

Measure A.1 – Authorizer Mission: *The authorizer has a clear and compelling mission for charter school authorizing.*

Essential Elements:

- The mission is stated and fully aligns with Minnesota charter law
- The response includes a description of how the process of chartering schools is a way for the organization to carry out its mission

As a program existing within a large educational institution, the authorizing mission historically echoed that of the University of St. Thomas (UST): *The University of St. Thomas Educates students to be morally responsible leaders who think critically, act wisely, and work skillfully to advance the common good.* In spring 2016 the Charter Accountability Board in collaboration with program staff completed a strategic planning process that included the development of a program-specific mission. While we will continue to operate under the guidance of the University mission, the programmatic mission below will drive our work on a daily basis.

Mission

The mission of the University of St. Thomas Charter Authorizing Program is *to advance the common good by using quality authorizing practices to oversee and promote the health of a portfolio of charter schools that demonstrably assist students in reaching their full academic and human potential.*

Mission Alignment with Charter School Law

UST Charter Authorizing Program mission is well aligned with charter law and is further defined in the Charter School Authorizing Program Manual (see [Attachment A: Program Manual, page 4](#)), which articulates our expectation that any schools authorized by UST be accountability-based, data-driven and result in effective learning for all children. These priorities forward the primary statutory purpose of charter schools “to improve all pupil learning and all student achievement (*Minn. Stat. 124E.01 Subdivision 1*).

How Chartering Forwards Mission

UST is committed to advancing the common good and strongly believes that improving educational opportunities and outcomes for the children who live in our community is critical to accomplishing this goal. As articulated by our President Emeritus, UST strives to be ‘in and of the city,’ which means engaging with and working to advance the good beyond our traditional post-secondary educational programming. Authorizing charter schools has, and continues to be, a critical and impactful way for us to live our mission within the PK-12 education community.

Measure A.2 – Authorizer Vision and Organizational Goals: *The authorizer has a comprehensive vision for charter school authorizing with clear organizational goals and time frames for achievement that are aligned with the purposes of Minnesota law.*

Essential Elements:

- The authorizer’s vision addresses, with specificity, the desired characteristics of the schools it will charter
- The authorizer’s vision includes organization-specific purposes, if applicable
- The authorizer’s organizational goals align with charter vision and statutory purpose(s) per Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.01, Subdivision 1
- The organizational goals are measurable.

As stated in A1, the University of St. Thomas (UST) Charter Authorizing Program completed a strategic planning process in June 2016. As part of this process, a program-specific vision was developed. This vision is complimented by a set of core values and measurable goals ((see Attachment A: Program Manual, page 4-6).

Vision and Desired School Characteristics

The vision of the UST Charter Authorizing Program is *to authorize excellent charters schools in order to increase quality educational opportunities for all children in the Twin Cities metro area. UST strives to be a national model for quality authorizing and schools’ authorizer of choice based on our competence, transparency, and respect for school autonomy.*

The core values below further define the vision and also articulate key characteristics of the authorizing program.

- **Whole Student.** Schools in our portfolio are committed to developing the whole individual in a way that allows students to meet their full human potential. Our schools have an unwavering commitment to academics as well as a focus on growing well-rounded students who are community-minded, problem-solvers, and leaders in pursuing a just society for all.
- **Educational Equity.** Schools in our portfolio serve the community in which UST is located and are committed to improving educational outcomes for all students, particularly those who have traditionally been underserved and are most impacted by achievement and opportunity gaps.
- **Portfolio of Options.** UST does not subscribe to one educational model and, therefore, our schools are not limited in the manner in which they choose to educate students. Rather, we endeavor to authorize a portfolio of schools with an individual and local curricular focus that answer community needs in a unique way. Our emphasis is quality and we prioritize outcomes over process. We are open to diverse educational philosophies and approaches and believe there are multiple ways to rigorously measure success.
- **Empowered Autonomy.** Schools in our portfolio desire high levels of autonomy and are willing to be held accountable using a transparent and comprehensive accountability framework. We believe decisions should be made at the lowest appropriate level and strive to ensure school-authorizer relations are based on mutual respect, trust, collaboration and humility.
- **Excellence-First Authorizing.** Just as we expect our schools to maintain high standards and continuously improve, the authorizing program is committed to upholding rigorous standards and continually evaluating and improving our own policies and practices to ensure excellence. We believe sustaining a staff-to-school ratio of 1:6 as well as employing smart growth strategies as it relates to adding additional schools to our portfolio are central component of excellence-first authorizing.
- **Reflective Practitioners.** UST is committed to giving back by transferring knowledge and sharing what we learn with the broader community. We strive to foster a network among UST authorized charter schools that supports the sharing of best practices, offers technical assistance where appropriate, and facilitates collaboration while honoring school autonomy. We also seek to collaborate with our fellow authorizers and the charter community.

UST has also established a set of tenets to guide its authorizing decisions and relationships, and ensure alignment between authorized schools and the missions of the program and university.

- **Education that Promotes Moral Responsibility.** UST believes that it is a necessary role for its charter schools to demonstrate the ability to use an ethical framework in decision-making. Educators must process, articulate and act from a reasoned, ethically grounded educational philosophy. Leaders of these charter schools demonstrate a strong sense of social justice, emanating from a well-reasoned ethical perspective that supports the basic tenets of a democratic society.
- **Education That Promotes Critical Thinking.** UST believes that educators must employ critical thinking skills about the theory and practice of schools, reflecting broad understandings in humanities, social sciences, and current events. Students need to develop basic skills in literacy and numeracy to develop the skills to think critically.
- **Education that Promotes Wise Action.** UST expects its charter schools to create and maintain a culture for learning marked by practices that promote broad participation on the part of all constituents in the school community. It is through this process of teamwork and collegiality that wise action emerges in determining the best policies and practices to promote student learning. UST believes that wise action on the part of a school is the result of engaging students, staff, parents and the community at large in continuing dialogue that will inform the vision, mission, policies, and procedures of the charter school.
- **Education that Promotes Skillful Work.** UST believes that charter schools are a viable option for families who wish to provide the best possible educational opportunities for their children. Therefore, charter schools authorized by UST should establish a track record of skillful work on the part of students, including student achievement marked by excellence in relation to other schools in their neighborhood, city, state, and the nation. UST will not enter into an authorizing relationship with schools who lack a commitment to providing a higher quality learning program, one in which the skills of students are established at a high level and are assessed and analyzed regularly.
- **Education that Advances the Common Good.** As articulated in our core values, UST is committed to working with children and families in need, ones who have traditionally been left behind while other segments of society have thrived. Currently, many students are not served well by the traditional public school system. Some of these students fit the traditional “at-risk” profile, but many others have been pushed to the margins of educational programming for reasons such as unique learning styles, lack of social skills, and nonconformity. UST seeks to advance the common good through the authorization of charter schools who demonstrate a commitment to fairness and equity for all students, no matter their social status.

Measurable Organizational Goals

The UST authorizing program goals and corresponding outcome objectives include:

1. Expand impact by increasing school performance, growing the size of UST’s portfolio in alignment with rigorous standards, and promoting the dissemination and replication of best practices.
 - Increase the number of UST authorized Title I schools recognized for excellence by MDE.
 - 80% of UST authorized schools choose to attend network training and collaboration opportunities.
 - Grow portfolio size from 10 to between 12 and 18.
2. Solidify a sustainable infrastructure that includes the financial and human resources needed to effectively elicit and maintain quality authorizing, oversight, growth, and strategic support.
 - Remain in the black yearly
 - Maintain a staff to school ratio of 1:6
 - 80% or greater meeting attendance rate for Charter Accountability Board members
 - 90% of charter school leaders and board chairs rate their satisfaction with the UST authorizing office as satisfied or highly satisfied.
 - Receive a Commendable or higher rating on 2019-20 MAPES and/or receive a Well-Developed rating in at least 8/10 categories from NACSA.

3. Increase visibility, collaboration, and contributions to the University and the broader education ecosystem.
 - Increase the number of UST departments interacting with the authorizing program.
 - Increase the number of graduates from UST authorized charter schools being accepted to and attending the University.
 - Receive and accept at least two invitations to participate in or present at local, state, and national conferences, workshops, committees, and/or task forces.

Organizational Goal Alignment with Charter Vision and Statutory Purposes

UST's vision and goals for charter school authorizing are in accordance with Minnesota Statute 124E.01, Subd. 1: The primary purpose of this chapter is to improve all pupil learning and all student achievement. Additional purposes include to:

- (1) increase learning opportunities for all pupils;
- (2) encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods;
- (3) measure learning outcomes and create different and innovative forms of measuring outcomes;
- (4) establish new forms of accountability for schools; or
- (5) create new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be responsible for the learning program at the school site.

