

A1: Authorizer Mission and A.2: Authorizer Vision and Organizational Goals:

Minnesota Statute 124E.01 states in part, “the primary purpose of [charter schools] is to improve all pupil learning and all student achievement.” It goes on to cite five (5) areas that charter schools should address in carrying out their mission. They include, i) increase learning opportunities for all students, ii) encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods, iii) measure learning outcomes and create different and innovative forms of measuring outcomes, iv) establish new forms of accountability for schools or v) create new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be responsible for the learning program at the school site.

Innovative Quality Schools (IQS) is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization [**Attachment A.1.1**]. It was established in 2010 to serve as a single purpose authorizer as defined by Minnesota Statute 124E.01. The mission of IQS, “...***is to authorize charter schools that are innovative and successful in preparing students to achieve their full potential...***” The vision of IQS is, “...***is to achieve success for all learners by supporting schools engaged in educational innovation...***” The mission and vision of IQS directly align with and support the purposes of charter schools as outlined in M.S. 124E.01

To further support its adherence to the requirements found within M.S. statute 124E, IQS operates within a set of values that define the framework within which decisions are made. Those values are:

Focus on Innovation: Take risks to try creative new things, challenge old processes, and continuously adapt.

Avoid Insularity: Learn from, and be sensitive to, ideas and proposals that challenge our comfort zones.

Commit to Collaboration: Be interdependent, have an open flow of ideas, listen to others and value differences.

Embrace Diversity: Seek diversity in Board membership and sponsored schools.

Instill Clarity and Transparency: Follow fair and rigorous procedures resulting in the authorization of high quality schools focused on innovation and student achievement.

Transform for Educational Excellence: Commit to achieving our vision, mission and goals through the continual assessment of our work and acting upon results to improve our performance.

Finally, annually, the IQS Board of Directors and its management team work collaboratively to review and develop its strategic plan. The strategic initiatives are the goals for the organization. They have been developed and approved by the IQS Board as follows:

- 1) Design and implement alternative means of measuring student and school success that support innovative instructional practices.
- 2) Design and implement practices that will ensure IQS meets and exceeds all performance criteria as determined by the MDE.
- 3) Focus our oversight efforts on student achievement.
- 4) Ensure, through our oversight practices, that our schools continue to evolve and grow in their commitment to innovation and student success.
- 5) Disseminate information on the innovations of IQS schools.

Collectively, IQS's mission, vision, values and strategic initiatives address, reflect and support in totality, the purpose of charter schools as defined by Minnesota Statute.

A.3 – Authorizer Structure of Operations and Measure A.4 – Authorizer Staff Expertise

As noted in A.1/A.2, Innovative Quality Schools has been established as non-profit 501(c)3 organization. It consists of a Board of Directors of up to nine (9) members. It has no direct employees. To conduct its oversight responsibilities, IQS acquires the services of a Management Leadership Team (MLT) to oversee and conduct its day to day business. It utilizes professional educators, researchers and financial planners to carry out the specific oversight responsibilities as defined in M.S. 124E. **[Attachment A.3.1]**. The MLT is responsible for ensuring that all schools that comprise the IQS charter school portfolio receive the kind and quality of expertise that will support their program. The team is also responsible for ensuring that IQS is in compliance with all reporting requirements as put forth by the MDE. The group of professional educators, researchers and financial planners comprise the IQS Cadre. Cadre members are highly skilled professionals in their respective fields. Persons interested in becoming a Cadre member must apply. Applications are reviewed by members of the MLT. Contracts are issued and approved by the IQS Board of Directors. The rolls and responsibilities of Cadre members are described in detail in the Cadre handbook and reviewed annually in workshops and webinar training sessions. **[Attachment A.4.1]**. The IQS management team has in place a system to ensure the collaborative work of Cadre team members while preserving the integrity of school data in compliance with Minnesota Government Data Privacy Act. Annually, Cadre members are provided training in data privacy best practices as a part of their orientation.

