QUALITY STANDARDS FOR CHARTER SCHOOLS

A Resource for Missouri’s Charter Public Schools
Dear Colleagues,

The number of charter public schools in Missouri continues to grow. After many years of dedication and commitment to quality education, Missouri's charter public schools have become established as an important part of the State's public education system. More and more families enroll their children in charter public schools each fall. More principals, teachers, and staff are working in charter public schools. More public officials are supporting charter public schools. This expansion is critically important to Missouri and is the result of countless hours of work by school employees, volunteer governing board members, sponsoring institutions, and education stakeholders.

With growth comes great responsibility and the charter public school network has risen to the challenge. When a new charter school opens, it is with a commitment to quality education for the students they will serve. Although success is never a guarantee, charter public schools accept the 'autonomy for accountability' bargain recognizing that if, over time, they are not able to meet the academic needs of their students they will close, opening the educational space for new options for Missouri's families. The charter public school sector recognizes that Missouri's charter public schools do not simply provide options; they must provide better options.

The Missouri Charter Public School Association (MCPSA) is committed to supporting all charter public schools toward reaching levels of excellence. The highest priority is ACADEMIC QUALITY; however, there is great value in responsible leadership and governance, organizational sustainability, and engagement within the school community. All charter public schools in Missouri are bound by the commitment to improve educational opportunities for Missouri’s children.

In order to best serve our Members and all students, the Missouri Charter Public School Association has crafted the Quality Standards for Missouri's Charter Public Schools. These standards are intended to provide guidance to schools. They are built on research and stakeholder input. Quality charter public schools are defined through five standards: substantive academic performance, quality leadership, responsible governance, organizational financing and sustainability, and engaged parents and community.

Drafted in 2012, MCPSA offers these Quality Standards as a resource to continue to strengthen the charter public school sector so that future growth, expansion, and development of charter schools may always occur with an eye on what true quality means. The Quality Standards are not intended as an instrument of evaluation but as a tool supporting the tremendous work existing charter public schools are doing and future charter public schools will assume.

The Missouri Charter Public School Association remains excited by the growth of charter public schools in the State. We appreciate the tremendous and important work each and every person associated with a charter public school does. We continue to celebrate the many successes and achievements of each school and their students as we all work together delivering on the incredible promise of the charter school model.

Sincerely,

Douglas P. Thaman
Executive Director
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- Standard: Monitors the school’s education program, operational procedures, and fiscal health in cooperation with the sponsor

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- Standard: Ensures financial resources are directly related to the school’s purpose: student achievement and learning

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- Standard: Seeks input from relevant, critical, impacted stakeholders
**Principle 1: Substantive Academic Performance**

*A charter school promotes student learning through a clear mission, vision, and high-expectations for all students, teachers, and administrators.*

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**Standard: Sets and meets clear, meaningful, and measurable academic goals and student learning objectives as stated in the charter through a performance contract with its sponsor**

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**A quality school:**

Articulates its curricular content and performance standards, including minimum student performance standards for advancement or graduation.

Uses multiple forms of assessment, including growth-measured assessments, to inform instructional decision-making.

Evaluates students’ progress towards meeting school performance goals and modifies goals, as needed, to improve student achievement.

Tracks and disseminates growth data for students over time using both norm referenced measures and state assessments.

Complies with the performance contract established with its sponsor.

Implements curriculum that clearly identifies essential and enduring knowledge.

Maintains an attendance rate that aligns with the school’s performance contract.

Uses a variety of instructional techniques to enhance content and vocabulary acquisition.

Ensures that the curriculum prepares students to extend their learning beyond the classroom and beyond their school career (life-long learning, career readiness, college readiness, active citizenship).

Implements assessments that collect data about students’ short-term acquisition and long-term mastery of essential knowledge.

Closes the achievement gap among sub-groups of students.

Maintains a high graduation rate (secondary schools) that aligns with the school’s performance contract.

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**Standard: Demonstrates high expectations for student achievement**

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Principle 1: Substantive Academic Performance

A charter school promotes student learning through a clear mission, vision, and high-expectations for all students, teachers, and administrators.

Standard: Provides a challenging, coherent curriculum for all students

Standard: Supports students in a safe, healthy, and nurturing environment that promotes achievement, character, responsibility, and inclusion

A quality school:

Structures a Curriculum Scope and Sequence aligned to Missouri’s Common Core Standards

Develops and implements clearly defined strategies to meet the needs of a diverse student population

Creates a school environment conducive to learning and growth

Maintains a safe school environment free of violence and the threat of violence

Implements processes to promote student health and wellness

Ensures that students feel supported and respected by teachers and staff

Implements and communicates a comprehensive student discipline policy that complies with the Missouri Safe School Act and the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
**Principle 2: Quality Leadership**

*Charter school leaders work to fulfill the school’s mission and enable students to achieve academic growth and success.*

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**The School Leader and Board:**

- Develop strategic plans to address critical issues including school performance, financial management, human resource management, facilities, and quality improvement.
- Articulate and monitor the goals.
- Establish transparent procedures and appropriate policies.
- Hold themselves accountable for specific outcomes outlined in the charter and detailed in the school's performance contract with the sponsor.
- Engage in ongoing relevant professional development.
- Utilize an effective data communication instrument providing consistent, timely data regarding the school’s progress toward meeting agreed upon performance expectations (academic, operational, and financial).

