

NEO AAP Part A: Authorizer Capacity and Infrastructure

The purpose of Part A is to provide authorizers an opportunity to demonstrate their capacity and commitment to fulfill the responsibilities of a charter school authorizer in Minnesota. This portion of the application directly aligns with Part A performance measures in MAPES.

Provide a narrative response for each Part A measure and include attachments as necessary to address the authorizer's capacity and infrastructure.

Measure A.1 - Authorizing Mission: The authorizer has a clear and compelling mission for charter school authorizing.

Essential Elements:

Identify the authorizer's clear and compelling mission and indicate how it fully aligns with Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 124E.

NEO Response: NEO has a clear and compelling mission for charter school authorizing. NEO's mission is to oversee charter schools through consistent, ongoing, and robust evaluation to achieve significant, measurable student growth.

The goal as stated in the mission is to achieve significant, measurable student growth and aligns to the primary purpose of chartering as stated in MN charter school law- to improve all pupil learning and all student achievement.

Describe how the authorizer will carry out its mission by chartering schools.

NEO Response: The mission describes three tenets of evaluation that characterize NEO's approach to its authorizing role and responsibilities, and that are aligned to national principles and standards: 1) NEO approaches oversight and high-stakes decisions with consistency and transparency; 2) NEO monitors school performance on an ongoing basis; and 3) NEO brings robust resources and support to its schools through a competent and diverse Board and staff.

NEO provides robust feedback to the portfolio schools through charter school board observations, site visits, and document review, as well as ongoing communication. NEO allocates resources to ensure that the feedback and evaluation that the schools receive is the highest quality by contracting only with proven experts in the areas of oversight.

The NEO vision to be a leading Minnesota authorizer of innovative, diverse, and effective charter schools. In addition to the focus on effective (high quality) schools, NEO also focuses on innovation and diversity.

Each of the schools authorized by NEO provides innovation that makes them unique in their communities. Examples include Language Literacy in Hmong, Spanish and English at Achieve

Language Academy; a high school Montessori and International Baccalaureate Program at Great River School; a middle-high-post-secondary transition school offering an individualized learning program particularly effective for students on the autism spectrum at Lionsgate Academy; a teacher-led school at Avalon Charter School, and multi-age, service learning with environmental ties at Nerstrand Elementary Charter School.

In addition to promoting innovation and effective schools, NEO promotes diversity. NEO requires new schools to regularly report evidence of diverse recruitment. NEO employs and authorizes schools with leaders from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

In addition, NEO monitors and reports the demographics of the schools in the Authorizer Annual Report and also monitors and reports progress toward goals for the performance of the NCLB Focus student groups that the schools that are authorized by NEO serve including English Learner (EL), Special Education (SPED), and Free/Reduced Price Lunch (FRP).

NEO's vision is consistent with the intent of charter law to monitor and hold charter schools accountable and to improve all pupil learning and all student achievement. NEO's Authorizer Annual Report, Strategic Plan, as well as Performance Framework specify goals that reflect the mission of measurable growth and the vision of effective schools.

Measure A.2 - Authorizer Organizational Goals: The authorizer has clear organizational goals and timeframes for achievement that are aligned with its authorizing mission and Minnesota charter school statute.

Essential Elements:

Identify the authorizer's clear organizational goals, criteria and timeframes for achievement.

NEO Response: Between 2020 and 2025, NEO will make enrollment at high-quality charter schools available to an increasing number of students by supporting the expansion of high-quality schools and effective practices, supporting the continuous improvement of existing schools, and starting high-quality schools.

NEO monitors and evaluates progress toward two main organizational goals. The first goal focuses on improvement in the number of students who meet and exceed grade-level standards in reading, math and science and improvement in the number of students graduating.

The second goal focuses on improvement in the growth students make in reading and math.

Goal 1. Achievement. At least 4,000 students collectively served by schools authorized by NEO will score meets or exceeds on grade level math, reading and science state assessments, and graduate by 2025.

In FY19 approximately 2,882 students scored meets or exceeds, and graduated, compared to approximately 1,908 in FY14, the year that NEO began utilizing the measure. Due to the pandemic, schools were not able to assess students and therefore, no results are available for 2020.

Goal 2. Growth. Collectively, the percent of all students who exceed projected growth scores will exceed 55% by 2025.

During the 2015-2019 period, schools collectively achieved 50% of students who exceeded projected growth scores in reading (an increase of 11 percentage points from 2014) and 41% in math (an increase of 4 percentage points from 2014).

NEO aims to authorize up to 35 charter schools by 2025.