Measure A.3 – Structure of Operations and Measure A.4 – Authorizer Staff Experience: *The authorizer has a clear structure of duties and responsibilities and sufficient resources to effectively oversee its portfolio of charter schools. The authorizer has appropriate experience, expertise and skills to sufficiently oversee the portfolio of charter schools.*

Definitions:

- **Expertise** is defined as having knowledge, education, training, etc. in the areas of charter schools, curriculum, instruction, management, facilities, finance and law
- **Experience** is defined as length of time working in the areas of charter schools, curriculum, instruction, management, facilities, finance and law
- **Skills** is defined as effective application of experience and expertise in the areas of charter schools, curriculum, instruction, management, facilities, finance and law

Essential Elements:

- Description of the capacity of the organization to serve as an authorizer, including the positions (e.g. employees, contractors, volunteers; both paid and unpaid positions) who will perform the authorizing duties and ratio of positions (FTE) to portfolio size
- The authorizer describes a clear structure of duties and responsibilities, including required expertise, experience and skills in curriculum, instruction, management, facilities, finance and law in charter schools, at a level adequate to meet the needs of the portfolio
- The authorizer describes how the organization will manage and safeguard information and records related to authorizing
- An organizational chart that shows clear lines of reporting and authority/decision-making and, if applicable, showing projected organizational changes due to proposed expansion over the next five-year term.

Description of Organizational Capacity and Authorizing Program Positions

The University of St. Thomas (UST) Charter Authorizing Program is fortunate to be situated in Minnesota's largest private institution of higher education, which boasts 90 majors and 60 minors for undergraduates, as well as 60 graduate degrees in over a dozen areas. UST is arranged into seven academic divisions including:

- College of Arts and Sciences;
- College of Education, Leadership and Counseling;
- Opus College of Business;
- School of Engineering;
- St. Paul Seminary School of Divinity;
- School of Law; and
- School of Social Work.

To do their work well, authorizers need to possess skills in a variety of areas including curriculum, instruction, education of English learners, special education, charter/non-profit/contract/open meeting law, finance, data analysis, program evaluation, facilities, policy, governance, and more. The challenge is that while some of these skills are needed on a daily basis (data analysis, instruction, finance, law), others are needed sporadically, or only on rare occasions. The UST authorizing program has sought to recruit and retain professional staff with expertise in the areas most critical for authorizing. The current team of staff including 2.375 FTEs consists of a Director of Charter School Authorizing, Program Coordinator, and Fellow.

Together, the team possesses a wealth of expertise and formal training at the undergraduate and graduate level in charter schools, instruction, data analysis, program evaluation, school law, school finance, program management, non-profit management, and much more. However, despite the broad base of skills and expertise possessed by the current program staff, the number of areas in which an authorizer provides oversight are extremely numerous. As a higher education authorizer, this is a perfect illustration of a time when a community of experts from across the University come together to—in the words of our mission—advance the common good.

The authorizing program at UST is located squarely in the midst of a community of passionate, highly skilled experts who possess skills that enhance our ability to confidently evaluate and oversee the schools in our portfolio. We tap the expertise of our community most visibly through our Charter Accountability Board (CAB), which is made up of faculty and meets regularly (generally 10 monthly meetings per year). As a group, they possess skills in accounting, finance, curriculum, instruction, management, special education, gifted education, governance, school leadership, and more. The authorizing program also taps the expertise of non-board-member-faculty and staff to provide additional expertise in areas such as English Language Learners, school law, facilities, and more as needed. When we are unable to satisfy a particular need—for example, the need for an expert in Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students, we contract out to ensure we have access to the appropriate expertise. Below is a table highlighting where expertise can be found.

Topic	Experience, Expertise, and Skills Possessed Primarily By
Charter Schools	Three program staff, all CAB members
Curriculum	Three CAB members
Instruction	Two program staff, two CAB members
Management	Two program staff, two CAB members
Facilities	UST staff, external consultants
Finance	Two program staff, two CAB members
Law	One program staff, UST staff, external consultants

*Please note that the individual FTEs in each category are as of August 2016 and are subject to change; however, UST is committed to maintaining appropriate expertise and will ensure that the program has, or is able to access, individuals with experience, expertise, and skills in all of the required areas.

Staffing Ratio

As has been our past practice, UST will maintain a staffing ratio of 1:6 (.17 FTE per school) or better. Should our portfolio of authorized schools grow, staffing changes will be made in order to ensure this ratio is maintained. Presently, UST employs 2.375 staff FTEs and contracts with external resources/consultants to provide oversight as needed in all required areas.

Manage and Safeguard Data

The UST Authorizing Program enjoys considerable in-kind support from the broader University of St. Thomas, including access to its network, hardware, software, and Information Technology Services (ITS) staff. The ITS staff are able to provide assistance with identity and access management (ensuring that all computers and other hardware used are secure), secure computing (using VPN and encryption technology when working remotely, preventing viruses, etc.), providing advice and policy guidelines around managing, securing, and working with data. University systems also regularly back-up data and provide reminders to staff that secure copies of program files should be housed in multiple locations (i.e.: external hard drive, cloud, etc.) and updated regularly.

Structure of Duties and Responsibilities

Please see our organizational chart ([Attachment B: UST Charter Authorizing Program Organizational Chart](#)), which provides responsibilities and decision-making authority. As noted above, changes in portfolio size will result in increases to internal or external capacity in order to maintain staffing ratio of 1:6 or better.

Measure A.5 – Authorizer Capacity and Skill Development of Leadership and Authorizing Staff: *The authorizer has a plan to build the knowledge and skill base of its authorizing leadership and staff through professional development. The authorizer has a plan to provide professional development aligned with its operations, vision and goals for overseeing its portfolio of charter schools.*

Essential Elements:

- The authorizer describes a plan to offer professional development to authorizing leadership and staff
- The authorizer describes the frequency and nature of potential professional development as well as personnel expected to attend
- The authorizer describes how professional development aligns with its operations, vision and goals for the portfolio of charter schools

The University of St. Thomas (UST) Authorizing Program is committed to building the knowledge and skill base of its authorizing team. To this end, program leadership and staff participate in high-quality, relevant professional development throughout the course of the year that aligns with UST’s authorizing vision, mission, goals, and operations.

Professional Development Plan (Frequency and Nature)

UST’s professional development plan is comprised of two parts: individual and staff-wide learning opportunities. Each year, UST team members set goals as a part of their review process. These goals are revisited throughout the course of the year in order to determine successes and areas for growth. An individual learning plan, which includes at least one learning experience annually, is created for each team member based on the areas of growth identified. Individualized professional development opportunities may take the form of skill development courses, workshop or conference attendance, targeted readings, etc.

Program staff also strive to stay abreast of the latest in education and charter legislation, research, authorizing best practices and hot button issues by annually attending one or more local, state and/or national conferences, workshops, trainings and/or presentations such as the Minnesota Association of Charter School’s Legislative Summit, the National Association of Charter School Authorizers Annual Conference and the Clifton Larsen Allen Minnesota Charter School Conference. In addition, the team actively participates in Minnesota Association of Charter School Authorizers’ monthly meetings.

A key component of UST’s authorizing program is the utilization of a Charter Accountability Board (CAB) which provides recommendations on interim accountability and high stakes decisions. To ensure that we are building the knowledge and skill base of CAB members we employ a three-pronged development strategy.

First, as some CAB members have limited experience with the concept of authorizing prior to joining the board, UST authorizing program staff provide a robust orientation which includes providing key reading materials such as the NACSA principles and standards, UST’s Authorizing Program Manual, conflict of interest policy, CAB bylaws, and more. Reading materials are supplemented with a presentation and one-on-one meeting with the program director to digest the content, answer questions, and familiarize members with the schools in UST’s portfolio. All CAB members maintain a binder containing the documents listed above, as well as current portfolio school information.

The second component of our CAB development strategy includes embedding trainings on authorizing best practices into monthly meetings a minimum of twice per year. These embedded trainings generally follow the layout of the NACSA Principles and Standards and may include a presentation and discussion on topics such as ‘quality application decision making,’ ‘renewal decision making,’ and ‘upholding school autonomy,’ among others.

Finally, the third component of our development strategy includes ensuring that CAB members are able to understand, digest, and respond to, current events impacting the charter and authorizing sector. Our monthly meeting agendas include a ‘happenings’ section where local and national news stories, research, and policy developments are shared and discussed in context.

Alignment with Vision, Mission, Goals and Operations

UST strives to be a model authorizer that oversees a portfolio of high-quality charter schools. Central to attaining this goal is ensuring that all members of the program team continue to build their skills, knowledge and expertise. Specifically, we ensure authorizing leadership and staff receive professional development in order to:

- Inform and enhance our authorizing practices;
- Strengthen skills that contribute to effective oversight;
- Better understand the key components that drive student achievement;
- Better understand school operational requirements; and
- Remain up-to-date on legislative and policy changes that impact or could impact authorizing and our schools.

Measure A.6 – Authorizer Operational Budget for Authorizing the Portfolio of Charter Schools: *The authorizer has a plan to allocate resources commensurate with its stated budget, needs and responsibilities of authorizing the portfolio of charter schools.*

Essential Elements:

- Anticipated five-year budget (SYFY16 – SYFY21)
 - Anticipated revenue sources such as fees collected annually from schools and additional funds from outside sources
 - Anticipated expenditures such as staff, travel, consultants and office costs
 - Anticipated authorizer staff increases in relation to portfolio growth
- The budget projects the number and size of schools in the portfolio
Important note: this establishes the maximum portfolio size for the authorizer’s next five-year term

Advanced Element:

- The authorizer describes how its budget shows resource allocations are devoted to achieve nationally recognized quality authorizing standards

Anticipated Staffing Increases in Relation to Portfolio Growth

The following table details the five-year period in which UST has MDE approval to operate as an authorizer and presents a range of potential growth. As has been our past practice, UST will maintain a staffing ratio of 1:6 (.17 FTE per school) or better.