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**The School Leader:**

- Implements its academic program in alignment with the school’s charter and Missouri Common Core Standards.
- Collects, assimilates, and disseminates student achievement data to inform a continuous cycle of school improvement.
- Provides professional development opportunities for all staff members advancing the effectiveness of teaching and learning.
- Maintains open, consistent, clear communication among students, staff, parents, and administration.
- Maintains a school culture conducive to learning and continuous improvement.

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**Standard: Employs a clear strategic approach to meeting the goal of improving student academic achievement**

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**Standard: Implements the educational model, all associated programs, and procedural operations outlined in its charter**

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**Standard: Develops, employs, and sustains a school culture conducive to student learning and staff professional development**
**Principle 2: Quality Leadership**

*Charter school leaders work to fulfill the school’s mission and enable students to achieve academic growth and success.*

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<tr>
<th>Standard: Understands and complies with the laws, policies, and state and federal requirements that govern charter schools</th>
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<tr>
<th>The School Leader:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Develops policies and training practices that clarify the responsibilities and relationships among key leaders, governing board members, staff, students, and parents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participates regularly in professional development opportunities, which provide insight into the trends, issues, and potential changes in the environment in which charter schools operate</td>
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<td>Makes decisions that reflect high standards and ethics</td>
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<td>Allocates resources based primarily on their impact on student achievement, learning, and well-being</td>
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<tr>
<td>Implements business policies and procedures that promote school sustainability, operational integrity, and a focus on student achievement and learning results</td>
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<tr>
<td>Establishes programs and policies that enable all students to be served effectively</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ensures timely submission of required data and reporting</td>
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**Principle 3: Responsible Governance**

*Charter school governing boards develop and implement policies to fulfill the school’s mission and enable students to achieve academic growth and success.*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Standard: Defines the mission and purpose of the charter school that serves as a guide to all school operations</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The School Leader and Board:</strong> Establish a clear mission and vision to communicate the school’s purpose and guide short and long-term decision-making</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The Governing Board:</strong> Selects a highly qualified school leader and defines the role the leader plays in the overall operation of the charter school Supports the administrator’s decision making Establishes clear expectations of and assesses the performance of the school leader using a consistent evaluation instrument reflecting the mission and vision of the school, the performance goals set forth in the performance contract, and the day-to-day management of the school</td>
</tr>
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<td>Standard: Identifies, supports, and evaluates the school leader</td>
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<td>Standard: Ensures that policies are implemented in a fair and consistent manner</td>
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<tr>
<td>Develops, adopts, and follows a comprehensive set of bylaws which at a minimum include conflicts of interest policies, meeting protocols and procedures, and formal delineations of roles and authorities within the charter school Organizes and makes available to the public the school policies utilizing multiple forms of communication</td>
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**Principle 3: Responsible Governance**

*Charter school governing boards develop and implement policies to fulfill the school’s mission and enable students to achieve academic growth and success.*

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**The Governing Board:**

*Includes individuals who are experienced in managing organizations and well versed in charter law*

*Provides new board members a formal orientation on the purpose and educational vision of the school, the school’s performance objectives, and their roles and legal responsibilities*

*Seeks information and professional development opportunities related to charter operations, laws, and effective non-profit board work*

*Implements student recruitment strategies that focus on the targeted population stated in its charter and that are inclusive of a diverse range of learners*

*Utilizes a public lottery process for open enrollment*

*Ensures no practices are implemented which may limit the opportunity for students with special needs to enroll*

*Directs the school leader to provide regular reports of student performance, academic progress, and the school’s fiscal health to the sponsor and to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education*

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**Standard: Recruits and maintains a governing board with diverse backgrounds and skill sets**

**Standard: Enacts policies that respect diversity and implements practices that are consistent with the school’s charter, mission, vision, and federal and state regulations**

**Standard: Monitors the school’s education program, operational procedures, and fiscal health in cooperation with the sponsor**
**Principle 4: Organizational Financing and Sustainability**

A charter school fulfills its fiduciary responsibility for public funds, preserves a minimum three percent budget surplus, maintains accessible fiscal records, and conducts an annual financial audit.

