

MACSA

PRINCIPLES & STANDARDS

for Quality Charter School Authorizing



MACSA

MINNESOTA ASSOCIATION OF
CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZERS



▶ LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Colleagues,

Minnesota is the birthplace of the charter movement. The first charter law in the world passed here in 1991. Today, nearly 60,000 students attend more than 160 charter schools in Minnesota, offering students innovative and affirming educational experiences, no matter ability or need. It is the responsibility of Minnesota's charter school authorizers to oversee, evaluate, and hold accountable these schools, ensuring they deliver on their promises to families, teachers, and communities.

Authorizing has evolved in the nearly three decades since charter schools came into being in Minnesota. Initially, only school districts were approved to act as sponsors for "outcome-based" schools (as charters were called when first approved). As time went on the types of organizations that could sponsor the schools grew to include higher education institutions, non-profit organizations, and single-purpose authorizers.

In 2009, the Minnesota Legislature passed sweeping changes to the charter school law to increase accountability in the sector. These changes to the law, in addition to the Minnesota Authorizer Performance Evaluation System enacted in 2015, contributed to the formation of the Minnesota Association of Charter School Authorizers (MACSA).

Authorizers working together to hold each other accountable for decision-making is not new to Minnesota. MACSA's roots go back as far as 2003 when the Sponsors Assistance Network was formed. In 2012, Minnesota authorizers decided to formally create a membership

Approved by the
MACSA Board of Directors
on December 7, 2018

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organization and in 2017 MACSA officially formed as a non-profit corporation.

The overarching goals of MACSA have been consistent since the beginning. These include improving learning opportunities for Minnesota's children and youth, increasing the capacity of authorizers, and developing ways to enhance the work of authorizing in Minnesota.

Authorizers take our responsibility to Minnesota students, families, and communities seriously. It is our hope that these principles and standards effectively communicate our intentions as a group and will serve as a guideline to our collective and individual work for years to come.

Sincerely,



Larry McKenzie
Chair, Minnesota Association of Charter School Authorizers

▶ INTRODUCTION

Charter school authorizing is a critical component of a robust public school system that increases educational opportunities for all students. When implemented well, authorizing can expand the number and variety of quality public schools through approving new charter schools that meet high standards, expanding schools that are effectively educating students, and if necessary, closing schools that do not serve students well.

Charter authorizing is complex work executed by skilled and committed professionals and is well served by maintaining professional standards. The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) first developed the Principles & Standards for Quality Authorizing in 2004. They have been updated often in the subsequent 15 years to address the evolution of the profession and the charter-school sector as a whole, and to reflect current challenges and the latest lessons drawn from practice, research, and analysis. MACSA has benefited from the work of NACSA and that of other states and organizations in the development of the MACSA Principles & Standards for Quality Authorizing. While this version approved in 2018 is the organization's current best thinking, MACSA is committed to making revisions and updates as required to ensure the principles and standards continue to support quality authorizing and purpose of charter schools in Minnesota.

➤ ABOUT MACSA

MACSA officially incorporated as a non-profit corporation in 2017. Its purpose is to increase the quality of charter school authorizing across the state in order to advance excellence and accountability in the charter school sector, ultimately helping ensure all students have access to a variety of strong PreK-12 options. MACSA seeks to grow the capacity and efficiency of new and experienced authorizers while also advocating for policies that ensure authorizer and school quality.

We believe Quality Authorizing means implementing a comprehensive, collaborative, and transparent charter school performance accountability process that leads to a high performing charter school sector while serving student and public interests and the needs of the community.

Mission

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

Vision

Quality charter schools are an integral component of a strong education system that results in exceptional academic outcomes for all students in the state.

➤ PURPOSES OF THE MACSA PRINCIPLES & STANDARDS

The MACSA Principles & Standards for Quality Authorizing were developed to increase the quality and the effectiveness of charter school authorizing in Minnesota and to serve as a guide to the formative development of authorizers. The principles and standards provide tools for the planning and the development of sound practices and to identify areas of improvement or refinement to achieve ever-stronger outcomes, as demonstrated by the quality of schools they oversee. MACSA's overarching purpose is to advance the primary purpose of charter schools in Minnesota, which is to improve all pupil learning and all student achievement, and the additional statutory purposes of charter schools. Further, the principles and standards are intended to augment the Minnesota Charter School Statute, MDE Regulations, each authorizer's Approved Authorizing Plan (AAP), and NACSA's Principles & Standards.