In addition, NEO will continue to measure and monitor the progress of schools that are authorized by NEO by the percent of schools meeting academic indicators for proficiency of all students and of focus groups of students, academic indicators for growth, and indicators for school climate, operations, and finance, utilizing the Performance Framework for each authorized school.

Indicate how the organizational goals align with the authorizing mission and Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 124E.

NEO Response: NEO's vision and organizational goals are consistent with the authorizing mission and intent of charter law to monitor and hold charter schools accountable and to improve all pupil learning and all student achievement. NEO's Authorizer Annual Report, NEO's Strategic Plan, as well as each authorized school's Performance Framework, specify goals and progress monitoring that align with NEO's mission of significant, measurable student growth and the primary purpose of chartering as stated in MN charter school law- to improve all pupil learning and all student achievement.

Advanced Elements:

Explain how the authorizer will actively measure progress on its organizational goals.

NEO Response: NEO will continue to utilize the de-identified student data provided to authorizers by MDE to monitor progress toward organizational goals.

NEO will continue to actively measure progress on its organizational goals by collecting and analyzing the number of students reaching proficiency and growth goals, as well as the progress of schools reaching the Performance Framework goals for climate, operations, and finance.

Explain how the authorizer will evaluate its work regularly against its authorizing mission and organizational goals and implement plans for improvement.

NEO Response: NEO will continue to report the progress toward organizational goals in the Authorizer Annual Report and analyze the progress to identify strategies that are effective and those that need improvement in order to make adjustments to improve performance.

[See Attachment I: NEO 2020-2025 Budget and Business Plan.](#)

Measure A.3 - Authorizer Structure of Operations: The authorizer operates with a clear structure of duties and responsibilities sufficient to effectively oversee its portfolio of charter schools.

Essential Elements:

Describe the capacity of the organization to serve as an authorizer, including the positions (e.g. employees, contractors, volunteers; both paid and unpaid positions) allocated to authorizing duties, the qualifications for those positions, the job descriptions of those positions, the full-time equivalencies of those positions, and the financial resources available to fund the positions.

NEO Response: The Executive Director possesses day-to-day management responsibilities and the NEO Board of Directors makes final new school, readiness to open, expansion, and contract renewal, termination, and amendment/revision decisions based on recommendations from the Executive Director. The Executive Director reports to the NEO Board of Directors and manages the implementation of the strategies and progress monitoring, as well as the board-approved budget.

The Executive Director oversees the NEO Advisors, leveraging their experience and expertise in academics, operations, governance, and finance to ensure that NEO effectively and efficiently starts, oversees, monitors, and evaluates schools authorized by NEO as well as provides technical assistance and facilitates sharing of best practices.

The responsibilities of NEO Advisors include:

- desktop review and evaluation of new, transfer, contract renewal, and expansion applications,
- drafting reports and evaluations,
- monitoring progress of pre-operational schools toward readiness to open,
- monitoring compliance with the law and contractual requirements,
- conducting annual site visits,
- conducting fact finding and investigations,
- facilitating sharing of effective school practices,
- providing technical assistance with compliance,
- respecting school autonomy and mutual authorizer-school responsibility, and
- communicating effectively and efficiently with schools.

Advisors are independent contractors that NEO engages as necessary to provide a breadth of skills and expertise to meet NEO's mission and vision and organizational goals.

NEO currently contracts with 10 Advisors and employs 3 full-time staff who serve 9 pre-operational and 20 operational charters.

Ten (10) independent contractors work an average of time of 0.20 FTE and NEO staff work a total of 3 FTE.

Due to this innovative and resourceful human resource strategy, NEO has been able to maintain about a 1 FTE Expert to 6 School ratio.

29 schools divided by (10 independent contractors x 0.20 FTE) + 3 = 1FTE per 5.8 schools

To achieve the organizational goals, NEO will continue to maintain 1FTE per no more than 7 schools authorized.

Should an authorized school transfer or close, NEO has the flexibility to adjust work with independent contractors to maintain NEO's Fund Balance Policy end of year target of 30%, which NEO maintains in the event of unforeseen expenditures or loss of revenue. NEO will also continue to contract for legal and financial services.

Describe a clear structure of duties and responsibilities that will be sufficient to effectively oversee and meet the needs of the portfolio of charter schools, including how the structure will be updated if and when necessary.