Time Period	Initial Number of Charters	Initial Number of Staff -- FTE per School	Portfolio Growth Range	Staffing Change if maximum growth realized	Ending Number of Staff -- FTE per School
SY2016-2017	10	2.375 Staff .75 Director 1.0 Coordinator .625 Fellow -- .238 FTE per school	2 Transfers* (UST intends to enter into contracts with SPCPA and F2F Academy midyear, pending MDE approval of its AAP and transfer affidavits for the schools. Both schools have permission to remain with their current authorizer through the end of SY2017 if necessary.)	If the two transfers are realized UST will consider an additional 1.0FTE position replacing its current .625FTE position or add an additional .375FTE through an administrative position.	2.75 Staff .75 Director 1.0 Manager 1.0 Coordinator -- .23 FTE per school
SY2017-SY2018	10-12	2.75 Staff .75 Director 1.0 Manager 1.0 Coordinator -- .23 FTE per school	0-2	If two additional charters were taken on (14 total) UST would add an additional .33 administrative or consulting position.	3.09 Staff .75 Director 1.0 Manage 1.0 Coordinator .33 Admin -- .22 FTE per school
SY2018-	10-14		0-2	If two	3.42 Staff

SY2019		3.09 Staff .75 Director 1.0 Manager 1.0 Coordinator .33 Admin -- .22 FTE per school		additional charters were taken on (16 total) UST would add an additional .33 to its administrative or consulting position.	.75 Director 1.0 Manager 1.0 Coordinator .67 Admin -- .21 FTE per school
SY2019- SY2020	10-16	3.42 Staff .75 Director 1.0 Manager 1.0 Coordinator .67 Admin -- .21 FTE per school	0-2	If two additional charters were taken on (18 total) UST would add a second coordinator position as well as a potential .25 administrative or consulting position.	4.0 Staff .75 Director 1.0 Manager 2.0 Coordinators .25 Admin -- .22 FTE per school
SY2020- SY2021	10-18	4.0 Staff .75 Director 1.0 Manager 2.0 Coordinators .25 Admin -- .22 FTE per school	0-2* Growth in this year would only occur if less than maximum growth had occurred in prior years.	Maximum number of charters is 18.	4.0 Staff .75 Director 1.0 Manager 2.0 Coordinators -- .22 FTE per school

*Please note that the position titles and individual FTEs in each category are as of August 2016 and are subject to change; however, UST is committed to maintaining appropriate expertise and will ensure that the program has, or is able to access, individuals with experience, expertise, and skills in all of the required areas.

The budget projection provided below is for a portfolio size of 14; halfway between our current size of 10 charter schools and our maximum potential growth of 18 charter schools. As the budget is a projection, and the number of schools joining (or departing) the portfolio in a given year cannot be determined with absolute certainty, flexibility within the ranges provided is necessary. However, budget scenarios have been run at all potential portfolio sizes from 10 schools (no growth) to 18 schools (maximum proposed growth), and with schools of varying sizes representing minimum to maximum fee revenue. We believe that we will be able to honor our staffing ratio commitments no matter what our realized growth represents.

Due to the labor-intensive nature of overseeing start-up schools, UST will not take on any more than one new school per year. UST is also open to taking on transfer schools if proven, high-quality transfer schools that fit our mission and vision become available. In any scenario, our top priority is to thoughtfully add high quality schools that truly advance the common good—not to grow for the sake of growth. Due to a desire to move forward in a cautious and conservative way, the budget projection below includes one large school and one school at the lowest end of the fee spectrum.

Revenue					
Charter School Fees	FY2017	FY2018	FY2019	FY2020	FY2021
<i>Academia Cesar Chavez</i>	\$ 24,268.00	\$ 24,268.00	\$ 24,753.36	\$ 25,248.43	\$ 25,753.40
<i>Community of Peace Academy</i>	\$ 24,268.00	\$ 24,268.00	\$ 24,753.36	\$ 25,248.43	\$ 25,753.40
<i>HOPE Community Academy</i>	\$ 24,268.00	\$ 24,268.00	\$ 24,753.36	\$ 25,248.43	\$ 25,753.40
<i>Main Street School of Performing Arts</i>	\$ 24,268.00	\$ 24,268.00	\$ 24,753.36	\$ 25,248.43	\$ 25,753.40
<i>Metro Deaf School</i>	\$ 6,067.00	\$ 6,067.00	\$ 6,188.34	\$ 6,312.11	\$ 6,438.35
<i>Twin Cities Academy and Twin Cities Academy High School</i>	\$ 24,268.00	\$ 24,268.00	\$ 24,753.36	\$ 25,248.43	\$ 25,753.40
<i>S.U.N. Academy</i>	\$ 8,750.00	\$ 8,750.00	\$ 8,925.00	\$ 9,103.50	\$ 9,285.57
<i>Global Academy</i>	\$ 24,268.00	\$ 24,268.00	\$ 24,753.36	\$ 25,248.43	\$ 25,753.40
<i>Spero Academy</i>	\$ 8,700 .00	\$ 8,700 .00	\$ 8,874.00	\$ 9,051.48	\$ 9,232.51
<i>Hiawatha Academies</i>	\$ 24,268.00	\$ 24,268.00	\$ 24,753.36	\$ 25,248.43	\$ 25,753.40
<i>Pending Transfer: St. Paul Conservatory for Performing Artists</i>	\$ 12,134.00	\$ 24,268.00	\$ 24,753.36	\$ 25,248.43	\$ 25,753.40
<i>Pending Transfer: Face to Face Academy</i>	\$ 3,033.50	\$ 6,067.00	\$ 6,188.34	\$ 6,312.11	\$ 6,438.35
<i>Other School A</i>	N/A	N/A	\$ 6,188 .00	\$ 8,000.00	\$ 10,000.00
<i>Other School B</i>	N/A	N/A	\$ 24,753.36	\$ 25,248.43	\$ 25,753.40
Other income sources	\$2000.00				
Total Revenue	\$ 210,560.50	\$223,728.00	\$259,144.26	\$266,015.04	\$ 273,175.34
Expenses					
Personnel Salaries/Benefits	\$151,923.72	\$200,622.19	\$221,218.63	\$225,643.01	\$230,155.87
Personnel subtotal	\$151,923.72	\$200,622.19	\$221,218.63	\$225,643.01	\$230,155.87
Administrative/office expenses					
<i>Professional fees (staff development/conferences/workshops/training/dues /subscriptions)</i>	\$ 3,056.56	\$ 3,142.69	\$ 3,814.14	\$ 3,913.42	\$ 4,013.69
<i>Legal Fees</i>	\$ 5,000.00	\$ 5,100.00	\$ 5,202.00	\$ 5,306.04	\$ 5,412.16
<i>Office space use/lease</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<i>Office supplies, equipment, technology</i>	\$ 4,990.79	\$ 5,090.61	\$ 5,192.42	\$5,296.27	\$5,402.19
<i>Interpreting Services</i>	\$2,080.80	\$ 2,122.42	\$ 2,164.86	\$2,208.16	\$ 2,252.32
<i>Milage/Transportation/Travel Expenses</i>	\$ 6,892.58	\$ 7,030.44	\$ 8,256.72	\$ 8,421.85	\$ 8,590.29
Administrative/office expenses subtotal	\$22,020.73	\$22,486.15	\$24,630.14	\$25,145.75	\$25,670.66
Total Expenditures =	\$173,944.45	\$223,108.34	\$245,848.78	\$250,788.75	\$255,826.53
Net Income/(Deficit)	\$36,616.05	\$ 619.66	\$13,295.48	\$15,226.28	\$17,348.81

Measure A.7 – Authorizer Operational Conflicts of Interest: *The authorizer implements a clear policy to address conflicts of interest in all decision-making processes concerning the portfolio of charter schools.*

Essential Elements:

- Clear policy to address conflicts of interest in all decision-making processes concerning the portfolio of charter schools
- The authorizer describes how the policy will be implemented (forms, process, etc.) in order to avoid conflicts of interest that might affect the authorizer’s capacity to make objective, merit-based application and renewal decisions, including avoiding decisions and interventions that hold the authorizer accountable for the school’s performance

Our program continuously strives to strike the right balance between preventing both the appearance and occurrence of conflicts of interest while also ensuring that schools retain the autonomy to partner with various University of St. Thomas (UST) departments and initiatives *at their own discretion and fully independent of the authorizing office*. We suggest reviewing this section in conjunction with Measure A.8: Ensuring Autonomy of the Schools in the Portfolio as maintaining autonomy and preventing conflicts of interest have some natural areas of overlap.

We will continue to reinforce the issues of autonomy and conflicts of interest in our interactions and meetings with school leaders, school board members, and all other involved parties. Expectations surrounding conflicts of interest will be communicated in email interactions, when necessary, as well as consistently included in PowerPoint presentations to key stakeholders. We will maintain open communication with all appointed Charter Accountability Board members to ensure that no conflicts arise throughout the school year. In addition, our authorizing program will present our Conflict of Interest Policy (see Attachment C: Conflict of Interest Policy) and other information related to the program at a College for Education, Leadership, and Counseling meeting.