Finally, it is important to note that Cadre members are assigned to school based upon their area of expertise and the schools' unique needs. Cadre members are assigned up to three (3) schools depending upon time and availability. Annually, new professionals are recruited to join the Cadre. Current Cadre membership is 'underutilized'; not all Cadre have been assigned to schools – some have requested additional assignments. The IQS Board and leadership team expect and understand that Cadre utilization will fluctuate from year to year dependent upon the needs of the school in its portfolio.

A.5 – Authorizer Capacity and Skill Development of Leadership and Authorizing Staff

As cited in A.1 of this application, the mission of IQS, “...*is to authorize charter schools that are innovative and successful in preparing students to achieve their full potential...*” and the vision of IQS is, “...*is to achieve success for all learners by supporting schools engaged in educational innovation...*” The totality of the mission and the vision represents the fundamental purpose and focus of Innovative Quality Schools. Our focus is two-fold; innovation and student achievement. To fulfill its fundamental purpose requires IQS to have in place a highly qualified leadership team supported operationally by a team of professionals (Cadre) who have experience and expertise in the five critical areas of charter school operations that are important to ensuring student success (i.e. mission/vision, governance, school performance, school finance and school operations). Further, because a requirement of schools in the IQS portfolio is innovation, the IQS leadership team and Cadre members must also have expertise in a variety of innovations in the field of education.

The ‘plan’ to ensure the skill development of IQS’s leadership team and Cadre contains three (3) components:

1. IQS Management Leadership Team Training- The IQS Board is responsible for acquiring the services of a leadership team whose responsibility it is to oversee all authorizing functions as articulated in the C-AAP. The qualifications of this team are carefully reviewed by the Board. Performance reviews are conducted annually. To ensure that the MLT remains current in its knowledge and understanding of authorizing practices, it is expected that members of the team:
 - a. Regularly attend meetings of the Minnesota Association of Charter School Authorizers
 - b. Attend all meetings conducted by the MDE related to authorizer best practices
 - c. Attend, at least bi-annually, state and/or national conferences related to charter school practices

Reports will be provided to the IQS Board as a means of promoting an understanding of authorizing best practices within the Board.

2. IQS Cadre Training- Serving as a member of the IQS Cadre requires each Cadre member to submit an application. The application asks prospective Cadre members to identify their skill sets related to school operations as well as related experiences. Applications are reviewed by the IQS leadership team before being accepted as a Cadre member. Cadre members are assigned to schools based upon their background, experience and professional expertise. Each must align with the unique educational program of the school(s) assigned for their oversight. Continuing professional develop for Cadre members takes place in a variety of formats.
 - a. At least three (3) times annually, **[Attachment A.5.1]** Cadre members will be asked to participate in a workshop designed to develop a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of a Cadre member. The fall workshop will focus on

Cadre roles and responsibilities as defined in the Cadre handbook. A mid-winter workshop will be conducted to provide opportunities for Cadre members to share areas of expertise and conduct a SWOT analysis of the oversight process. A spring workshop will be conducted to review the entire year and make suggestions for improvement. As needed, experts in the field of authorization will be brought into workshops as a means of improving our overall approach to authorization.

- b. Throughout the course of the year, members of the IQS leadership team will conduct webinars. The purpose of these 'virtual' meetings will be to provide opportunities for Cadre members to share thoughts and ideas related to IQS oversight processes as well as to 'catch up' on any information that may have been 'missed' from a workshop.
- c. As needed, small group discussions will be led by a member of the IQS Management Leadership Team. These discussions will be 'impromptu' in nature; held from time to time as Cadre members indicate an interest in meeting with fellow Cadre members that share an area of particular interest and/or concern.

This multi-tiered approach to professional development aligns with the stated values of IQS to, avoid insularity and transform for educational excellence.

Charter School Leadership Training- The charter schools in the IQS portfolio share a common characteristic; innovation. To ensure our schools' fulfill the innovation articulated within their missions, the IQS leadership team will, at least twice annually, conduct training sessions for its school leaders (directors, lead teachers and/or board chairs). Topics for these workshops will be determined based upon the assessed need of our schools as cited by Cadre members in carrying out their oversight responsibilities and/or by our charter school leaders. Whenever appropriate, experts in the field will be brought into the conferences as a way of expanding knowledge and understanding.