NEO Response:

NEO BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The NEO Board of Directors hires, oversees and evaluates the Executive Director. The Executive Director possesses day-to-day management responsibilities and the NEO Board of Directors makes final new school, readiness to open, expansion, and contract renewal, termination, and amendment/revision decisions based on recommendations from the Executive Director. The Executive Director reports to the NEO Board of Directors and manages the implementation of the strategies and progress monitoring, as well as the board-approved budget.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The NEO Executive Director is an experienced and talented management professional with an established record of success to lead the organization. The Executive Director has a deep appreciation of nonprofit entrepreneurship, public school education and a keen sense of community service. The Executive Director demonstrates the importance of quality education as a foundation of civic society and will clearly articulate and implement a vision for quality education. The Executive Director hires, oversees, and evaluates additional staff and manages the engagement of the financial and legal contracted services.

STAFF

NEO employs additional staff based on the needs. Currently NEO employs two (2) Systems Analysts in addition to the Executive Director in order to ensure that NEO operates systems most effectively and efficiently leveraging technology to do so.

NEO ADVISORS

As a volunteer body, the NEO Board of Directors is assisted by NEO Advisors (independent contractors) and by staff. The NEO Advisors evaluate applications, monitor the school performance, provide technical assistance, facilitate sharing of effective school practices, and conduct fact finding in response to complaints. NEO Advisors bring a depth of experience from the charter school world and elsewhere. NEO Advisors are paid stipends and/or hourly amounts for specific tasks and/or projects that they carry out for NEO, such as evaluating applications, conducting site visits, and monitoring school compliance.

NEO will continue to actively measure progress on its organizational goals by collecting and analyzing the number of students reaching proficiency and growth goals, as well as the progress of schools reaching the Performance Framework goals for climate, operations, and finance.

NEO will continue to report the progress toward organizational goals in the Authorizer Annual Report and analyze the progress to identify strategies that are effective and those that need improvement in order to make adjustments to improve performance.

Based on the results, NEO will continue to make staffing adjustments as well as adjustments in contracting with Advisors to update the structure of duties and responsibilities if and when necessary.

[See Attachment II: NEO Staff and Advisor Roles and Responsibilities.](#)

Provide 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 years.

[See Attachment III: NEO Organizational Chart.](#)

Describe how the authorizer will appropriately manage, retain, and safeguard school and student information and records relating to authorizing.

NEO Response: NEO will continue to utilize Epicenter online software to collect and safeguard records. Epicenter alerts notify schools in advance of documents that the schools are required to submit to NEO and reminds schools of deadlines via email. NEO and NEO's authorized schools use Epicenter as a means to keep track of submission deadlines and history.

In addition, NEO entered into a Data Sharing Agreement with MDE and has a NEO Data Sharing Agreement in place requiring any NEO staff or independent contractor with which NEO works to enter into a Data Sharing Agreement with NEO in order to safeguard protected data.

[See Attachment IV: NEO Data Sharing Agreement.](#)

Measure A.4 - Authorizing Staff Expertise: The authorizer has appropriate experience, expertise and skills to sufficiently oversee its portfolio of charter schools.

Definitions:

“Expertise” is defined as having knowledge, education, training, etc. in the areas of charter school academics, finance, operations and law.

“Experience” is defined as length of time working in the areas of charter school academics, finance, operations and law.

“Skills” is defined as effective application of experience and expertise in the areas of charter school academics, finance, operations and law.

“Credentials” is defined as degrees, certificates or other documentation awarded by a reputable external organization demonstrating a person’s expertise, experience, and/or skills.

Essential Element:

Provide the background and experience of authorizing staff (such as through resumes and/or vitae), including individuals both paid (e.g., staff) and unpaid (e.g., board members) as well as contractors hired by the authorizer, necessary to demonstrate the authorizer has appropriate experience, expertise and skills to sufficiently oversee its portfolio of charter schools.

See Attachment V: NEO Staff and Advisor Resumes and/or Vitae

Advanced Elements:

Identify how the authorizer’s staff experience, expertise and skills align with nationally recognized quality authorizing standards.

NEO Response: NEO has appropriate experience, expertise and skills in charter school academics, finance, operations and law. Therefore, authorizing staff and advisors (experts/independent contractors) are able to sufficiently oversee the portfolio of charter schools.

NACSA evaluated NEO in fall 2019 and found that NEO’s authorizing staff experience, expertise and skills align with nationally recognized quality authorizing standards.

Specifically NACSA found that NEO:

“implements a unique and resourceful staffing strategy: a team of part-time contracted advisors perform NEO’s key authorizing duties, including application reviews, monitoring, and renewal reviews. Using advisors is a cost-effective way to engage substantial professional expertise that would not be affordable or accessible to the organization on a full-time basis.” NACSA Evaluation of NEO (2019)

All of the following areas of expertise recognized by NACSA as important for quality authorizing are included in the resumes/bios of the NEO staff and advisors (independent contractors).

