

# Charter School Oversight Process/Report Design Principles

## That Work for Small Authorizers

Those organizations who operate charter schools and the authorizers who have the responsibility of authorizing and overseeing charter schools are responsible for answering three core questions:

1. Is the school's educational program a success?
2. Is the school financially viable?
3. Is the organization operating the school effectively and is it well run?

For small authorizers<sup>1</sup> to fulfill their responsibilities they need to do their work in a manner that serves the best interest of the children and the public, that is fair, and that recognizes the flexibility and autonomy of the charter schools under the law. To assist these small authorizers who are often limited by a lack of resources and dedicated personnel in creating an annual progress report structure that meets these goals, is our work in the Master Class, and is guided by the following "Design Principles"<sup>2</sup>.

### Principle 1

**The process and annual report format must meet the needs of a small authorizer:** The process and the annual progress report format must effectively answer the three core questions (see above), be as complete and self-contained a process and report structure as possible, and be effective within the limited resources and charter authorizing capacity/expertise typically found in a small authorizer district or county office of education:

### Principle 2

**Place first level oversight responsibility on charter school boards:** The responsibility for ensuring the proper and successful operation of the charter school rest first and primarily with the board of the charter school. Instead of an authorizer in the normal course of its oversight work doing extensive reviews of day-to-day operational activities and sometimes other intrusive oversight activities, it is the charter school boards responsibility to ensure the effective and compliant operations of the school and report/certify this to the Authorizer. In doing this work/filling this role the charter school board also builds critically important board capacity and competence.

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<sup>1</sup> A small authorizer is generally defined as one with seven or fewer schools. Typically small authorizers do not have the financial resources to dedicate a full time professional position to charter authorizing and oversight.

<sup>2</sup> design principles—simple yet specific statements defining what the organization must do to enable execution of the strategy. A carefully drafted set of design principles, typically between 7 and 15 statements, helps align the leadership team around objective criteria for designing the operating model. (Bain & Company)

### Principle 3

**There are fundamental measures of quality that can be identified and measured.**

- **There are a limited number of Key Performance Indicators<sup>3</sup> that guide this work and allow it to be done in an efficient manner.**
  - **Key Performance Standards are Quantifiable/Measurable, and are**
  - **Determined at the Time the Charter School is Authorized and are Known by All.**

**Financial Viability:** A baseline of fiscal standards that apply to all charter schools. These are based on “educational best practices” and are broadly recognized as rigorous but reasonable. There may be a set of modified standards that apply to schools in certain circumstances; such as “new schools”.

**Operational Success:** A baseline of operational standards that apply to all charter schools. These are based on “organizational best practices” and are broadly recognized as rigorous but reasonable for charter schools and more generally for non-profit organizations.

**Competence Governance:** A baseline of governance standards that apply to all charter schools. These are based on “governance best practices” and are broadly recognized as rigorous but reasonable for charter schools and more generally for non-profit organizations. These standards are directly measurable and/or can be observed (e.g., evaluation of board effectiveness during a board meeting).

**Educational Program Success:** A baseline of educational standards that apply to all charter schools. These are based on “educational best practices” and are broadly recognized as rigorous but reasonable. The emphasis is on multiple valid and measurable student outcomes. These may vary by school type; e.g., a school serving certain grade levels, certain type of students such as drop-outs.<sup>4</sup>

A second group of standards are specific to a specific charter school; these are based on the unique characteristics of the school. These are negotiated by the school with the authorizer. These standards may be used to fulfill baseline educational standards, or may access other aspects that the school believes are important to fulfilling its mission, and therefore they believe need to be part of the evaluation of their success.

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<sup>3</sup> In this context Key Performance Indicators define and communicate the fundamental characteristics of the school to a wide variety of stakeholders including but not limited to the charter school and its authorizer.

<sup>4</sup> It is recognized that identifying such educational standards in California at this time is a significant challenge because of the changes to the statewide assessment system, the new statewide dashboard, the need for additional measures and the lack of any statewide consensus of what constitutes a reasonable level of performance/improvement for a school.

## **Principle 4**

**Determine the level/intensity of oversight based on the charter school meeting/failing key performance indicators.** The charter oversight process is based on a limited number of key performance indicators clearly identified and known to the charter school and the authorizer. These key performance indicators define and communicate fundamental measures of quality. If these key performance indicators are met, less intrusive oversight is possible. Failure to meet these performance indicators (e.g., reserve levels, student achievement levels) triggers additional, more detailed and potentially more intrusive reviews. The purpose of the additional reviews are to determine if one or more standard(s) is/are being met on face or through an alternative means, to better identify the level of additional risk that exists, if any, as well as to motivate/support/help the school identify possible solutions.

## **Principle 5**

### **The Authorizer Provides an Annual Report that guides the renew/not renew decision for the school**

The work of the authorizer in the context of an annual performance report is twofold. First it is to review and validate data provided by the charter school and data that the authorizer has collected through their own independently collected information (e.g., site visit) and from other sources. The second is to analyze the entirety of the data and produce a written report of the school success/progress in meeting the standards set for that school that informs all parties and ultimately guides the renew/not renew decision for the school.

### **Using the Design Principles in the Master Class**

1. The Design Principles provide the context, “the set” to align the thinking of the Master Class participants at the beginning of the Master Class. The Design Principles are presented, are discussed by the participants, and if appropriate, modified.
2. Each of the working groups, Finance, Operations, Governance and Educational, use these principles to guide their work.
3. The work product of each group, and the combined work product, is reviewed by the Master class participants through the lens of how well the work product(s) are faithful to the Design Principles.