A.6: Authorizer Operational Budget for Authorizing the Portfolio of Charter Schools

Innovative Quality Schools, under the current Authorizer Approved Application (AAA) has twenty-two (22) schools in operation serving more than 4500 students. The 5-year budget submitted in the AAA provided for an authorizer portfolio of up to twenty-six (26) charter schools. The budget (revenues and expenditures) for the year ending June 30, 2016 is contained as an attachment to this application. For revenues, the budget reflects that virtually 100% of its revenues are received through per pupil funding as allowed in Minnesota Statute 124E.10 subd. 3. Expenditures reflect the vast majority (~90%) of our resources are expended on activities directly related to oversight of our charter school portfolio. The next five-year budget projects an expansion in the number of charter schools in our portfolio to increase to a maximum of thirty-six (36) schools. The budget assumptions over this period of time anticipate a modest increase in the state funding formula (2% annually) and a slight increase

in the number of students served by each of our charter schools (1% annually) [**Attachment A.6.1**]. The growth in the budget over the next five (5) years also assumes that approximately two (2) to three (3) new and/or transfer schools will be added into the IQS portfolio annually until the maximum number of schools in the portfolio (thirty-six (36) schools) is reached.

The number of Cadre members currently serving IQS is approximately thirty-five (35) professionals with a variety of backgrounds and expertise. Many of these members have expressed a desire to be engaged in more schools than currently assigned. As the number of charter schools in the IQS portfolio increases, current Cadre members will be able to accommodate those additions. However, it is important to recognize that the IQS Management Leadership Team is responsible for annually recruiting new Cadre members – both in preparation for the addition of new schools as well as to replace any current Cadre members who elect not to continue serving in the oversight role.

A.7 – Authorizer Operational Conflicts of Interest

IQS has created numerous places within its organization and approval processes to ensure that no conflicts of interest occur either at the IQS board level or in the Cadre team/oversight process in accordance with Minnesota Statute 124E.14. Our awareness and expertise in this area allows us to objectively and professionally review (and when deemed necessary take action on) any concerns or complaints that might be raised relative to the charter schools it is authorized to oversee.

Article III, Section 1 of IQS by-laws states that *“no director may be a board member, administrator, teacher, employee, or independent contractor engaged on a full time basis by or for any Minnesota chartered school nor have any contract by which the director will provide services to any school to be sponsored by the Corporation....”* Annually, IQS Board members renew their declaration of having no conflict of interest by signing an affidavit noting such.

In addition, to insure that no conflict of interest exists within the process of school oversight, all Cadre team members sign an agreement with IQS to serve as independent contractors (IC) [**Attachment A.7.1**]. The contract specifically states, *“The IC represents to IQS that as of the date of this Agreement and the immediately preceding two years, neither IC nor any immediate family member, has had a financial interest in, been a paid consultant to, or a board member or employee of, the IQS school(s) assigned above. IC further agrees to refrain from having a financial interest in, becoming a paid consultant to, or becoming a board member or employee to charter school(s) assigned above for a period of one year following the termination of this Agreement...”*

Finally, at the charter school level, IQS works to ensure that a conflict of interest policy is in place and reviewed annually. In its “Ready to Open” checklist, Section 1.c(2) addresses the need to be certain no board members have a conflict of interest (see attachment B.1.2). In addition, the IQS contract with its schools contains a provision that states *“The provisions*

of the Charter Law 124E.14 relating to conflicts of interest shall be followed by each member of the board...” (see attachment B.3.1). Annually, charter school board members are asked to sign a “statement of assurance” that no conflicts of interest exist and submit to IQS for recording purposes [Attachment A.7.2].