“Enlists expertise and competent leadership for all areas essential to charter school oversight including, but not limited to, education leadership; curriculum, instruction, and assessment; special education, English learners, and other diverse learning needs; performance management and accountability; law; finance; facilities; and nonprofit governance and management through staff, contractual relationships, and/or intra- or inter-agency collaborations.

Employs competent personnel at a staffing level appropriate and sufficient to carry out all authorizing responsibilities in accordance with national standards, and commensurate with the scale of the charter school portfolio.

Demonstrates an on-going commitment to developing and retaining staff members to achieve and maintain high standards of professional authorizing practice, enable continual agency improvement.” NACSA-Principles-and-Standards-2018-Edition page 11

Authorizing staff and advisors have credentials demonstrating experience, expertise and skills in charter school academics, finance, operations and law.

In addition, NEO currently contracts for financial services with an experienced vendor, The Anton Group (TAG), and with legal counsel (Ratwik, Roszak & Maloney, P.A.)

The NEO Board also has great breadth and depth of relevant experience.

Provide the credentials of authorizing staff demonstrating experience, expertise and skills in charter school academics, finance, operations and law.

See Attachment VI: Table of NEO Staff and Advisor Credentials

Measure A.5 - Authorizer Knowledge and Skill Development of Authorizing Leadership and 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, mission and goals for overseeing its portfolio of charter schools.

Essential Elements:

Describe the authorizer’s intentional plan to offer professional development to build the knowledge and skill base of authorizing leadership and staff.

NEO Response: NEO Executive Director and/or Advisor(s) will participate annually in the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) Leadership Conferences.

NEO Executive Director, Staff, and/or Advisor(s) will participate annually in MDE charter-related workshops and trainings, including all required trainings.

NEO Executive Director and/or Staff will continue to actively participate regularly with the Minnesota Association of Charter School Authorizers (MACSA).

The Executive Director, Staff and/or Advisor(s) will continue to lead PD sessions at least quarterly for the purpose of cross training in oversight and evaluation of academic, governance and financial school performance, interventions, and response to complaints.

Describe the frequency and nature of potential professional development as well as personnel expected to attend.

See above.

Describe how professional development will align with the authorizer’s operations, mission and organizational goals for overseeing its portfolio of charter schools.

NEO Response: NEO allocates a line item in its anticipated five-year budget to MAPES A.5 (Authorizer Capacity and Skill Development of Leadership and Authorizing Staff) in order to monitor and ensure that resources are invested in improving the expertise of the NEO staff and Advisors, as well as NEO Board members. The budget line item supports cross training of NEO board members, staff and Advisors in order to grow the team expertise in the areas of academic, operations, governance, and financial oversight and evaluation. In addition the line item supports attendance at conferences such as the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) to learn nationally recognized quality authorizing standards and processes.

Advanced Element:

Describe how professional development will be measured, evaluated and customized to meet the needs of authorizing leadership and staff.

NEO Response: NEO staff and Advisors will continue to complete surveys to identify the tasks of interest and expertise as well as tasks of interest and need for professional development, so that the work can be allocated most effectively and efficiently.

Upon completion of professional development activities, NEO staff and Advisors will complete a survey to measure the effectiveness and quality of the professional development.

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, and the needs and responsibilities of authorizing the portfolio of charter schools.

Essential Elements:

Include the authorizer's anticipated five-year budget (for example, FY 2021-FY 2025) outlining the following:

- **Anticipated revenue sources such as fees collected annually from schools and additional funds from outside sources.**
- **Anticipated expenditures such as staff, travel, lease, consultants, office costs (e.g. equipment, supplies), etc.**
- **Anticipated staff expenditures and personnel budget increases in relation to portfolio growth. Authorizers that are school districts may satisfy this specific requirement by submitting a written assurance (Form 4) promising to comply with this specific requirement, per Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.05, subdivision 4(b).**

See Attachment I: NEO 2020-2025 Budget and Business Plan.

Provide the target number and size of schools for the portfolio of charter schools for a five-year period. (Important note: This establishes the maximum portfolio size for the next five years.)

35 authorized schools

Authorizer demonstrates resource allocations are sufficient to fulfill authorizing responsibilities and are commensurate with the needs and scale of the anticipated portfolio of charter schools (e.g., income, expenditures, number and size of the charter schools in the portfolio).

See Attachment I: NEO 2020-2025 Budget and Business Plan (including line items aligned to MAPES indicators).

