



OFFICE OF PUBLIC
CHARTER SCHOOLS

AUTHORIZER APPROVED PLAN

2016 - 2021

Overview

Per Minnesota Statute, Pillsbury United Communities is an approved authorizer of charter schools. This document is an outline of processes and protocols of the Pillsbury United Communities Office of Public Charter Schools.

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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.*

Comprehensive Application and Review Process

See [Appendix 2: New School Application Guidance](#) for comprehensive instructions, evaluative criteria, procedures, timeline and review processes. It includes clear and transparent procedures and rigorous criteria to evaluate new charter school applications, describes the timeline of the new school application, and is consistent with the authorizer’s performance standards/ framework.

Alignment that Promotes High Quality

Pillsbury United Communities – Office of Public Charter schools (PUC-OPCS) opens charter schools that promote high quality and align with national principles and standards in that the PUC-OPCS new school application,

“States any chartering priorities the authorizer may have established; articulates comprehensive application questions to elicit the information needed for rigorous evaluation of applicants’ plans and capacities; and provides clear guidance and requirements regarding application content and format, while explaining evaluation criteria.”

-The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) “Principles and Standards: 2015 Edition”

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.*

The Pillsbury United Communities Office of Public Charter Schools (PUC-OPCS) has clear and comprehensive approval criteria and process standards to rigorously evaluate proposals for existing charter school expansion requests, readiness to open, and change in authorizer requests. PUC-OPCS’ decisions and resulting actions align with its stated approval and process standards in order to promote the growth of high-quality charter schools. The department encourages new, expansion and replication of charter schools that demonstrate success and capacity for growth.

Site Expansion:

PUC-OPCS utilizes [Appendix 16: Site Expansion Application](#) to conduct and entertain new site applications. PUC-OPCS encourages expansion of charter schools that demonstrate success and capacity for growth.

Grade Level Expansion:

PUC-OPCS utilizes [Appendix 17: Grade Expansion Application](#) to conduct and entertain grade level expansions. PUC-OPCS encourages expansion of charter schools that demonstrate success and capacity for growth.

Early Learning Program:

PUC-OPCS utilizes [Appendix 20: Early Learning Program Application](#) to conduct and entertain early learning programs. PUC-OPCS encourages expansion of charter schools that demonstrate success and capacity for growth.

Change in Authorizer Requests:

PUC-OPCS utilizes [Appendix 3: Transfer Application](#) to conduct and entertain change in authorizer requests. PUC-OPCS encourages transfer of charter schools that demonstrate success and capacity for growth.

Throughout this process, PUC-OPCS analyzes and justifies whether to authorize the transfer school. PUC-OPCS looks for schools that are academically sound, operationally proficient, governed appropriately, and fiscally sustainable.

Ready to Open:

Pre-operational schools will comply with [Appendix 18: New School Start-up Checklist](#). These documents outline fair expectations and transparent procedures necessary for a charter school opening. The checklist includes governance, administrative/ financial management, personnel and policy development, facilities, learning program, accountability, school culture, special education, community relations/marketing, service learning, and partnership tasks necessary for a high-quality charter start-up.

Merger of Nonprofits or Schools

In the event a charter school intends to merge with another nonprofit or school, PUC-OPCS conducts a formal process as outlined in [Appendix 19: Merger Application](#).

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

Sample Charter Contract:

A sample charter contract is attached as [Appendix 12: Charter Contract Template](#). Pillsbury United Communities – Office of Public Charter Schools (PUC-OPCS) negotiates contracts that clearly define material terms and rights and responsibilities of the school and the authorizer. The contract is executed with a legally governing Board of Directors that is independent of PUC-OPCS.