Conflicts for the Charter Accountability Board and UST faculty/staff in application processes for new and existing schools are addressed directly by our Conflict of Interest Policy. Conflicts for the external reviewers used in our new school application process are addressed through the use of a conflict of interest form, which must be filled out and returned prior to the evaluator completing the review.

In the event that a conflict of interest arises, we will take immediate action to address the situation.

Measure A.8 – Ensuring Autonomy of the Schools in the Portfolio: *The authorizer implements a policy to preserve and support the essential autonomies of the portfolio of charter schools.*

Essential Elements:

- The authorizer describes a clear policy to ensure school autonomy
- The authorizer describes processes and procedures for implementing and executing school autonomy
- The authorizer describes a focus on holding schools accountable for outcomes rather than on processes

Advanced Element:

- The authorizer describes how its policy to ensure school autonomy aligns with nationally recognized quality authorizing principles and standards

The University of St. Thomas (UST) believes in the charter bargain of autonomy in exchange for accountability, and takes protecting the autonomy of its schools seriously. The importance of autonomy can be seen in its position as one of the core values that define the charter authorizing program, discussed as Empowered Autonomy. Essentially, schools in our portfolio desire, and are entitled to, a high level of autonomy. In return for this enhanced freedom, schools are held accountable for their outcomes using a transparent and comprehensive accountability framework.

Policies Supporting School Autonomy

Our protection of school autonomy can be seen primarily in:

- The Charter Contract: Section 10.2 - Authorizer Authority and Section 10.3 - Liability and Indemnification each address the independent and autonomous nature of the school ([see Attachment D: Charter Contract Template](#)).

Except as otherwise provided by this agreement or applicable law, the authorizer has no authority, control, power, or administrative or financial responsibility over the school. And, the school assumes full responsibility for its activities and operations.

- The UST Conflict of Interest Policy: This policy has been in place since UST became an approved authorizer and guides our work in preventing conflicts of interest and preserving school autonomy ([see Attachment C: Conflict of Interest Policy](#)).

As acknowledged in the policy, one of the strengths of a higher education authorizer is that the organization can potentially provide access to University services and expertise. However, we recognize that such a strength also leaves the University open to conflicts of interest which could potentially infringe on a school's autonomy. Our conflict of interest policy provides stringent checks to ensure that schools are able to make fully autonomous decisions. This means that some authorized charter schools, just like some *unauthorized* charter schools, may choose to interact or work with university departments—but are able to make their decisions without concern about these interactions having any impact on their authorization.

Processes and Procedures for Supporting School Autonomy

UST has the following processes and procedures in place for promoting school autonomy:

1. Ongoing communication about the importance of school autonomy and UST's conflict of interest policy to Charter Accountability Board (CAB) members, school leaders and board members, and other key stakeholders in presentations, emails, and formal/informal conversation;
2. Clearly communicate when it is recommended for a school to take action versus when it is required (i.e. a legal compliance issue or matter covered in the school's contract/accountability plan);
3. Clear communication that participation in authorizer provided professional development and training opportunities are entirely optional; and
4. Refusal to participate in management level decisions at UST authorized schools.

Focus on Outcomes Over Processes

As stated above, UST firmly believes in the charter bargain—autonomy in exchange for accountability—and takes protecting the autonomy of its schools seriously. To ensure that each school’s autonomy is maintained, the Charter Contract indicates that the school maintains *full responsibility for its activities and operations* (see Attachment D: UST Charter Contract Template, sections 10.2 & 10.3). It also clearly outlines the criteria and outcomes upon which schools will be evaluated and renewed (see Attachment D: UST Charter Contract Template, section 3.2 & Attachment #2: Accountability Plan Template), which are focused on school outcomes, with the greatest emphasis placed on student academic success.

Alignment with National Best Practice

The National Association of Charter School Authorizers’ (NACSA) Principles for Quality Charter School Authorizing lists three principles that are considered ‘core’ to quality authorizing. The first is to maintain high standards for schools, the second is to uphold school autonomy, and the third is to protect student and public interests.

NACSA notes that preserving school autonomy must include:

- Governing board independence from authorizer (see Attachment D: UST Charter Contract Template, sections 6.1, 10.2, & 10.3);
- Personnel (see Attachment D: UST Charter Contract Template, section 6.1);
- School vision and culture ;
- Instructional programming, design, and use of time; and
- Budgeting.

UST’s comprehensive conflict of interest policy, charter contract sections 6.1, 10.2, and 10.3, together with the processes and procedures outlined above, preserve all of these autonomies and align directly with nationally recognized quality authorizing principles and standards in this area.

Measure A.9 – Authorizer Self-Evaluation of Capacity, Infrastructure and Practices: *The authorizer plans to self-evaluate its internal ability (capacity, infrastructure and practices) to oversee the portfolio of charter schools.*

Essential Elements:

- The authorizer describes a plan to regularly review its internal ability to oversee the portfolio of charter schools
- The authorizer describes the organization’s process to implement continuous improvement plans which will result in more effective authorizing practices

Advanced Elements:

- The authorizer describes the process the organization will use to evaluate its internal ability (capacity, infrastructure and practices) regularly against its mission, vision and goals
- The authorizer describes the organization’s frameworks for addressing any needs for improvement when falling short of its mission, organizational goals or strategic plan

Self-evaluation and continuous improvement are central to achieving our vision and mission. To this end, the University of St. Thomas (UST) Authorizing Program engages in the following annually:

- **Board Survey.** In June of each year, Charter Accountability Board (CAB) members conduct a board self-evaluation. The self-evaluation is intended to gather information on how the board and overall program functions as well as identify focus areas and board recruitment needs for the upcoming year.
- **Staff Evaluations.** Program staff complete a staff evaluation in the spring of each year. The evaluation includes self-reflection as well as supervisor feedback. Goals for the upcoming year are set and areas for growth and professional development identified.
- **Policy, Procedure, and Operations Review.** On an annual basis, the authorizing team assesses the capacity, effectiveness, and efficiency of program policies and practices. Areas for improvement as well as gaps are identified. Processes and procedures are revised as needed and new processes and procedures adopted, if needed.

Continuous Improvement Plan Implementation

Where areas for improvement are identified, the UST Authorizing Program implements a continuous improvement plan that includes the following components:

1. Identify desired outcome(s);
2. Identify key strategies and products needed to achieve outcome(s);
3. Set target dates for completion and intermediary milestones;
4. Identify the primary person(s) responsible for each strategy;
5. Monitor progress regularly at staff and CAB meetings; and
6. Review final outcome and determine whether issue has been satisfied or the cycle begins again.

Measure A.10 – Authorizer High Quality Authorizing Dissemination: *The authorizer plans to disseminate best authorizing practices and/or assist other authorizer in high quality authorizing.*

Essential Elements:

- The authorizer describes the organization’s process to share best practices and/or provide assistance to other authorizers
- The authorizer describes the organization’s intent to engage with other professionals (such as state or national associations) in order to promote high quality authorizing dissemination

The University of St. Thomas Charter School Authorizing Office is committed to promoting high quality authorizing across Minnesota and the nation. The organization uses the following strategies to share best practices, assist other authorizers, and engage with professionals in the field:

- Participating in the Minnesota Association of Charter School Authorizers (MACSA), including serving on the executive committee;
- Participating in Minnesota Comeback, including serving on the Cabinet and chairing the Charter Implementation Team;
- Participating in the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA), including serving as a mentor to an emerging leader in the authorizing field through NACSA Leaders Program);
- Hosting a NACSA Fellow and serving as a resource to the program;
- Speaking and/or providing training on authorizing at meetings and conferences; and
- Providing individual and small group consultation with colleagues and responding to request for guidance.

Measure A.11 – Authorizer Compliance to Responsibilities Stated in Statute: *The authorizer intends to comply with reporting, submissions, and deadlines set forth in Minnesota statute.*

Essential Elements:

- The authorizer describes its internal process which will ensure that it will comply with reporting, submissions, and deadlines set forth in Minnesota Statute.

The University of St. Thomas (UST) takes the deadlines set forth by the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) and state statute seriously. In order to ensure that the authorizing program maintains its record of 100% compliance with deadlines, the office will employ a master timeline. The timeline will be updated as needed to reflect changes to statute and MDE deadlines, and will be accessible to all authorizing program staff.