Advanced Elements:

Describe how the budget aligns with nationally recognized quality authorizing standards for financial resource commitments.

NEO Response: NEO allocates resources that are adequate to fulfill authorizing responsibilities for the needs and scale of its portfolio. NEO staff changes occur in relation to portfolio growth. Resource allocations are devoted to align with state and national authorizing practices and standards, and line items in the budget are specifically aligned to the Minnesota Authorizer Performance Evaluation System (MAPES) and monitored, which enables NEO to monitor and evaluate financial stability and viability based on short-term performance and long-term sustainability.

NEO must ensure conditions are right for innovation in reaching the learning needs of all students, particularly those who have not been served well in more traditional education programs. Therefore, NEO monitors its expenditures to ensure that the resources are allocated to attract and retain consultants and staff with expertise, skill sets, and experience that provide the highest quality feedback on which the schools can act, the most cost-effective and efficient systems for monitoring compliance, and the most valid and reliable measurement systems.

NEO currently contracts with 10 Advisors and employs 3 full-time staff who serve 9 pre-operational and 20 operational charters. 10 independent contractors work an average of time of 0.20 FTE and NEO staff work a total of 3 FTE.

Due to this innovative and resourceful human resource strategy, NEO has been able to maintain about a 1 FTE Expert to 6 School ratio.

29 schools divided by (10 independent contractors x 0.20 FTE) + 3 = 1FTE per 5.8 schools

To achieve the organizational goals, NEO will maintain 1FTE per no more than 7 schools authorized.

Should an authorized school transfer or close, NEO has the flexibility to adjust work with independent contractors to maintain NEO's Fund Balance Policy end of year target of 30%, which NEO maintains in the event of unforeseen expenditures or loss of revenue.

NEO will also continue to budget for contracting for legal and financial services.

It is important to note that the NEO reserves the right to adjust the budget submitted to MDE with the Approved Authorizer Plan (AAP) based on the size and number of schools authorized, which may change due to school closures and/or additions and school expansions.

Contracting with independent contractors as NEO Advisors is an asset because it allows the flexibility of working with independent contractors with specialized expertise and experience in relation to the size and needs of the portfolio.

Describe how the budget shows resource allocations dedicated to achieving nationally recognized quality authorizing standards for financial resource commitments, including how the budget will be revised as necessary to ensure such resource allocations.

NEO Response: NACSA evaluated NEO in fall 2019 and found that NEO’s authorizing staff experience, expertise and skills align with nationally recognized quality authorizing standards.

Specifically NACSA found that NEO:

“implements a unique and resourceful staffing strategy: a team of part-time contracted advisors perform NEO’s key authorizing duties, including application reviews, monitoring, and renewal reviews. Using advisors is a cost-effective way to engage substantial professional expertise that would not be affordable or accessible to the organization on a full-time basis.” NACSA Evaluation of NEO (2019)

All of the following areas of expertise recognized by NACSA as important for quality authorizing are included in the resumes/bios of the NEO staff and advisors (independent contractors).

“Enlists expertise and competent leadership for all areas essential to charter school oversight including, but not limited to, education leadership; curriculum, instruction, and assessment; special education, English learners, and other diverse learning needs; performance management and accountability; law; finance; facilities; and nonprofit governance and management through staff, contractual relationships, and/or intra- or inter-agency collaborations.

Employs competent personnel at a staffing level appropriate and sufficient to carry out all authorizing responsibilities in accordance with national standards, and commensurate with the scale of the charter school portfolio.

Demonstrates an on-going commitment to developing and retaining staff members to achieve and maintain high standards of professional authorizing practice, enable continual agency improvement.” NACSA-Principles-and-Standards-2018-Edition page 11

NEO will continue to allocate resources that are adequate to fulfill authorizing responsibilities for the needs and scale of its portfolio. NEO staff and contracted work changes in relation to portfolio growth.

NEO will continue to ensure that resource allocations align with state and national authorizing practices and standards by coding line items in the budget to the Minnesota Authorizer Performance Evaluation System (MAPES) indicators which are aligned to the state and national

standards. This enables NEO to monitor and evaluate resource allocation by state and national standards.

NEO must ensure conditions are right for innovation in reaching the learning needs of all students, particularly those who have not been served well in more traditional education programs.

Therefore, the NEO Board of Directors and NEO Executive Director monitor expenditures regularly by MAPES Indicator to ensure that the resources are allocated to meet authorizing duties, attract and retain consultants and staff with expertise, skill sets, and experience that provide the highest quality feedback on which the schools can act, implement the most cost-effective and efficient systems for monitoring compliance, and utilize the most valid and reliable measurement systems.