Plan for Contract Goals:

Contracts are executed through an iterative process of negotiation, including but not limited to:

- 1) Review of recommendations from charter school, PUC-OPCS, QSR report, Advisory Council and PUC Board of Directors.
 - a. Includes approval of contract term by PUC Board of Directors.
 - b. Includes meeting between authorizer, board chair, and charter school executive director to review recommendations.
- 2) Negotiation of the academic and non-academic goals and charter contract.
 - c. Includes review of goals by PUC-OPCS to charter school Board of Directors that they are strategic, specific, measurable, and time-bound.
 - d. Includes final agreement on the outcomes set forward in the academic and non-academic goals specific to the charter school.
- 3) Finalization and execution of the charter contract

The process utilized in contract negotiations builds trust and strengthens the relationship between PUC-OPCS and our charter schools. The charter contract is the binding force enabling PUC-OPCS as an authorizer and the roles/ responsibilities of the charter school. PUC- OPCS negotiates charter contracts that plainly establish, define, and include performance standards that can be clearly measured. The charter contract identifies the interventions if the terms of the contract are not met, and states the responsibilities and commitments the school will adhere to. Each of these components are discussed with the charter school director and the charter Board of Directors, enabling all parties to clearly understand the terms and content of the charter contract.

Process for Timely Submission of Contracts (New and Renewal):

See [Measure A.11](#) on Authorizer Compliance to Responsibilities Stated in Statute.

Process for Contract Amendments:

PUC- OPCS amends contracts only when there are significant changes to the relationship between PUC and the charter school. Each charter contract outlines the specific procedure and why a contract amendment may be necessary (see [Appendix 12: Charter Contract Template, Article IX](#)).

The iterative cycle of review, feedback, and edits displays the strong relationship PUC has with its Charter Schools. PUC-OPCS wants contract amendments to be fully iterated discussed and negotiated with the charter school leadership, charter school Board of Directors before execution.

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

Pillsbury United Communities (PUC) executes statutorily compliant contracts with clear measurable and attainable performance standards through the Academic & Non-Academic Goals and Performance Framework. Each charter school is held accountable to both the academic and non-academic goals and the performance framework.

The key components of Pillsbury United Communities – Office of Public Charter School’s (PUC-OPCS) measurable performance standards include:

- PUC-OPCS generates school specific academic and non-academic goals through the charter contract.
- PUC-OPCS has a uniform performance framework (previously called accountability plan) across the portfolio of schools tracking the essential academic, operational, and financial standards of a high-quality charter school. The performance framework is part of ongoing oversight within the charter contract (see [Appendix 12: Charter Contract Template, Exhibit K](#)).

If the charter school does not meet its performance targets, PUC-OPCS utilizes [Appendix 12: Charter Contract Template, Exhibit L](#) to intervene.

PUC-OPCS has clear, measurable and attainable performance standards that meet the MN Authorizer Application Standards, follow the National Association of Charter Schools Authorizer (NACSA) standards, abide by MN state statute, and meet the primary and secondary purposes of charter schools.

Contract Academic & Non-Academic Goals:

The department is dedicated to executing contracts with clear measurable and attainable performance standards. Each charter contract contains academic and non-academic goals that are tailored to the school’s specific performance standards for the charter contract term.

Achieves outcomes that meet or exceed expectations per Minnesota Statutes. The academic and non-academic goals contain educational indicators (through credit attainment, standardized assessments based in growth and proficiency, graduation rates, and/ or project based accomplishments), operational indicators (professional development, school culture, and/or leadership development), and financial indicators. The school and authorizer decide on the essential indicators to show the school’s success to meeting the primary and secondary purpose(s) of charter schools.

If the charter school does not meet one or more of its academic and non-academic goals, PUC-OPCS utilizes [Appendix 12: Charter Contract Template, Exhibit L](#) to intervene, including but not limited to: Letters of Awareness, Letters of Concern, Letters of Revocation, Notice of Deficiency, Notice of Probationary Status, Charter Review, and/or Charter Revocation. PUC-OPCS maintains the right to not send a letter of concern for particular circumstantial situations in which the goal is defunct or non-relevant.

Performance Framework:

PUC-OPCS has a uniform performance framework across our portfolio of schools that drills deeper into the essential performance standards for a high-quality charter school. PUC-OPCS continuously gathers input from the charter school directors, educational consultants, and other authorizers to ensure that the performance framework shows a complete picture of high quality charter schools. As necessary, PUC-OPCS makes non-substantial changes to ensure that the performance framework is clear, measurable, and attainable. The complete performance framework is included in [Appendix 12: Charter Contract Template, Exhibit K](#).