➤ DEVELOPMENT OF THE MACSA PRINCIPLES & STANDARDS

Starting in the fall of 2017, the Principles & Standards Committee of MACSA (comprised of members of the organization and supported by facilitators from NACSA), met over 12 months to develop the document you are reading now, the MACSA Principles & Standards for Quality Authorizing. The committee reviewed principles and standards from other states and organizations including Florida, California Charter Authorizing Professionals, and NACSA, and used these as a foundation for creating principles and standards unique to Minnesota. Throughout the process, the committee received feedback from the full MACSA membership which formally approved the principles and standards in December 2018. This work was funded through a capacity building grant provided by Minnesota Comeback.

➤ MACSA VALUES

We believe the actions and decisions of quality charter school authorizers are guided by the following values:

Student Success

We believe the well-being and academic success of students are at the center of our work.

Integrity

We believe in keeping our promises, telling the truth, and listening.

Equity

We believe all children should have a great education that prepares them for life and learning. We advocate for opportunities for all students and seek to eliminate barriers to student success.

Transparency

We believe in serving the public and conducting our work with openness.

Collaboration

We believe we are more effective at reaching our goals when we work together.

Respect

We believe in acting with consideration, kindness, and tolerance.

MACSA PRINCIPLES

A thriving charter school sector has an authorizing community that is mutually supportive and lives by the following principles:

Maintain & Advance High Standards

Authorizers set high standards for student outcomes, fiscal performance, and operational performance. They uphold these standards through oversight and decision-making.

Serve Student & Public Interests

Authorizers serve as stewards of student and public interest through responsible decision-making and school oversight.

Ensure Access for All Students

Authorizers support a charter school community where all students have equitable access to, and realize the benefits of, a quality education.

Uphold Autonomy & Foster Innovation

Authorizers honor and preserve the autonomies crucial to school success, and support innovative practices of schools and authorizers.

Promote Excellence & Accountability in Authorizing

Authorizers work collaboratively to share effective practices, to support one another in implementing our collective standards, and to hold ourselves accountable.

MACSA STANDARDS

MACSA developed standards to increase the quality and effectiveness of charter school authorizing in the state of Minnesota. The standards are intended to augment the Minnesota Charter School Statute, MDE Regulations, the Approved Authorizing Plan (AAP), and the National Association of Charter School Authorizers' (NACSA) Principles and Standards. The goal is to advance the authorizer's primary role, which is to hold schools accountable for school performance, and the charter school's primary purpose, which is to improve all pupil learning and all student achievement. In doing so each authorizer acknowledges that it remains required to comply with Minnesota Statute § 124E and other applicable state, federal, and local laws.

1 Ensure Quality Education for Students

1.1 Improve All Pupil Learning and All Student Achievement

- ◆ Schools meet authorizer student achievement performance expectations.
- ◆ Schools meet or exceed local district averages on statewide assessments. Schools receive local and national performance recognition and honors.
- ◆ Schools exceed ESSA graduation requirement.

1.2 Culture & Climate

- ◆ Schools exhibit mission and vision fidelity.
- ◆ Schools exhibit student enrollment levels that promote school sustainability. Schools demonstrate a teacher retention rate that is conducive to an effective program.
- ◆ Schools demonstrate a high level of student and parent satisfaction.

1.3 Finance

- ◆ Schools show no significant deficiencies or material weaknesses in the annual financial audit.
- ◆ Schools meet authorizer contract fund balance expectations.
- ◆ Schools receive the MDE Finance Award.

1.4 Governance

- ◆ Schools comply with the Open Meeting Law (Minn. Stat. § 13D) and all charter school regulations.
- ◆ Schools adhere to their own bylaws.
- ◆ Schools monitor, evaluate, and respond to student achievement and academic performance.
- ◆ Schools conduct annual school director performance evaluations.
- ◆ Schools conduct required board training.
- ◆ Schools post board information, including board roster, meeting dates, meeting times and locations, and meeting minutes on the school's website in a timely manner.
- ◆ Schools comply with state and federal regulations.