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:

Include the authorizer's clear policy to address conflicts of interest in all decision-making processes concerning the portfolio of charter schools.

See Attachment VII: NEO's Conflict of Interest and School Autonomy Policy.

Describe the process and procedures for intentionally implementing and executing the authorizer's conflict of interest policy to avoid conflicts of interest that might affect the authorizer's capacity to make objective, merit-based application and renewal decisions and avoid decisions and interventions that hold the charter school accountable for its performance.

NEO Response: NEO's policy related to conflicts of interest reads as follows: Persons with any actual or perceived conflict of interest shall disclose the same. Persons with a conflict of interest are excluded from deliberation and voting to ensure that they have no influence over the corporation regarding the compensation for, or business deals of, themselves or of related persons. NEO Advisors will not be allowed to take part in decisions relating to authorizing any school with which they are currently affiliated. NEO shall at all times endeavor to undertake all its actions exclusively in furtherance of its charitable and educational purposes without any of its actions resulting in any impermissible benefit. At all times, NEO shall comply with conflict of interest laws laid out in applicable law.

Describe how application review and decision-making processes are free of conflicts of interest, and require full disclosure of any potential or perceived conflicts of interest between reviewers, decision- makers and applicants.

NEO Response: NEO requires each Board member, employee, and independent contractor to sign a statement of assurance that he or she has read NEO's Conflict of Interest and School Autonomy Policy.

In addition, at the beginning of each NEO board meeting, board members review the agenda and indicate if there are any agenda items with which they may have a conflict of interest in order to recuse themselves from discussion and/or vote if a real or perceived conflict exists.

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:

Include the authorizer's clear policy to ensure, preserve and support the essential autonomies of the portfolio of charter schools.

See Attachment VII: NEO's Conflict of Interest and School Autonomy Policy.

Describe how the authorizer's policy on school autonomy establishes and recognizes the schools' authority over academics, financials and operations and respects the schools' authority over day-to-day operations.

NEO Response: NEO's policy related to preserving and supporting the essential school autonomies reads as follows:

"As an authorizer, NEO does not run charter schools; it functions to carry out monitoring and oversight, to assure compliance with the law, and support the establishment and success of innovative and successful public charter schools.

Therefore, NEO shall not enter into the following types of contracts with schools it authorizes: financial management, administration, accounting or auditing services, or lease of space.

NEO's responsibilities as an authorizer require that it provide comprehensive oversight of its chartered schools. NEO is a legally authorized agency to help ensure public accountability for the schools that NEO authorizes. NEO will operate in a monitoring relationship providing feedback on compliance, sharing observations, asking questions, facilitating sharing of effective practices and evaluating school performance based on the NEO-School contract and law to help ensure the success of the schools that NEO authorizes."

Describe the processes and procedures for implementing and executing the authorizer's policy to ensure school autonomy.

NEO Response:

NEO has a clear policy to ensure school autonomy. NEO requires each Board member, employee, and independent contractor to sign a statement of assurance that he or she has read NEO's Conflict of Interest and School Autonomy Policy. NEO staff and all independent contractors sign the school autonomy policy along with the conflict of interest policy so that they are aware of and follow it.

NEO's policy on school autonomy establishes and recognizes the schools' authority over academics, financials and operations and respects the school's authority over the schools' day-to-day operations.

NEO holds charter schools accountable for performance outcomes and compliance with statute rather than on processes and inputs. For example, NEO monitors and evaluates performance using a Performance Framework. When observing the school programming, approaches, and strategies, NEO visitors share observations and questions with the school leadership, but all staff and contractors that work with NEO are trained not to provide directives on processes and inputs.

Describe how the authorizer will hold charter schools accountable for performance outcomes and compliance with statute rather than on processes and inputs.

NEO Response: The NEO-School Performance Framework is utilized as the main data source for decision making and holds schools responsible for outcomes rather than processes.

[See Attachment VIII: NEO-School Oversight Plan.](#)

Advanced Element:

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

NEO response: [NEO's policy aligns with nationally recognized quality authorizing standards regarding autonomy.](#)

["A quality authorizer conducts contract oversight that competently evaluates performance and monitors compliance; ensures schools' legally entitled autonomy; protects student rights; informs intervention, revocation, and renewal decisions; and provides annual public reports on school performance."](#)
[NACSA-Principles-and-Standards-2018-Edition page 17](#)

Central to each contract is the Performance Framework. The Performance Framework clarifies the performance indicators for each school as well as the results that must be achieved for contract renewals. Schools falling below 50% of possible points in any section- academic, climate, compliance, finance; receive technical support as an intervention to improve outcomes.