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<th>Standard: Creates and monitors immediate and long-range financial plans to effectively implement the school’s educational program and ensure financial stability as required by state and federal agencies</th>
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<tr>
<td>Prepare comprehensive budget assumptions during the budget process</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monitor the working budget against actuals, including a review of Average Daily Attendance assumptions, and adjust accordingly</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ensure that the budget considers any long-term debt schedules and multi-year contracts, and track and monitor capital projects on a regular basis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Review annually the status of all significant operating costs, including employee salaries and benefits, changes in health benefit costs, and any other significant costs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ensure that the budget process includes long-term planning at a minimum of three years</td>
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<tr>
<th>Standard: Conducts an annual independent audit which is made public</th>
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<tr>
<th>Ensure the school organization is audited by a certified public accountant or an accountant licensed by the State of Missouri Board of Accountancy and that the audit includes:</th>
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<tr>
<td>• The validity of the school’s Average Daily Attendance and reports these findings in the audit report</td>
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<tr>
<td>• A school-specific audit report that includes financial statements and audit findings/conclusions specific to the charter school</td>
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<tr>
<td>• A management letter commenting on areas of possible improvements (if any) in structures, procedures, and management practices of the school, as well as any factors that prevent them from issuing an unqualified opinion</td>
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<tr>
<th>Distribute a copy of the audit to the sponsor and Department of Elementary and Secondary Education by the legally mandated deadline</th>
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<th>Disseminate the audit results publicly</th>
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Principle 4: Organizational Financing and Sustainability

A charter school fulfills its fiduciary responsibility for public funds, preserves a minimum three percent budget surplus, maintains accessible fiscal records, and conducts an annual financial audit.

The School Leader and Board:

Adhere to an adopted and board approved fiscal policy and procedures manual

Ensure fiscal policies include procedures for the authorization of purchases and release of funds

Adopt a budget by June 30 for the upcoming fiscal year

Ensure that the budgeting process maintains a direct focus on teaching and learning needs with a fiscal balance to cover expenses with revenue

Ensure that the school’s physical space, materials, and supplies are conducive to accomplishing the charter’s school-wide learning goals as specified in the charter

Establish policies to ensure that contracts reflect fair market value

Determine compensation levels for employees that are appropriate for the positions and responsibilities and that are consistent with industry norms

Standard: Establishes clear fiscal policies that use public funds appropriately

Standard: Ensures financial resources are directly related to the school’s purpose: student achievement and learning
**Principle 5: Engaged Parents and Community**

A charter school recognizes that families and communities are assets and develops engagement opportunities for them to impact and inform educational decisions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard: Engages parents and community stakeholders in the vision and mission of the school</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The School Leader and Board:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Develop and implement an effective communications plan consistently engaging the community in becoming educated regarding quality education and developing support for their charter school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ensure the active engagement of administrators, board members, parents, students, and staff in communication and outreach planning and implementation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communicate and engage all stakeholders in the mission and vision of the school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Involve students, parents, and community members as part of the school’s support system</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintain frequent, consistent, and clear communication with students, parents, and community members</td>
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<tr>
<td>Establish regular opportunities and methods of communication among the stakeholders, administration, and the board</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conduct its meetings regularly and in an open, organized, and effective manner</td>
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<tr>
<td>Operate within the requirements of the Missouri Sunshine Law ensuring board meeting agendas and meeting minutes are posted in a timely manner for broad public review and all state non-profit requirements are met</td>
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**Standard: Seeks input from relevant, critical, impacted stakeholders**
About MCPSA

Who We Are:
The Missouri Charter Public School Association (MCPSA) is the membership and professional organization serving charter public schools in the state of Missouri.

Mission Statement:
Our mission is improving student achievement by increasing access to high quality charter public education options throughout Missouri.

Values:
Our values reflect what we believe in. We articulate our values to remind us that these are the behaviors and beliefs that we strive to uphold.

- **Excellence** – We expect high quality outcomes from ourselves and the charter school community because the work we do impacts the lives of our children.
- **Accountability** – Holding charter schools accountable for the quality of the education they provide to Missouri’s students is paramount to the success of Missouri’s charter movement and to the future of our state. We must hold our schools and ourselves to a high quality standard in everything we do.
- **Integrity** – To maintain public trust and credibility in our efforts, we operate with respect, consideration, and honesty in our relationships with both people who share our vision and those who do not.
- **Diversity** – To reflect the diversity we expect from the charter community and we see in our best classrooms, our organization is committed to including talented individuals from a wide range of backgrounds and perspectives.
- **Innovation** – We promote and support promising new ideas and approaches, both within our organization and the public school sector.

Vision:
By 2020, MCPSA is recognized and respected as the primary resource and representative voice of the state’s charter school sector. Our sector includes students and families flourishing in over 100 high quality charter schools throughout Missouri. MCPSA is a sustainable, dynamic, entrepreneurial organization playing a vital role in both the charter and traditional public school systems. Citizens and policymakers openly acknowledge the value of a thriving charter school environment. Our efforts are helping to re-shape public education, providing Missouri’s students and families with more high quality public education options than ever before.

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**Suzanne Love**, Board Member

**Douglas Thaman**, Executive Director

**Dawn Finley**, Director of Member Services and New School Development

**Melissa Martin**, MCPSA Intern