Achieves outcomes that meet or exceed expectations per Minnesota Statute. PUC-OPCS utilizes the performance framework to assess the extent to which a charter school is meeting the primary purpose of charter schools: to improve all pupil learning and all student achievement § Minn. Stat 124E.Subd1.

The performance framework measures differentiated and innovative learning outcomes per the secondary purpose of charter schools § Minn. Stat 124E.Subd1. See [Appendix 12: Charter Contract Template, Exhibit K](#) for details on how state priorities, legislative mandates, and commissioner expectations are tracked in the PUC-OPCS performance framework.

Contains Academic, Operational, and Financial Standards. The academic portions of the performance framework are subdivided into: achievement (growth indicators), preparation (proficiency indicators), access (post-secondary indicators), and belief (culture/community indicators). These areas align with the broader PUC organization’s Strategic Framework (see “Pillsbury United Communities’ Strategic Framework”, found on PUC’s website at <https://www.puc-mn.org/strategic-framework>). PUC charter authorizing minimizes the achievement gap, preparation gap, access gap and belief gap within communities PUC serves. The performance framework is weighted to heavily emphasize academic performance (90% of the framework), but includes operational (5%) and financial (5%) components.

Promotes High Quality Charter Schools and Aligns with National Principles and Standards. Many components of the performance framework are derived from the NACSA recommendations for performance framework indicators.

The performance framework is utilized on an annual basis to track and assess performance. The information will be used to inform contract renewal, but is not the only indicator of a school’s success (other indicators include board observations, annual and monthly reporting, site visits, etc.).

If the charter school does not meet expectations set out in the Performance Framework, PUC-OPCS utilizes [Appendix 12: Charter Contract Template, Exhibit L](#) to intervene, including but not limited to: Letters of Awareness, Letters of Concern, Letters of Revocation, Notice of Deficiency, Notice of Probationary Status, Charter Review, and/or Charter Revocation. PUC maintains the right to not sending a letter of concern for particular circumstantial situations in which the measure is defunct or non-relevant.

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.

Evaluation of Fiscal, Operational, and Academic Performance

PUC-OPCS monitors and oversees its charter schools in academics, operations, and finances according to [Appendix 12: Charter Contract Template, Exhibit K](#). The required academic, financial and operational reporting is included in this exhibit and throughout the charter contract.

PUC-OPCS is in regular communication with its charter schools. As stated in the 2014 NACSA review, “Charter leaders also described OPCS as ‘always available,’ and sometimes as ‘collaborative.’ OPCS’s day-to-day interactions with its charter schools vary based on the issues and needs that arise.” PUC-OPCS and its charter schools value transparency and continuous learning provoking strong, consistent ongoing monitoring.

Oversight Plan aligns with School Autonomy

Ongoing evaluation and review takes place throughout the contract term to ensure the school is following state statute and upholding the central tenants of the charter contract between the school and PUC. See [Measure A.8](#) for PUC’s policy on school autonomy.

Oversight Informs Interventions

With all ongoing oversight, if the school is unable to meet or make clear progress towards meeting Academic, Operational or Financial Performance indicators, PUC will advise the school of its concerns and may carry out interventions explained further in [Appendix 12: Charter Contract Template, Exhibit L](#).

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.*

Complaint Process:

Pillsbury United Communities-Office of Public Charter Schools (PUC-OPCS) has clear and comprehensive standards and processes to address complaints. The Stakeholder Grievance Process presents the overall processes for remediating complaints. Note that there is general guidance for whom the complaint should go through as well as timelines for how long PUC-OPCS will investigate concerns and before providing a decision (see [Appendix 11: Stakeholder Grievance Process](#)).

Interventions and Corrective Action Plans:

The PUC and charter school contract outlines the intervention policies and states the general conditions that may trigger intervention, including the types of actions and consequences that may ensue (see [Appendix 12: Charter Contract Template, Exhibit L](#)).