NEO preserves and supports autonomies of the schools by negotiating school performance evaluation indicators and by providing the opportunity to schools to revise performance evaluation indicators, Each school has evaluation indicators that are unique to their school, in addition to indicators that are consistent across the portfolio of schools in their Performance Framework.

Therefore, NEO conducts contract oversight that ensures schools' legally entitled autonomy in regards to contract oversight.

Important for conducting contract oversight that protects student rights is having a data sharing agreement with authorized schools so that NEO can access and analyze the unique school performance data to verify that it is accurate. NEO utilizes a Data Sharing Agreement when verifying the accuracy of the school reported results for unique school performance standards for each school.

A challenge when providing schools the opportunity to include unique performance indicators for oversight and evaluation in the Performance Framework is clarifying how the contract oversight informs intervention, revocation, and renewal decisions.

To accomplish the nationally recognized standard of conducting oversight that informs intervention, revocation, and renewal decisions; NEO has developed dashboards for the schools to use to identify areas of strength and areas for intervention. Each school's Performance Framework is provided in a Google Sheet format with tabs for various dashboards related to intervention, revocation, and renewal decisions.

The Performance Framework Google Sheet is shared with all of the school's board members, leadership team, NEO board members, NEO Advisors and staff, and any other in "view only" mode and is available at all times for anyone to access the school's current status in regards to renewal and intervention.

In this way, NEO provides publicly accessible reports at all times on school performance.

Only NEO staff retains the permission to enter and edit data, and only the board chair and school leader have the permission to comment. All others have "view only" access.

Finally, in order to provide the flexibility to the schools to include unique performance indicators for oversight and evaluation in the Performance Framework, it is critical to have an Implementation Guide that specifies how to calculate the results for the Performance Framework indicators and which data to use.

This is critical so that the results are reported in a consistent and valid and reliable way from year to year even if school leadership changes.

NEO also monitors compliance in a way to preserve and support the essential autonomies of the schools by utilizing Epicenter, data collection and storage technology, to collect only documents necessary for NEO to review for the purpose of verifying compliance.

NEO has reduced burdensome or duplicative reporting by collecting only documents which are necessary for NEO to conduct oversight of operations and compliance.

Epicenter emails reminders about the upcoming submissions and generates reports on the extent to which submissions are on-time and accurate. If a submission does not meet compliance criteria, NEO staff return the submission to the school with the specific directions for meeting the criteria, so that the school can resubmit a compliant document.

This automation supports school autonomy by collecting only documents required for verifying compliance with laws and regulations, streamlining the reporting, and supporting the school to self-monitor and manage their required document submissions.

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.

NEO has made a very focused, intentional effort to improve the two areas where NEO scored “Approaching Satisfactory” in 2015, namely, Performance Standards (B.4) and Charter School Renewal or Termination Decisions (B.9).

With engagement of the leadership of authorized schools, NEO created a Performance Framework that is meaningful and useful to the schools and clarifies progress toward contract goals and renewal status.

Improvement from “Approaching Satisfactory” ratings for B.4 and B.9 in 2015 to “Commendable” ratings for B.4 and B.9 in 2020 is evidence that NEO improved oversight of charter schools and therefore, regularly evaluates its internal ability to oversee the portfolio of charter schools.

Essential Elements:

Describe the authorizer’s plan to regularly evaluate its internal ability to oversee the portfolio of charter schools.

NEO Response: NEO will continue to engage in self-evaluation utilizing national and state authorizing and governance standards to gain feedback that NEO will use in continuous improvement (as NEO did through engaging NACSA and Charities Review Council).

At NEO Board meetings, the NEO Board and Executive Director will continue to regularly monitor, analyze, and act upon NEO Board reports on spending coded by MAPES indicator codes to ensure that NEO is allocating resources to meet all required authorizer roles and responsibilities.

In addition, the NEO Board and Executive Director will continue to analyze the impact of the budget allocations coded by MAPES indicator in order to make adjustments as necessary to ensure that NEO is allocating the resources most effectively and efficiently.

Describe how the authorizer’s self-evaluations will be intentional and planned to build the authorizer’s capacity, infrastructure and practices to oversee its portfolio of charter schools.

NEO Response: NEO will continue to be intentional about and plan for self-evaluations utilizing national and state authorizing standards as it has done so in the past by engaging external evaluators to gain feedback for continuous improvement.

Advanced Elements:

Describe the process the authorizer will use to develop and implement continuous improvement plans to address findings of self-evaluation.