➤ MACSA STANDARDS

2 Agency Purpose & Capacity

- 2.1** Exercises due diligence in being informed and knowledgeable, and seeks to stay up to date on Minn. Stat 124E, MDE regulations, and relevant issues in education and charter schools both in Minnesota and nationally.
- 2.2** States a mission for quality charter authorizing that is consistent with the law, MACSA's Standards for Quality Authorizing and the overarching purpose of improving all pupil learning, all student achievement, and student success.
- 2.3** Adopts a strategic vision and plan for charter authorizing that includes goals, priorities, strategies, and time frames to achieve goals that directly align to student success.
- 2.4** Adopts and follows policies in adherence to current Minnesota charter school law and as articulated in the Approved Authorizing Plan (AAP).
- 2.5** Operates with a defined organizational structure that facilitates the effective execution of all authorizing responsibilities.
- 2.6** Implements policies, processes, and practices that minimize administrative burdens on charter schools and meet authorizer needs.
- 2.7** Enlists expertise as necessary to effectively carry out all authorizing responsibilities.

➤ MACSA STANDARDS

- 2.8** Allocates sufficient resources to effectively carry out authorizing responsibilities.
- 2.9** Provides regular professional development for the authorizer's staff and its board to achieve and maintain high standards of authorizing practice.
- 2.10** Establishes a process and policy to prohibit and/or mitigate conflicts of interest to protect the integrity of charter school authorizing and decision-making.
- 2.11** Reflects and evaluates its performance against a strategic plan.
- 2.12** Informs stakeholders about the impact and challenges of charter school authorizing to maintain public trust and confidence.
- 2.13** Actively engages with other authorizers in Minnesota to promote the replication and dissemination of effective practices and to advance shared initiatives.
- 2.14** Works with MDE and other key stakeholders in advancing quality charter school authorizing.
- 2.15** Establishes and maintains a culture of respect, communication, collaboration, and transparency in working with schools, other authorizers, MDE, and other stakeholders.

➤ MACSA STANDARDS

3 Charter Application Process & Decision Making

- 3.1** Grants charters only to applicants who present a comprehensive and quality plan and who demonstrate a strong capacity to establish and operate a high performing charter school consistent with application criteria and Minn. Stat. § 124E
- 3.2** Establishes and implements a comprehensive new school application process that includes application instructions, procedures, timelines, evaluation criteria, and review process.
- 3.3** Makes sure the charter application process and guidance are transparent, reasonably easy for school founders and the general public to access, and published online.
- 3.4** Implements a new school application process that appropriately differentiates between various types of applicants such as new, replication, charter management organization (CMO), virtual, etc. via distinct application requirements.
- 3.5** Evaluates each new school application through a review of the written submission, a substantive in-person interview with each qualified applicant (“capacity interview”), and other due diligence as necessary.

➤ MACSA STANDARDS

- 3.6** Disseminates information to the public about new school applications and provides the opportunity for, and considers, public comment.
- 3.7** Provides equitable access to the new school application process, consistent with a non-discrimination policy and the MACSA shared value of equity.
- 3.8** Gives consideration to an applicant’s school performance track record for applicants seeking to replicate existing schools or to establish new schools.
- 3.9** Recognizes charter school applicants, such as alternative schools, drop-out recovery programs, and virtual schools, may require different measures of student success.
- 3.10** Exercises professional discretion and minimizes the amount of technical assistance provided to new school developers during the application phase to ensure school independence and capacity.
- 3.11** Employs a rubric or similar tool for the evaluation of new school applications to ensure consistency in application analysis and decision-making.
- 3.12** Engages a team of highly competent application reviewers that includes individuals that reflect the proposed school community (internal and/or external) and have charter, educational, organizational, financial, and legal experience and/or expertise.

➤ MACSA STANDARDS

- 3.13** Provides application reviewer orientation and training to ensure there is consistency in evaluation standards and protocols.
- 3.14** Ensures that the application review process and decision-making are free of conflicts of interest and requires the disclosure of any potential or perceived conflicts of interest between the applicant, reviewers, and decision-makers.