Measure B.1 – New Charter School Decisions: *The authorizer has clear and comprehensive approval criteria and process standards to rigorously evaluate new charter school proposals. The authorizer outlines new charter school decision-making processes that will promote the growth of high quality charter schools.*

Essential Elements:

- Comprehensive new school application instructions, evaluative criteria, procedures, timelines and review processes that address the following elements:
 - Mission/Vision
 - Need/Demand
 - Primary statutory purpose of improving all pupil learning and all student achievement (Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.01, Subdivision 1) and how the school will report the implementation of it to the authorizer
 - Additional purpose(s) and how the school will report the implementation of said purpose(s) to the authorizer
 - Program designed for students to meet or exceed the outcome expectations adopted by the commissioner for public school students (Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.10, Subdivision 1(a)(15)(b))
 - Academic plan: description of the school program, specific academic and nonacademic outcomes that students must achieve, educational philosophy and approach, school culture, curriculum and instruction, assessment and services for special populations
 - Operational plan: governance and management, administration, human resource recruitment and development, student recruitment and enrollment, admission policy, school calendar, parent and community involvement, operational outcomes and compliance with applicable laws and regulations
 - Financial plan: short and long-term financial projections, budget(s), business management procedures, financial outcomes and facility planning
- The authorizer’s review process includes clear and transparent procedures and rigorous criteria to evaluate new charter school applications
- The authorizer describes the timeline of the new school application process consistent with statutory deadlines per Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.06
- The authorizer’s new charter school application criteria is consistent with the authorizer’s performance standards/framework as describe in B.4: Performance Standards

Advanced Element:

- The Authorizer identifies how its new charter school application process is designed to promote high quality charter schools and align with national quality authorizing principals and standards

Comprehensive New School Application Instructions, Criteria, Procedures, Timelines, and Review Process

The UST new school application is included in the Program Manual (Attachment A: Program Manual, pages 8-49) and provides the instructions, prompts, evaluation criteria, procedures, timelines, and review process. All current statutory components are included and timelines are consistent with law. UST will continue to monitor and incorporate changes to statute as they occur.

Additionally, although the criteria remain the same, we have recently re-formatted the New School Application to make the submission timelines and procedures more accessible for applicants.

Review Process Includes Clear and Transparent Procedures and Rigorous Criteria for Evaluation

A narrative describing the review process is also presented in the Program Manual (Attachment A: Program Manual, pages 31-32) along with the Evaluation Rubric, which provides the criteria by which the application is scored (Attachment A: Program Manual, pages 32-47). In building the New School Application Process, including the review process, we carefully examined the applications of high quality local and national authorizers to ensure a comprehensive and relevant application process. The New School Application Process is clearly outlined and it contains the rigor and relevance necessary to ensure that UST only authorizes schools that will best meet the needs of the students they intend to serve.

Application Criteria Consistent with Authorizer Performance Standards

The new charter school application is consistent with UST’s performance standards, as it revolves heavily around the three main components included in our performance standards: Academic Performance, Financial Viability, and Organizational Aptitude.

New Charter School Application Process is Designed to Promote High Quality Charter Schools and Align with National Best Practices

The current UST New School Application Process is designed to fully align with the standards of the National Association for Charter School Authorizing (NACSA) and ensure that only applications with a strong likelihood of producing successful, high quality schools are approved. In addition to aligning with basic NACSA criteria, we wanted to guarantee that UST's process included the same levels of rigor and relevance as those of the nation's top authorizers. To accomplish this goal we began by reviewing the new school application processes of authorizers that had been recognized by NACSA for having high quality practices, including:

- The State University of New York (SUNY),
- The District of Columbia Public Charter School Board (DCPCSB),
- The Denver Public School District, and
- The Indianapolis Mayor's Office.

We also reached out to Katie Piehl, NACSA's Director of Authorizer Development, for recommendations, and as a result reviewed the new school application processes of the Indiana Charter School Board and the newly formed Washington State Charter School Commission. In addition, we examined the processes of local authorizers Audubon Center of the North Woods, Novation Education Opportunities, and Friends of Education in order to ensure that UST's process encompassed all prudent content categories and quality process steps, as well as clear and consistent formatting. You will note in reviewing our application process that it is suitable for both new and existing school operators. Our process also includes specific elements for applicants wishing to partner with an educational service provider or charter management organization, as well as those planning to offer online/hybrid instruction.

By aligning with NACSA criteria and designing our application to match the rigor and relevance of other quality authorizers, we are ensuring that we only authorize the highest quality charter school applicants.

Measure B.2 – Interim Accountability Decisions (i.e. site/grade level expansions, official early learning program(s) recognition, ready to open and change in authorizer): *The authorizer has clear and comprehensive approval criteria and process standards to rigorously evaluate school opening decisions as well as proposals of existing charter school expansion requests and interim changes. The authorizer outlines interim accountability decision-making processes that will promote the growth of high quality charter schools.*

Essential Elements:

- Comprehensive application instructions, evaluative criteria, procedures, timelines and review processes, including academic, operational and financial conditions upon which the authorizer approves or denies the following
 - Site/grade level expansion per Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.06, Subdivision 5
 - Official early learning program(s) recognition per Minnesota Statutes, section 124R.06, Subdivision 3(a) and Minnesota Statutes, sections 121A.16 to 121A.19
 - Change in authorizer requests per Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.10, Subdivision 5
 - Ready to Open per Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.06, Subdivision 3(g)

Advanced Element:

- The Authorizer identifies how its interim accountability decision-making processes are designed to promote high quality charter schools and align with national quality authorizing principals and standards

The University of St. Thomas (UST) has established policies and procedures surrounding interim accountability decisions designed to provide clarity to schools and form a comprehensive authorizing program capable of rigorously and fairly evaluating any change effort schools may wish to undertake. Critical interim accountability items including site/grade level expansion, official early learning program recognition, change in authorizer requests, and the ready to open protocol and checklist are detailed in UST’s *Charter School Authorizing Program Manual (Attachment A: Program Manual pages 59-118)* distributed to all UST schools at the start of their authorization and again when any revision is made. The manual is also available on the authorizing program website so that schools can easily find and reference processes of interest.

UST has formal, written policies and procedures pertaining to the interim accountability areas. It is worth noting that the policies and procedures in all areas are comprehensive and seek understanding of the school as a whole with a focus on academic, governance, financial, and operational areas. It is also worth highlighting that UST’s policies and procedures are founded on national best practices and standards. Specifically, they are aligned with the principles and standards published by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers related to interim accountability decisions:

- UST encourages expansion and replication of charter schools that demonstrate success and capacity for growth.
- UST allows sufficient time for each stage of the application and school pre-opening process to be carried out with quality and integrity.
- UST grants [expansions, transfers, and school openings] only to applicants that have demonstrated competence and capacity to succeed in *all* aspects of the school, consistent with the stated approval criteria.

Site/Grade Level Expansions

UST’s Expansion Application is detailed in the *Charter School Authorizing Program Manual (Attachment A: Program Manual, pages 72-81)* and applies to site and grade level expansions. The expansion application process was established when UST was initially approved as an authorizer and remains the same. The application includes instructions, a summary of the required application elements and evaluation criteria. As noted in the Program Manual (pp. 72), applications are typically due to UST by June of the year prior to the planned expansion, with a formal response in August (the Charter School Accountability Board reviews this timeline annually and may choose to adjust it as needed). This timeline facilitates the October 1 statutory supplemental affidavit due date.

UST believes that past performance is a strong indicator of future performance. To this end, UST’s review process for expansion applications is founded on clear and comprehensive academic, financial, and organizational criteria. The review process consists of an internal examination of historical information and data such as annual reports and

evaluations and an evaluation of the expansion application utilizing the Evaluation Rubric ([Attachment A: Program Manual, pages 77-81](#)). Follow-up interviews, additional information and/or a site visit may be requested. UST authorizing staff make a recommendation to the Charter Accountability Board. This recommendation is considered and a decision made.

Official Early Learning Program(s) Recognition

UST's Official Early Learning Program Recognition Application is detailed in the *Charter School Authorizing Program Manual* ([Attachment A: Program Manual, pages 82-96](#)). In SY2014, following updated guidance from the Minnesota Department of Education, UST created an adapted version of our expansion application process for existing charter schools seeking to add a preschool program. The application requests information needed to assess a school's ability to operate a successful early learning program, including the academic, financial and organizational elements contained within in the Expansion Application as well as early learning program indicators. As noted in the Program Manual ([pp. 82-83](#)), applications are typically due to UST no later than June the year prior to the proposed expansion with a formal response in August (the Charter School Accountability Board reviews this timeline annually and may choose to adjust it as needed).

As enumerated in the application, UST's review process consists of an internal examination of historical information and data such as annual reports and evaluations and an evaluation of the expansion application utilizing the Evaluation Rubric specific to this process ([Attachment A: Program Manual, pages 90-95](#)). Follow-up interviews, additional information and/or a site visit may be requested. UST authorizing staff make a recommendation to the Charter Accountability Board. This recommendation is considered and a decision made.

Change in Authorizer Requests

UST's Change in Authorizer Application is detailed in the *Charter School Authorizing Program Manual* on pages 59-71. The application includes a request for specific academic, organizational, and financial documents/information at both the letter of intent and full application phases. As noted in the Program Manual ([pp. 60](#)), Letters of Intent are typically due to UST by the second Friday in September with a formal response the first week in October. The letter of intent process also clearly states that if an applicant does not meet a few key criteria (i.e.: 12% or higher fund balance), they are highly unlikely to be approved—though in an effort to offer a fair and open examination to all, we will review a letter of intent from any school, no matter the state of their initial indicators. Full applications are typically due by the first business day in November and site visits scheduled for November. A formal response is made by early December. This timeline facilitates the statutory affidavit submittal date of 105 days prior to the end of the charter school's existing contract. The Charter Accountability Board may choose to adjust this timeline as needed.