NEO Response: NEO will continue to use feedback from the self-evaluations from external evaluators, including feedback from NACSA’s evaluations, MAPES, Charities Review Council, and any other external evaluator NEO will contract with over the next five years, to measurably improve areas identified by the evaluators for improvement.

Describe how the authorizer will evaluate its work regularly against nationally recognized quality authorizing standards and implement continuous improvement plans that result in more effective authorizing practices.

NEO Response: NEO will continue to use feedback from the self-evaluations based on national and state authorizing and governance standards from external evaluators, including feedback from NACSA’s evaluations, MAPES, Charities Review Council, and any other external evaluator NEO will contract with over the next five years, to measurably improve areas identified by the evaluators for improvement.

Describe how the authorizer will utilize reflective practices to maintain an organizational focus on purposeful improvement.

NEO Response: At NEO Board meetings, the NEO Board and Executive Director will continue to regularly monitor, analyze, and act upon NEO Board reports on spending coded by MAPES indicator codes to ensure that NEO is allocating resources to meet all required authorizer roles and responsibilities.

In addition, at the NEO Board meetings, the NEO Board and Executive Director will continue to analyze the impact of the budget allocations coded by MAPES indicator in order to make adjustments as necessary to ensure that NEO is allocating the resources most effectively and efficiently and focusing on areas identified by external evaluators for improvement.

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

Essential Elements:

Describe the authorizer’s plan and process to share and disseminate best authorizing practices and/or provide technical assistance to other authorizers to promote high quality authorizing.

NEO Response: NEO will continue to provide technical assistance to other authorizers to promote high quality authorizing in areas of expertise such as ways to leverage school data and feedback to improve the performance of the schools in the authorizer portfolio.

NEO will continue to actively participate in the Minnesota Association of Charter School Authorizers (MACSA) and Minnesota Association of Charter School (MACS) meetings and serve on MACSA and MACS committees committed to high quality authorizing and chartering in Minnesota.

NEO regularly shares best practices with and/or provides technical assistance to other authorizers by providing leadership in the area of charter board development and training.

NEO will continue to present the MN Charter Board Development and Training grant project to board members and leaders of schools authorized by other authorizers. The MN Charter Board Development and Training grant provides technical assistance to authorizers and school that they authorize by making board development and training materials available to all authorizers, charter board members and school leaders to support and improve charter school compliance and sustainability.

The MN Charter Board Development and Training grant project provides a repository of information that board members and school leaders need to know and also shares ideas from board members and school leaders for how to apply the knowledge to meet requirements.

The content is available on demand and once a course is completed, a certificate immediately generated. Authorizers can suggest or even assign content based on observed needs.

The best practices and technical assistance are sought out by other authorizers, as evidenced by the requests for presentations at the authorizer conferences.

In addition, NEO assists authorizers whenever there is a request.

Describe the authorizer’s intent to engage with other professionals (such as state or national associations) in order to improve the authorizing community of practice, including sharing of best practices and/or providing technical assistance to other authorizers.

NEO Response: NEO will maintain its NACSA Plus membership with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers.

NACSA Plus is an advanced package that offers members the chance to add on additional member benefits. The NACSA Plus package provides members the following features to further their engagement and learning opportunities:

- Two complimentary registrations to the NACSA Leadership Conference
- Access to up to two additional NACSA Communities
- A complimentary NACSA Benchmark Report, a customized report that allows the authorizer to compare their agency to their peers and receive personalized recommendations to help better leverage their NACSA membership
- Access to two complimentary NACSA Expert Briefings tackling emerging trends and hot topics in the charter school sector

In addition, NEO will leverage relationships developed through participation in the NACSA Cohort #4 Leaders Program in order to share resources with other authorizers across the nation.

NEO will also continue to actively participate in the Minnesota Association of Charter School Authorizers (MACSA) as well as continue membership and actively participate in the Minnesota Association of Charter Schools (MACS).

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

Essential Element:

Describe the authorizer's internal process to ensure compliance with reporting, submissions and deadlines set forth in Minnesota Statutes.

NEO Response: NEO ensures that all new school contracts are finalized within 45 days of approval of the Affidavit and sent to MDE within 10 business days of execution by monitoring the new school compliance through the project management program, Basecamp.

NEO ensures that all renewals are also sent to MDE within 10 business days of execution by monitoring progress with renewals utilizing the project management program, Basecamp.

The Executive Director also tracks and verifies compliance with reporting, submissions and deadlines set forth in Minnesota Statute utilizing the MDE Authorizer Compliance Monitoring Database, which MDE will provide and NEO may request and examine for accuracy on a regular basis.