➤ MACSA STANDARDS

4 Performance-Based Charter Contract

- 4.1** Defines clear, measurable, and attainable academic, financial, and organizational performance standards as a condition of charter renewal.
- 4.2** Works with the school's governing board and incoming board members to support the understanding of and responsibility to contract terms.
- 4.3** Grants charters for an initial term of five years, unless the authorizer finds specific circumstances that justify the need for an earlier high-stakes review and evaluation.
- 4.4** Articulates, in writing, the sources of performance data and specific methodology including processes and procedures to be used in ongoing and renewal evaluation of:
 - ◆ academic achievement; improved pupil learning and all student achievement
 - ◆ school finance and financial stability
 - ◆ organizational and fiduciary accountability
- 4.5** Recognizes the unique features of the school or student demographics and adapts the charter contract where appropriate while maintaining high standards.

➤ MACSA STANDARDS

4.6 Employs a contract that is aligned with Minnesota Statutes and includes key components for ongoing oversight and evaluation of:

- ◆ School performance and compliance;
- ◆ Continuous improvement processes, and stated consequences for failure to meet performance expectations;
- ◆ Transparency and accessibility to the general public; and
- ◆ Pre-opening requirements and conditions.

4.7 The charter contract describes the legal rights and responsibilities of the authorizer and the charter school, including:

- ◆ Legal relationship between the charter school and authorizing agency.
- ◆ Assurances of charter school compliance with applicable state and federal law, including but not limited to non-discrimination, conflict of interest, and non-sectarian laws.
- ◆ Provisions for liability and insurance coverage.
- ◆ Confirmation of charter school's commitment to adhere to state open meeting and public records laws.
- ◆ Stipulation that the school will create and implement a grievance policy.
- ◆ Procedures for resolution of disputes between the charter school and the authorizer.

➤ MACSA STANDARDS

- ◆ External (third party) education provider provision (for CMOs or education management organization (EMO)s that such contract will address the education design, operation, performance targets and milestones to ensure rigorous oversight of the third-party.
- ◆ Provides for authorizer review of any external educational service provider contract as a condition of charter approval.

4.8 Defines the material terms of the charter application and contract.

4.9 Defines the process to amend the charter contract.

4.10 Defines the material terms and processes to renew, revoke, or terminate the charter, including:

- ◆ Explanation of process and standards for charter renewal.
- ◆ Definitions, standards, and process for charter revocation, non-renewal, and termination.
- ◆ Responsibilities of the school and the authorizer in the event of school closure.

➤ MACSA STANDARDS

4.11 Defines a clear and transparent process per Minnesota Statutes for grade and site expansion, requiring:

- ◆ Justification of need and market demand for additional grades or sites;
- ◆ Longitudinal record of student academic performance and growth;
- ◆ History of sound school finances and a plan that demonstrates financial sustainability; and
- ◆ Board capacity to administer and manage additional grade and site expansions.

4.12 Articulates state and federal regulation and provides appropriate access, education, and support services for students with disabilities, English language learners, gifted and talented students, foster children, homeless students, and other relevant student groups.

4.13 Articulates expectations for student behavior rules and policies that are consistent with the Minnesota Pupil Fair Dismissal Act.

4.14 Documents the process to negotiate a contract for optional services from the authorizer to the charter school, ensuring such process aligns with Minnesota Statutes.

➤ MACSA STANDARDS

5 Oversight & Evaluation

- 5.1** Provides schools with continuous monitoring and evaluation to assess adherence to the charter contract and Minn. Stat. § 124E compliance, and school performance effectiveness.
- 5.2** Implements a comprehensive process for charter performance accountability that is aligned with the charter contract.
- 5.3** Communicates and works with schools on a regular basis to collect student achievement, school performance and compliance data that will be used in renewal, non-renewal, intervention, contract amendment, or termination decision-making.
- 5.4** Collects data and information from the school in a way that is sensitive to administrative burdens while meeting the authorizer's oversight responsibilities.
- 5.5** Provides clear expectations to schools, including technical guidance as appropriate, to facilitate timely reporting.
- 5.6** Notifies school leaders and the governing board promptly and in writing of contract non-compliance, violations and/or performance deficiencies.