Similar to expansion requests, UST believes that past performance is a strong indicator of future performance. To this end, UST's review process for change in authorizer requests is founded on clear and comprehensive academic, financial, and organizational criteria. UST will use information provided in the Letter of Intent, Change in Authorizer Application, and related attachments, as well as information gained from the site visit to perform an evaluation using the UST School Evaluation Rubric ([Attachment A: Program Manual, page 70](#)). Follow-up interviews and additional information may be requested. UST authorizing staff make a recommendation to the Charter Accountability Board. This recommendation is considered and a decision made.

Ready-to-Open Processes

As stipulated in the charter law, *Minn. Stat. 124E.06 Subd.3(h)*, "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." UST's Ready-to-Open (RTO) procedures ensure that new schools know exactly what they are expected to have in place in order to open on their anticipated time table. These RTO procedures are detailed in the *Charter School Authorizing Program Manual* on pages 97-118, which contain the Ready-to-Open Benchmarks, the Ready-to-Open Process and the Ready-to-Open Checklist. The RTO procedures incorporate the items in the Minnesota Department of Education's 'Opening Checklist for New Charter Schools'.

The RTO process includes personalization of the RTO checklist template to incorporate goals specific to each new school, regular tracking of task completion on the checklist by founding teams, bi-monthly conversations between UST to discuss progress and ensure critical items are completed well in advance of opening and a RTO meeting.

Measure B.3 Contract Term, Negotiation and Execution: *The authorizer contracts that clearly define material terms and rights and responsibilities of the school and the authorizer*

Essential Elements:

- Sample charter contract (See Charter Contract Guidance on the MDE website) that meets all following elements:
 - *All* current statutory requirements per Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.10
 - Clearly state the rights and responsibilities of the school and the authorizer
- The authorizer describes a plan to establish contract outcomes/goals that are strategic, specific, measurable and time-bound
- The authorizer describes its process for how its new contract(s) will be completed within 45 business days of the commissioner’s approval of the authorizer’s affidavit and the authorizer will submit to the commissioner a copy of the signed contract within 10 business days of its execution
- The authorizer describes how its existing contract(s) will be fully executed no later than the first date of the renewal period
- The authorizer describes how the contract will be amended for material contract changes when applicable

Advanced Element:

- The authorizer identifies how its contract term, negotiation and execution decision-making processes are designed to promote high quality charter schools and align with national quality authorizing principals and standards

Sample Charter Contract

Both the charter contract template and a crosswalk linking the charter contract sections to the pertinent statutory requirements are included with this submission. The contract has sections that specifically address the rights and responsibilities of the school and authorizer, primarily Section 4: Legal Structure and Authority of the School, Section 6: Operating Requirements, Section 7: Authorizer Duties, and Section 10: General Terms. Please see Attachment D: Contract Template and Attachment E: Cover Letter.

SMART Contract Goals

At UST, we utilize an accountability framework including SMART goals that revolve around three main categories of interest: academic performance, financial viability, and organizational effectiveness (which includes governance, legal compliance, and operational health). Schools are encouraged to engage with us as they develop their mission-specific contract goals, and such goals must be presented in a SMART format. The Accountability System including the Evaluation Framework and Evaluation Rubric is embedded in each school’s contract once negotiations are complete. See the Attachment A: Program Manual, pages 119-159 for our section on accountability and oversight.

Compliance with Statutory Timelines

Each year, the UST authorizing program staff reviews the current MN charter statutes and creates a calendar detailing all important submission dates and what these dates mean for our process timelines (see Attachment A: Program Manual, page 51). These dates are communicated with interested schools as well as schools currently authorized by UST to ensure compliance to all deadlines. In addition, our general practice for new school contracts is to produce timelines that result in contracts being completed and signed by schools one month in advance. All UST contracts end on June 30th, and as documented in Attachment D: UST Charter Contract Template, our contracts are entered into as of July 1st of the renewal year. UST is aware that contracts must be submitted to MDE within 10 business days, including in cases of contract amendment and will take the steps necessary to ensure compliance.

Contract Amendments

To date, UST has not had occasion to formally amend a contract as we do so only for material changes—and never to lower the rigor of our goals. We have however, had schools request changes to their annual testing schedule. This did not change the indicators in our contract, but rather amended the way in which the data used for these indicators was collected. When such a request is made, we discuss relevant implications of the change with the school (in this case, moving from fall and spring NWEA data collection to fall only—thus measuring growth fall to fall rather than fall to spring) and then determine whether the request can be supported. If the change is supported, we then issue a written notice to ensure that the understanding of all parties is documented for the remainder of the contract period. If the need for a material change to the contract were to arise, UST would negotiate the change with the school on a case-by-case basis, and if approved, draft adjusted amendment language, and have both parties re-approve and sign

the amended contract. As noted above, UST is aware that contracts must be submitted to MDE within 10 business days, including in cases of contract amendment and will take the steps necessary to ensure compliance.

How Contract Terms and Related Practices Align with National Best Practices

UST uses Minnesota Statute, Federal regulations, and alignment with the standards of the National Association for Charter School Authorizing (NACSA) to guarantee that we are promoting high quality charter schools, and making the most responsible decisions throughout the contract terms of each new and existing school (Attachment A: Program Manual, pages 57-58).

Measure B.4 – Performance Standards: *The authorizer has a performance framework under which it executes contracts with clear, measurable and attainable performance standards.*

Essential Elements:

- Performance framework addressing all the following elements:
 - States the primary purpose of the charter schools in its portfolio is to improve all pupil learning and all student achievement and identifies additional purposes per Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.01, Subdivisions 1(a)(1) and 1(a)(2)
 - The performance framework defines clear, measurable and attainable academic, operational and financial performance standards for all schools in its portfolio per Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.10
 - The performance framework is designed to achieve outcomes that meet or exceed expectations adopted by the commissioner for public school students per Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.10, Subdivision 1(a)(15)(b)
 - Commissioner’s outcomes for public school students are the five goals of World’s Best Workforce:
 - All children are ready for school
 - All third-graders can read at grade level
 - All racial and economic achievement gaps between students are closed
 - All students are ready for career and college
 - All students graduate from high school

Advanced Element:

- The Authorizer identifies how its performance framework is designed to promote high quality charter schools and align with national quality authorizing principals and standards.

Accountability System Addresses Statutory Requirements and Clearly Defines Standards

The University of St. Thomas (UST) Contract and the Accountability System (which includes the Evaluation Framework and Evaluation Rubric) work together to promote high quality schools, upholding our adherence to the primary and additional purposes of charter schools. The Evaluation Framework sets forth the indicators (general categories) of performance which include academic, financial, organizational, legal compliance, and governance health, as well as the general measures (means of evaluation—for example, performance on state standardized assessments). This document works in conjunction with the Evaluation Rubric, which sets forth the metrics and specific targets for determining whether a school has met its performance requirements according to the expectations set forth in the Evaluation Framework. Taken together, these two documents provide clear, measurable, and attainable standards in the areas of academic, operational, and financial health.

It is worth noting that UST negotiates several mission-specific indicators which are individual to each school. Further, UST reserves the right to modify its Accountability System goals as needed if a school’s student population is extremely unique (i.e.: 90-100% Special Education Students, all over-aged/under credited, etc.). In such cases, UST maintains the same level of rigor found in the template goals, and also maintains the categories and approximate number of indicators (i.e.: Proficiency, Growth, English learner/Special Education subgroups, etc.). Please reference Attachment D: UST Charter Contract Template and Attachment A: Program Manual, pages 119-159 for further detail on this section.

Both the Accountability System and Section 3 of the contract, ‘Purpose of the School, Description of the Program, Performance Indicators and Evaluation,’ include language making clear that the primary purpose of charter schools is to improve all pupil learning and all student achievement, and the contract also provides that our schools will meet one or more additional purposes. Schools must declare the specific purposes they will be reporting on and held accountable to in Attachment 1 to the contract. For additional detail please reference Attachment D: Contract Template and Attachment A: Program Manual, pages 119-159.

Accountability System is Designed to Achieve Outcomes that Meet or Exceed Commissioner Expectations

Outcomes for each of our schools are designed to meet/exceed the expectations set forth in the World’s Best Workforce.

- **All children are ready for school** – Our performance framework uses metrics such as attendance rate, proficiency, and growth standards to ensure that all children are ready for school.

- **All third-graders can read at grade level** – Using proficiency and growth measures, our performance metric ensures that all students are making adequate progress towards reading at grade level.
- **All racial and economic achievement gaps between students are closed** – Our performance rubric includes standards requiring that all population subgroups meet/exceed state-established expectations and that schools are fulfilling their legal obligations to all subgroups.
- **All students are ready for career and college** – Using graduation rate targets, daily attendance, and other mission-specific goals for each school, our performance rubric aims to prepare all students for a career and/or college upon graduation.
- **All students graduate from high school** – Our performance rubric measures schools on whether or not they meet state-established targets for graduation rates.