PUC has comprehensive performance accountability and compliance monitoring in order to make rigorous and standards-based intervention decisions (see [Appendix 12: Charter Contract Template, Exhibit K](#)). PUC-OPCS regularly communicates with schools at the monthly directors meeting and provides timely notice of contract violations and/or performance deficiencies. If PUC-OPCS deems intervention necessary in the future, the previously mentioned range of interventions possible are included in our executed charter contracts. Each intervention allows the charter school the flexibility to decide how to remediate the issue, while ensuring the school takes responsibility for the required statutory and contractual obligations

Another way in which PUC-OPCS supports its portfolio is through our fifth strategic priority, Identify 1-2 Schools for Refresh Interventions (see [Appendix 1: PUC-OPCS Strategic Priorities 2012-2017](#)). PUC-OPCS has begun identifying schools that may be primed for individual attention.

Alignment with National Principles and Standards:

Including the Range of Possible Interventions ([Appendix 12: Charter Contract Template, Exhibit L](#)) directly in charter contracts is consistent with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers' (NACSA) standards for intervention, which specifies that a quality authorizer “establishes and makes known to schools at the outset an intervention policy which states the general conditions that may trigger intervention and the types of actions and consequences that may ensue.” As this document is included in all PUC-OPCS contracts, our schools are aware from the beginning what actions may precipitate an intervention and what said intervention may look like.

Additionally, NACSA states that a quality authorizer “Allows schools reasonable time and opportunity for remediation in nonemergency situations.” PUC-OPCS allows adequate time for corrective action plans as well as investigations into complaints.

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.

Support and Technical Assistance Provided:

Pillsbury United Communities – Office of Public Charter Schools (PUC-OPCS) provides technical assistance in a variety of areas to enable high-quality charter schools, while preserving charter school autonomy. Support and technical assistance are offered to schools both on a regular basis as well as based on need.

I. Regular Basis

Ongoing Oversight and Evaluation: Minnesota state statute and the charter contract outline the specific ongoing oversight that PUC-OPCS conducts. These tasks are conducted to support and assist schools while ensuring statutory requirements are met. Qualitative feedback is provided to replicate innovative practices, nationally normed standards, organizational excellence and high quality schools (see [Appendix 12: Charter Contract Template, Exhibit K](#)). Charter schools must meet contractual and statutory requirements and are able to pursue other qualitative feedback provided at their own volition.

Online Document Database: Additionally, PUC-OPCS in conjunction with its authorized schools utilizes an online database, Epicenter. The database is a communication and compliance tool between the authorizer, school Board of Directors, and school leadership. All parties have access to the system and can view the key documents of a school including but not limited to

annual reports, board minutes/ agendas, employee handbooks, leases, certification of background checks of board members, and the charter contract.

Directors Meetings: PUC-OPCS supports its authorized charter schools is by convening monthly PUC-OPCS directors meetings. These meetings identify and share best practices, focus on data collection and review, focus on policy issues and to connect schools with outside resources. The agendas are developed yearly by PUC-OPCS in response to needs and requests as identified by the PUC-OPCS department, charter school leaders and board members. Other charter school staff members attend as the agenda is pertinent to their work.

II. Other Assistance as Needed

Resource Communications: In addition to formalized assistance and development offerings, PUC-OPCS regularly sends information to schools, such as announcements, workshops and other resources. The resources are nationally and locally based including national news organizations, educational foundations, academic research, blog posts, and videos.

Forums: PUC-OPCS hosts professional development events for its authorized charter schools. The theme and avenue for the event varies depending on need and demand as identified in feedback from the previous conference and input prior to the event. Generally the themes are focused on school improvement, celebrating and distributing best practices, and networking amongst the Minnesota charter school landscape. Historically, the initial 2013 forum was focused on school leadership and board members. In the fall of 2015, the forum was open all school staff, approximately 500 participants. The staff forum theme was Creating Choice, Change and Connection, with the day's focus on educational equity and operational excellence.

Turnaround Interventions: As identified in ongoing oversight and evaluation, PUC-OPCS provides additional services to assist schools to turnaround charter schools in academic, financial, or operational distress. The interventions align with state statute and the charter contract. As necessary, specific services are provided by an external consultant to eliminate conflicts of interest.

Preservation of School Autonomy:

All resources and technical assistance brought forward by PUC-OPCS (exempt those required by statute or the charter contract) are optional to authorized charter schools. Each charter school Board of Directors is an autonomous decision making governing body that chooses their own course of curricular, operational, financial, and educational models.

Minnesota Statute and the charter contract outlines the relationship between PUC-OPCS and authorized charter schools- all support and technical assistance is in alignment.