➤ MACSA STANDARDS

- 5.7** Compels action on the part of schools to remediate deficiencies through a clearly defined intervention and corrective action process of escalation that communicates whether a school is making progress in resolving deficiencies.
- 5.8** Grants schools a reasonable time period to respond to and remedy contract violations or performance deficiencies, provided that such time does not endanger students.
- 5.9** Respects the charter school governing board's authority and school autonomy.
- 5.10** Provides a comprehensive annual evaluation per statutory requirements (academic, financial, and organizational performance) for all schools in the authorizer's charter portfolio.
- 5.11** Delivers a school performance report annually to the school's governing board and school leadership, disseminates it in a way that makes it reasonably easy for the public to access, and publishes it online.
- 5.12** Disseminates an annual school performance report in a way that makes it reasonably easy for the public to access, including publication online.

➤ MACSA STANDARDS

6 Renewal & Termination Decision-Making

- 6.1** Establishes a charter renewal process that complies with Minn. Stat. § 124E and includes timelines, procedures and renewal criteria.
- 6.2** Ensures the charter renewal process is transparent, disseminated in a way that makes it reasonably easy for the public to access, and published online.
- 6.3** Provides the school and board a comprehensive summative performance report for the contract period, in advance of renewal decision-making.
- 6.4** Makes certain charter renewal decisions are principally driven by improvements to all pupil learning and all student achievement.
- 6.5** Bases charter renewal decisions on a comprehensive body of evidence that demonstrates whether the school achieved expectations consistent with the charter contract, not on what the school promises to achieve.
- 6.6** Does not allow community or political pressure to exert undue influence on the authorizing agency's board or decision-making authority as it relates to renewal decision-making.
- 6.7** Provides the school board with the contract renewal recommendation, terms, and length of the contract prior to a final decision.

➤ MACSA STANDARDS

- 6.8** Terminates a charter during the charter term consistent with state law if one or more of the following are not sufficiently remedied or resolved in a timely manner per authorizer mandate:
- ◆ Clear evidence of a material contract breach of conditions, standards, or procedures identified in the charter contract;
 - ◆ A significant and/or chronic failure to demonstrate satisfactory improvements to all pupil learning, all student achievement, and pupil performance contract expectations;
 - ◆ Failure to meet fiscal management standards;
 - ◆ Violation and/or repeated major violations;
 - ◆ Student harm and/or school safety negligence;
 - ◆ Authorizer “notice of concern” or similar is not remedied or resolved per authorizer directive;
 - ◆ Other good cause exhibited
- 6.9** In the event of a termination, the authorizer will conduct an informal hearing consistent with statutory requirements and accessible to the public if requested by the charter school board of directors.
- 6.10** Communicates renewal or intent-to-terminate decisions to the school consistent with charter school law and in a timely manner that ensures parents and students have the ability to maximize school choice.

➤ MACSA STANDARDS

- 6.11** In a school closure, requires the school to verify the school closure notification to families.
- 6.12** In a school closure, oversees and offers support to the charter school in successfully executing all components of the authorizer’s school closure plan.
- 6.13** In a school closure, documents and ensures the transition and delivery of student records to the resident school district, consistent with state statute.

➤ TERMS & DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of clarity and to avoid misunderstanding by the reading audience, terms and phrases used in the authorizing standards have the meanings provided.

Standard

Desired level of quality or attainment

Comprehensive

Having all aspects/elements, including multiple data points of school performance and/or operations

Quality Authorizing

Implementing a comprehensive, collaborative, and transparent charter school performance accountability process that leads to a high performing charter school sector while serving student and public interests and the needs of the community

Minn. Stat. § 124E

Minnesota Charter School Statute

Contract

Authorizer and school charter contract agreement

High Quality/Performing

Attained and demonstrated success with no significant issues

➤ TERMS & DEFINITIONS

Approved Authorizing Plan (AAP)

A comprehensive plan approved by MDE that outlines key authorizer-specific structures, policies, and practices