Measure B.5 – Authorizer’s Processes for Ongoing Oversight of the Portfolio Charter Schools: *The authorizer has processes to monitor and oversee the schools in its portfolio in the areas of academic, operational and financial performance.*

Essential Elements:

- The authorizer describes the criteria, processes and procedures it will use to monitor and evaluate the fiscal, operational and academic performance of the schools in its portfolio per Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.10 Subdivision 1(a)(7)
- The authorizer describes required, academic, financial and operational reporting by the schools to the authorizer
- The authorizer describes an oversight plan that clearly establishes the criteria, processes and procedures that the authorizer will use to evaluate performance and monitor compliance, ensure school autonomy and protect student rights
- The authorizer describes how its ongoing oversight informs its standards and processes for intervention, termination and renewal decisions of the portfolio of charter schools (i.e. performance measure B.6 and B.9)

Advanced Element:

- The Authorizer identifies how its ongoing oversight of the portfolio of charter schools is designed to promote high quality charter schools and aligns with national quality authorizing principles and standards

The University of St. Thomas (UST) is committed to fulfilling its role as a charter school authorizer by holding its schools accountable for a range of results, including academic, financial and operation performance. An overview of our practices for providing ongoing oversight to the schools in our portfolio is provided below. These practices are founded on national models for quality authorizing and align with those found in the National Association of Charter School Authorizers’ principles and standards handbook. With regard to our practices for ongoing oversight of the portfolio of charter schools, UST:

- Implements a comprehensive performance accountability and compliance monitoring system that is defined by the charter contract and provides the information necessary to make rigorous and standards-based renewal, revocation, and intervention decisions.
- Visits each school as appropriate and necessary for collecting data that cannot be obtained otherwise and in accordance with the contract, while ensuring that the frequency, purposes, and methods of such visits respect school autonomy and avoid operational interference.
- Evaluates each school annually on its performance toward meeting the standards and targets stated in the charter contract, including essential compliance requirements, and clearly communicates evaluation results to the school’s governing board and leadership.
- Articulates and enforces stated consequences for failing to meet performance expectations or compliance requirements.
- Refrains from directing or participating in educational decisions or choices that are appropriately within a school’s purview under the charter law or contract.

Criteria, Processes, and Procedures

UST employs the criteria, processes and procedures for overseeing schools laid out in Section 7.1 of our charter contract (see Attachment D: UST Charter Contract Template). Section 7.1 states that UST will use the system outlined in contract attachment 8 titled “UST Accountability and Oversight System” to provide ongoing oversight to determine whether UST authorized schools are complying with the contract terms and meet our responsibilities under law regarding authorizing.” Specifically, UST:

- Evaluates the information we receive from our schools (e.g. annual reports, financial audits, monthly board packets, and site visits);
- Evaluates information we receive about our schools such as publicly reported information schools (e.g. state assessment information); and
- Monitors schools for compliances (e.g. website, board member training, teacher licensure, and open meeting law).

For additional details on the elements of the accountability and oversight system as articulated in the contract, schools are directed to the *Charter School Authorizing Program Manual (Attachment A: Program Manual, Accountability System, pages. 119-149 and Oversight System, pages. 150-160)*. In addition to evaluating performance and monitoring compliance, UST’s oversight protocol promotes autonomy and student rights through expectations set forth in the contract with regards to conflicts of interest (see AAP A.7), autonomy (see AAP A.8) and student’s rights (Attachment D: UST Charter Contract Template, Section 6).

Reporting

The reporting requirements for UST authorized schools is articulated in Section 6.6 of the Charter Contract, which states, “The school will file reports, including the annual report identified in section 3.2(d) with the authorizer regarding the implementation efforts and outcomes of the school program. These reports shall encompass operational, governance, financial, compliance, and academic elements—including those elements related to achievement of the primary and additional statutory purposes of the school. The Authorizer will provide a format and a reasonable timeline for these reports.” An example of the current format and timeline for reports can be seen in Attachment F: UST SY2017 Reporting Guidelines.

This requirement is further fleshed out in the Oversight System section of the Program Manual (Attachment A: Program Manual, pp. 149) which states that schools will provide Annual and Additional Reports to UST, the contents of which are aligned with our accountability system. Our intention is to ask only for necessary information that will be reviewed and used to instruct oversight. UST annually provides our schools with a format and reasonable timeline for the reports through the publication and dissemination of Reporting Guidelines (Attachment F: UST SY2017 Reporting Guidelines). Written feedback is provided in response to each report. While the feedback is not a required component of UST’s Accountability and Oversight System, it serves two functions. First, it provides an efficient and effective way to ensure that reports include all required items and promptly notify schools of anything missing. Second, the report feedback communicates appreciation to schools for their work and the value we place on our school leaders’ time.

Oversight Plan

In addition to the reporting requirements highlighted above, UST’s oversight plan includes the following elements (Attachment A: Program Manual, pp. 150-159).

- **Site Visits.** UST conducts a formal site visit each fall and provides verbal feedback as well as a site visit write-up. We also attend a board meeting as a part of this fall site visit. UST conducts an informal site visit each spring and provides verbal feedback. As needed, UST conducts monitoring visits and board meeting observations throughout the contract period.
- **Board Packet Receipt and Review.** The UST Accountability Plan (Contract Attachment 2) requires schools to submit board packets at least three days in advance of board meeting (Evaluation Rubric measures 2.1 and 3.11). UST staff reviews packets to ensure compliance with open meeting law, to remain informed about goings-on at the school, and to collect information for other Accountability Plan measures (e.g. Evaluation Rubric measures 3.3 – board self-evaluation, 3.5 strategic planning, and 3.6 school leader evaluation). Board packets are also kept on file for reference.
- **School Evaluations Using Accountability Plan Evaluation Rubric.** Schools receive annual evaluations using the Accountability System Evaluation Rubric contained in their contract.

For a visual representation of the general cycle of data collection and feedback, please see the UST Reporting Flow Chart and Timeline (Attachment G: UST Reporting Flow Chart and Timeline).

Alignment with Intervention, Termination and Renewal Decisions

Ongoing oversight and appropriate action are integrally connected. UST evaluates the collective body of information obtained through our ongoing oversight plan to advise decision-making. Oversight processes may lead to intervention, correction action and/or contract termination. Oversight processes provide evidence and support for contract renewal, non-renewal, or termination.

Measure B.6 – Authorizer’s Standards and Processes for Interventions, Corrective Action and Response to

Complaints: *The authorizer has clear and comprehensive standards and processes to address complaints, interventions and/or corrective action.*

Essential Elements:

- The authorizer describes standards, procedures and processes to address and resolve complaints, including forms if applicable
- The authorizer describes standards, procedures and processes for intervention and a plan for implementing corrective action
- The authorizer describes how its standards and processes for intervention, corrective action and response to complaints align with its ongoing oversight of the portfolio of charter schools (i.e. performance measure B.5)

Advanced Element:

- The Authorizer identifies how its standards and processes for interventions, corrective action and response to complaints are designed to promote high quality charter schools and aligns with national quality authorizing principles and standards

The University of St. Thomas (UST) has clear and comprehensive standards and processes for addressing interventions, corrective action, and complaints as follows. While the National Association for Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) does not have standalone best practices for interventions and complaint processes, the topic is referenced as part of ongoing oversight and evaluation. UST’s standards and processes are aligned with these as follows:

- Communicates regularly with schools, as needed, including both the school leaders and governing boards, and provides timely notice of contract violations or performance deficiencies (see B5).
- Provides an annual written report to each school summarizing its performance and compliance to date and identifying areas of strength and areas needing improvement (see B4 and B5).
- Articulates and enforces stated consequences for failing to meet performance expectations or compliance requirements (Attachment A: Charter School Authorizing Program Manual Range of Interventions Policy, pages 158-159).
- Establishes and makes known to its schools at the outset an intervention policy that states the general conditions that may trigger intervention and the types of actions and consequences that may ensue (see Attachment A: Charter School Authorizing Program Manual Range of Interventions Policy, pages 158-159).
- Gives schools clear, adequate, evidence-based, and timely notice of contract violations or performance deficiencies (see B5 and Range of Interventions policy described in Attachment A).
- Allows schools reasonable time and opportunity for remediation in non-emergency situations (see Attachment A: Charter School Authorizing Program Manual Range of Interventions Policy, pages 158-159).
- Where intervention is needed, engages in intervention strategies that clearly preserve school autonomy and responsibility – identifying what the school must remedy without prescribing solutions (see A8).

Interventions and Corrective Action

The University of St. Thomas employs a clear Range of Interventions policy, which is referenced in the body of all school contracts (Attachment D: Charter Contract Template, section 7.5), included as an attachment in all school contracts (Attachment D: Charter Contract Template, Attachment 10), and laid out in our *Charter School Authorizing Program Manual* (Attachment A: Program Manual, pp. 158-159). The Range of Interventions policy provides broad categories of issues that could trigger the various levels of intervention, an overview of what a school could expect to see from the authorizer (e.g. a letter detailing concerns, a requirement to put together a formal plan, etc.), and a summary of what the school may be asked to provide (e.g. a plan for improvement). It is important to note that our policy covers both intervention and corrective action as we believe the two go hand-in-hand. In other words, if there is an issue substantial enough for UST to issue an intervention notice, we expect that corrective action needs to be taken and provide information on our expectations/required actions within the intervention notice.