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.

Pillsbury United Communities – Office of Public Charter Schools (PUC-OPCS) encourages schools that have strong academic achievement trend data to expand grade levels and/or sites, replicate their models, and disseminate best practices. These strategies are particularly focused in on those schools who have demonstrated success serving high-needs, at-risk, traditionally underserved students. Academic achievement indicators include but are not limited to the items in [Appendix 12: Charter Contract Template, Exhibit K](#) and a school’s Academic and Non-Academic Goals.

Clear Plan of Model Replication and Dissemination

The below are mechanisms used by PUC-OPCS to encourage model replication:

- Summative review and ongoing oversight conversations to inspire expansion, replication of best practices, and dissemination of high performing models.
- Encourage innovative community leaders and experienced charter developers who have experience with best practices in high performing schools to start and expand charter schools.
- Require new charter school applicants to clearly present data (where possible) to show that the proposed school model will be successful when replicated (see [Appendix 2: New School Application Guidance](#)).
- Recommend use of Charter School Programs (CSP) federal start-up funds as appropriate to replicate and disseminate the effective school models and best practices.

Additionally, PUC-OPCS connects similar schools with one another to disseminate best practices and encourage model replication. Through talks, conferences, site visits and other avenues; each of the PUC authorized charter schools disseminate the things they are doing well to other local and national schools.

For instance, the directors meetings are one way to share. The meetings bring together all of our charter directors to share best practices with one another. The directors also connect about the big questions pressing on them, mainly: how do we move our students to higher academic performance? There is a consistent data dive and sharing best practices across the portfolio of schools at the PUC directors meetings.

External consultants and educational advisors are used throughout the year to share and discuss best practices with the PUC-OPCS portfolio of schools. PUC provides these free resources to schools but no school is mandated to utilize these systems or maintain a contract with these individuals/ organizations.

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.

Quality School Review Process:

Pillsbury United Communities – Office of Public Charter Schools (PUC-OPCS) has clear and comprehensive standards and processes to make high stakes renewal decisions. PUC-OPCS views the renewal process as serving two purposes, 1) to inform the renewal recommendations presented to the PUC Board of Directors to renew or not renew a charter school contract and 2) to provide the charter school an opportunity to evaluate their effectiveness and provide an opportunity for the school to set new goals and priorities.

The process of Quality School Renewal (QSR) is outlined [Appendix 12: Charter Contract Template, Exhibit J](#) and included within charter contracts with PUC authorized schools. The renewal/ termination decisions are informed by the charter schools ability to meet charter contract academic and non-academic goals and indicators found in [Appendix 12: Charter Contract Template, Exhibit K](#).

PUC-OPCS aligns its decision-making to promote high-quality charter schools and align with national quality principles and standards. The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) states about renewal decisions in their 2015 Principles and Standards that a quality authorizer, “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.”

PUC-OPCS grants renewal contracts to those schools that have achieved the standards and targets stated in the contract, are organizationally and fiscally viable and have been faithful to the terms of the contract and applicable law. PUC-OPCS does not make renewal decision on the basis of political or community pressure or solely on promises of future improvement. Thus, PUC-OPCS makes renewal decisions in alignment with national quality authorizing principles and standards.

School Closure Plan:

PUC-OPCS has clear and comprehensive standards and processes to make termination decisions.

- During the contract term, PUC-OPCS follows its process as described in [Appendix 12: Charter Contract Template, Exhibit L](#).
- Through Quality School Review, PUC-OPCS follows its protocols as described in [Appendix 12: Charter Contract Template, Exhibit J](#) and [Exhibit M](#).

PUC-OPCS follows Minnesota state statute and the charter contract to inform a charter school of charter revocation/ termination. When a termination decision is made, the timeline for closure document is filled out immediately with the appropriate personnel to time key actions as shown in [Appendix 12: Charter Contract Template, Exhibit H](#). This document is mirrored in charter contracts with authorized schools.

PUC-OPCS aligns its decision-making to promote high-quality charter schools and align with national quality principles and standards. Whenever possible, school closures occur at the end of the school year minimizing negative impact on the student population, while ensuring sufficient time to end operations and financial commitments.