MDE

Minnesota Department of Education

MACSA

Minnesota Association of Charter School Authorizers

NACSA

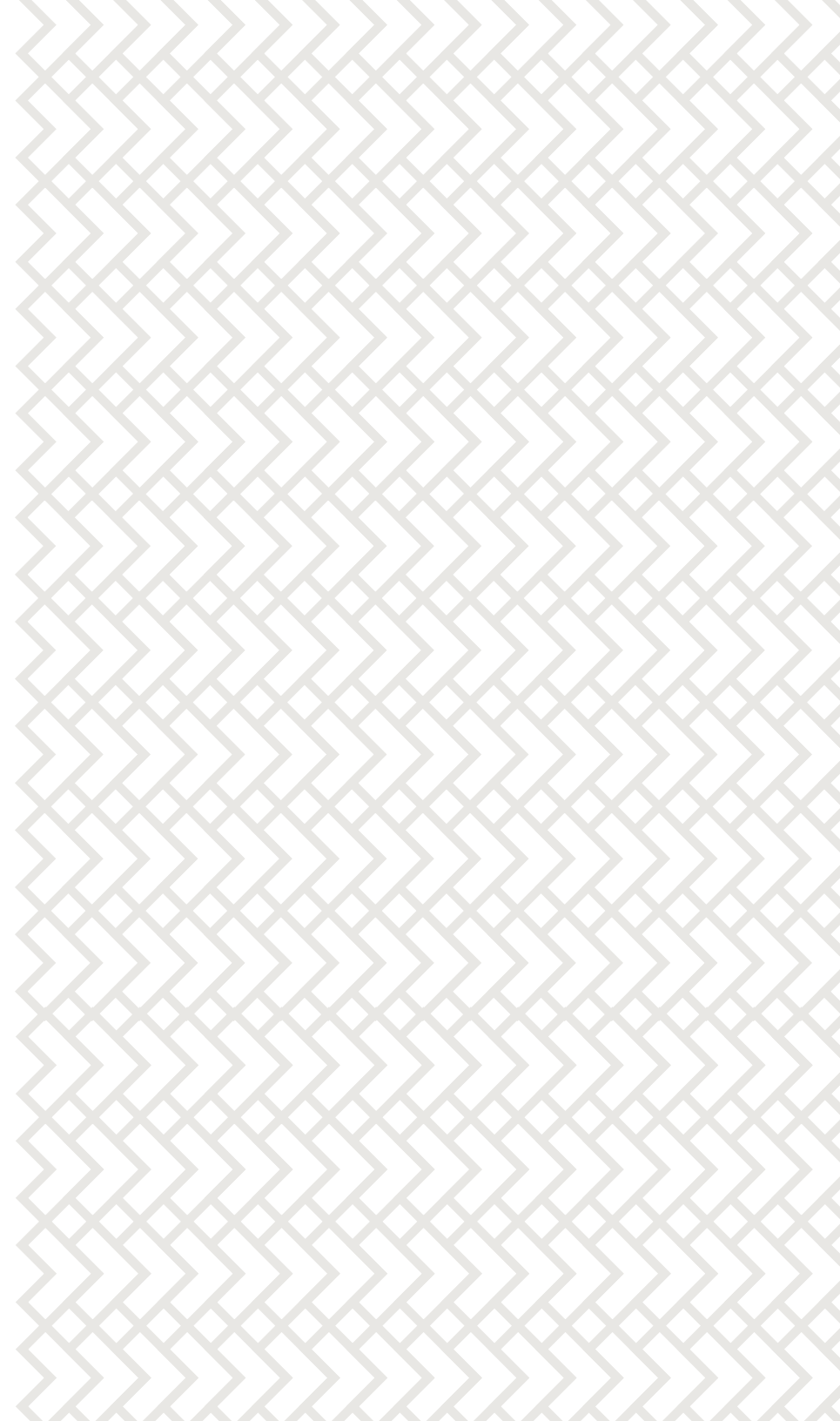
National Association of Charter School Authorizers

Charter Management Organization (CMO)

A non-profit organization that operates or manages two or more charter schools linked by centralized support, operations, and oversight

Educational Management Organization (EMO)

A for-profit entity that contracts with new or existing public school districts, charter school districts, and charter schools to manage charter schools by centralizing support, operations, and oversight.





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