Complaints

Complaints are also handled through a clear process outlined in the attached Complaint Flow Chart (Attachment A: Charter School Authorizing Program Manual, page 160). To summarize, UST requires all complaints to be in writing. For complaints under authorizer purview, UST conducts a reasonable investigation. If evidence of a legal or contract violation is found, UST will issue a report to the school’s board detailing the findings and resulting actions.

Measure B.7 – Charter School Support, Development and Technical Assistance: *The authorizer has an established process to support its portfolio of charter schools through intentional assistance and development offerings.*

Essential Elements:

- The authorizer describes its plan to provide support and technical assistance and in a manner to preserve school autonomy

Minnesota Statutes §124E.10 Subd. 3(b) states that: *An authorizer shall monitor and evaluate the academic, financial, operational, and student performance of the school, and may assess a charter school a fee according to paragraph (c). The agreed-upon fee structure must be stated in the charter school contract.* The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) Principles and Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing states three core principles of authorizing: (1) Maintain High Standards for Schools; (2) Uphold School Autonomy; and (3) Protect Student and Public Interests. The presentation of the intended role of authorizers in Minnesota law as evaluative and to provide oversight, coupled with national best practice shapes how UST approaches support and technical assistance to our charter schools.

Support and Development Plan

UST’s plan for support and technical assistance takes the approach of facilitation rather than provision. Specifically, we encourage UST schools to take the lead in selecting and providing development and take our cues from schools’ expressed needs. By allowing school leaders to receive information on best practices from one another rather than directly from UST, our hope is that leaders will form meaningful connections with one another and that the information gained can be used or discarded without any concern about rejecting an idea generated by the authorizer. UST is working to create a network across our schools that enables the sharing of best practices, continuous improvement and ongoing learning.

Specific activities UST may use to establish a ‘Charter Network’ and facilitate growth opportunities include:

1. **Resource on Charter Law and Related Topics.** We are available to answer questions regarding UST authorizing practices, the charter law (when the answer is clearly defined in law), and related topics. This includes ensuring that schools are aware of changes in Minnesota’s Charter Law by providing up-to-date copies of the law (and highlights of items we perceive as major) following legislative sessions.
2. **Liaison with MDE.** We are present for our schools when they are working with MDE on a statutory question or other issue and when possible, work to facilitate solutions.
3. **Information Hub.** We serve as a ‘hub’ for information. If a charter school leader calls with a question or request for assistance with best practice, we provide referrals to other schools or individuals we believe may be able to help. Additionally, we send out regular email updates to charter school leaders with news from our schools as well as key updates and information on topics of expressed interest and best practices.
4. **Other UST Departments and Colleges.** UST authorized charter schools may choose to work with other departments and colleges within the University. To protect autonomy, we neither encourage nor prohibit such partnerships. See the discussion of Authorizer Operational Conflicts of Interest in measure A.7 for additional information on this aspect of our program. When a school calls us with a request for another department/area of UST, we offer to make the initial connection and attempt to ensure that the school receives a response.
5. **Use of Space.** Occasionally schools need off-site space for a meeting, board retreat, or other gathering. When the authorizing program is approached with such a request, we do our best to accommodate the school and do not charge for the space.
6. **School Leadership Gatherings.** We offer our school leaders the opportunity to come together at least once per year to share ideas and information.
7. **Trainings.** Through surveys and conversations, we may choose to work with school leaders to identify common areas of growth across our network of charter schools and organize training opportunities to meet their needs. Typically, we call upon our school leaders or experts in the field to conduct the trainings. The one area where we frequently provide direct training to schools is with regard to authorizer policies/procedures/accountability plan metrics.

It is important to note that not all requests for support and/or assistance may be granted based on the availability of human and/or financial resources.

School Autonomy

Participation by UST-authorized charter schools in support, development and technical assistance is optional and provided at no cost to schools. There will be no negative consequences for schools who decline to participate.

Measure B.8 – High Quality Charter School Replication and Dissemination of Best School Practices: *The authorizer has an established process to promote, within its portfolio, the model replication and dissemination of best practices of high performing charter schools.*

Essential Elements:

- The authorizer describes a clear plan for successful model replication and dissemination of best practices

The University of St. Thomas (UST) Charter School Authorizing Program has a four-part plan for model replication:

1. Require new charter school applications to identify research supporting the educational model, curricula, and instructional methodology (see B1 and Appendix A: UST Charter School Authorizing Program Manual);
2. Implement a streamlined application process for proven high-quality model replication and/or expansion that reduces the application burden while maintaining rigorous evaluation standards;
3. Encourage existing high-quality schools within UST's portfolio to apply for Federal CSP Replication/Significant Expansion grants and the Best Practice Award Competition; and
4. Promote and support the replication of existing high-quality schools within UST's portfolio.

UST has a four-part plan for the dissemination of best practices:

1. Identify best practices within the UST network and external (local, state and national) for dissemination to UST authorized charter schools using a variety of vehicles such as authorizer updates, networking sessions and/or professional development offerings;
2. Identify best practices within the UST network and encourage schools to share through presentations and/or publications;
3. Identify best practices within the UST network and invite faculty from UST's College of Education, Leadership and Counseling to visit the schools and/or meet with school leadership; and
4. Share information with UST authorized charter schools about learning opportunities.

Measure B.9 – Charter School Renewal or Termination Decisions: *The authorizer has clear and comprehensive standards and processes to make high stakes renewal and termination decisions. The authorizer outlines charter school renewal and termination decision standards and processes that will promote the growth of high quality charter schools.*

Essential Elements:

- Comprehensive evaluative standards, procedures, timelines and review processes to evaluate a school’s academic, operational and financial performance for high-stakes renewal and termination decisions consistent with Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.10, Subdivisions 1(a)(7), 1(a)(8), 1(a)(13), 1(a)(14 and Subdivision 3(a) and includes the following:
 - Standards and process to evaluate the school’s performance in meeting or exceeding outcomes adopted by the commissioner for public school students (Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.10, Subdivision 1(a)(15(b)))
 - Standards and process to issue a formal written performance evaluation of the school’s contract outcomes to determine eligibility for contract renewal per Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.10, Subdivision 1(a)(8)
 - The authorizer describes clear standards for consequences for meeting or not meeting performance standards
- School closure plan and describes the authorizer’s role in the orderly closure of a school in the event of revocation, non-renewal or voluntary relinquishment of the charter per Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.10, Subdivision 1(a)(15), Subdivision 4 and Subdivision 6

Advanced Element:

- The authorizer identifies how its charter school renewal or termination decision-making processes are designed to promote high quality charter schools and align with national quality authorizing principles and standards

Comprehensive Evaluation Standards, Procedures, Timelines, and Review Process

The work of an authorizer has particular importance at three junctures in the life of a school: opening, closing, and renewal. The University of St. Thomas (UST) renewal process is taken seriously and combines a deep knowledge of each school—gained through our ongoing evaluation processes with expert review of the school’s academic, financial, and organizational performance *trajectories*, and annual evaluation scores.

Our comprehensive evaluation standards are contained in the Accountability System (including Evaluation Framework and Evaluation Rubric) which is included in each school’s contract. Please see Attachment A: Program Manual, Accountability System pp 119-149, for details. The UST Accountability System allows us to monitor and evaluate the fiscal, operational, and academic performance of each of our schools consistent with all provisions of *MN Statute 124E*. The process for renewal is viewed as ongoing and encompasses performance data collected over the duration of the contract (Attachment A: Program Manual, Oversight System pp. 150-160), rather than simply an end of contract exercise. Activities during contract renewal include an end of term visit from a team of reviewers, sharing of a draft evaluation, application for contract renewal, and UST providing a final written End of Term Evaluation including analysis of the school’s performance over the contract period. End of Term Evaluations include performance on Evaluation Rubric metrics for all years of the school’s contract, as well as a written analysis of the trajectory of performance over time in each of the key areas (academic, financial, organizational). Please see Attachment A: Program Manual, Charter Renewal Process and Application section on pp. 50-59 for additional details.

Consequences for Performance and Closure Plan

Consequences for performance can be seen in the length of contract renewal guidelines found in Attachment A: Program Manual, pg. 157. The UST Charter Contract forms the backbone of the school-authorizer relationship and includes relevant information such as requirements that the school meet the primary and additional purposes for charter schools included in statute (see contract section 3.1) and indicates that the goals and performance indicators set forth in the Accountability System will specify the performance levels necessary for the agreement to be renewed (see contract section 3.2). The contract (section 8) provides information on non-renewal or termination by the authorizer for good cause. A closure plan detailing the authorizer role in the orderly closure of a charter school is included in the charter contract and can be found in Attachment D: Charter School Contract Template, Attachment 11.

Authorizer Practices Are Designed to Promote High Quality Schools and Align with National Best Practices

The following are practices undertaken by UST that align with those found in the National Association of Charter School Authorizers' principles and standards handbook. With regard to revocation and renewal decision making, UST:

- Bases the renewal process and renewal decisions on thorough analyses of a comprehensive body of objective evidence defined by the performance framework in the charter contract.
- Grants renewal only to schools that have achieved the standards and targets stated in the charter contract.
- Provides to each school, in advance of the renewal decision, a cumulative performance report.
- Requires any school seeking renewal to apply for it through a renewal application, providing a meaningful opportunity and reasonable time to respond.
- Clearly communicates criteria for revocation, renewal and non-renewal decisions.