A.8 Ensuring Autonomy of the Schools in the Portfolio

As an authorizer, IQS has put into place both policies and practices that ensure school autonomy. The policy of IQS is found in its contract Section 8.2 which states, “...*Except as otherwise provided by this Agreement or Applicable Law, IQS has no authority, control, power, or administrative or financial responsibility over the School...*” It goes on to state that, “...*In carrying out its oversight responsibilities, when IQS has identified areas of concern relative to school performance, it may make recommendations to the school to encourage improvement...*” Such recommendations are not considered directives that impinge upon the autonomy of the school. To assure adherence to its policy, the Cadre Handbook (revised and reviewed annually with all members of the IQS Cadre team) thoroughly describes charter school oversight responsibilities; placing an emphasis on school outcomes in stating it is IQS’s responsibility, “*to create a performance framework that establishes expectations for school operations, student achievement, budget and finance, and board governance and then to provide guidance and oversight to assure those expectations are met...*”

A.9 Authorizer Self-Evaluation of Capacity, Infrastructure and Practices:

The importance of self-evaluation and continuing improvement to Innovative Quality Schools is recognized in its value statement to “Transform for Educational Excellence.” This is described to be a, “...commitment to achieving our vision, mission and goals through the continual assessment of our work and acting upon results to improve our performance...” As described in Section A.5, IQS conducts, at least three (3) times annually, professional development workshops for both members of its Cadre team as well as the school leaders in its portfolio. Prior to, and immediately after each workshop, surveys are given to participants. The purpose of these evaluate surveys is to assist the IQS Management Leadership Team in determining the operational needs of workshop participants and the success of the workshop content. These results are utilized to plan future training activities and /or make changes in the oversight process. These results are also shared with IQS Board of Directors and used as a framework for creating changes in its strategic plan.

Annually, the IQS Board of Directors engage in a process of strategic planning. The framework for this planning process [Attachment A.9.1] includes an annual review of the organization’s vision, mission and values. Its strategic initiatives are evaluated based upon a review of the ScoreCard that is developed to support each initiative as well as a review of survey results administered to IQS’s key stakeholders. Once the Board determines that an initiative has been achieved, it is deemed ‘accomplished’ and so noted by Board action.

Recognizing the evolving nature of charter school authorizing, new initiatives are added as needed.

A.10 – Authorizer High Quality Authorizing Dissemination:

Innovative Quality Schools utilizes a ‘multi-tiered’ process to share and disseminate innovative authorizing best practices. IQS actively seeks to involve itself in both formal and informal activities that allow us to share our authorizing practices with others as well as to take every opportunity to extend our own knowledge. Website updates that highlight school innovation and achievement, conference sponsorships that focus on educational innovation, and training Cadre and Charter school leaders are ongoing activities participation in Minnesota Charter School Association are at the ‘center’ of the process IQS uses to disseminate high quality authorizing practices. More specifically, IQS:

1. Maintains its website (iqsmn.org) as a means of sharing its practices with other authorizers. The website features each of its schools and highlights innovations practiced at each school. This information can be useful to other authorizers seeking information related to school performance, innovation and instructional model.
2. Conducts school leadership conferences at least twice annually. These workshops are designed to provide school leaders in the IQS portfolio with the opportunity to meet with one another and share school success. This ‘purposeful’ sharing of best practice is promoted through the arrangement of room/tables according to school innovations. School leaders have the opportunity to share their thoughts and ideas in an informal setting. Table participants are asked to share with the entire group ‘key themes’ that come out of their discussions. These ideas are recorded and disseminated to all schools. IQS informs other authorizers of these meetings and opens them to other authorizers; providing each with the opportunity to attend, listen and learn.
3. Participates in the MACSA. Members of the IQS Management Leadership Team participates in the monthly meetings of the Minnesota Association of Charter School Authorizers. In the capacity of a member of MACSA, IQS contributes on an on-going basis, its processes and practices that work to enhance charter school performance. IQS leadership also participates in all workshops of MDE pertinent to its authorizing practices and shares both successes and challenges with workshop participants on all matters related to successful authorizing practices.

A.11 – Authorizer Compliance to Responsibilities Stated in Statute:

Innovative Quality Schools utilizes the services of a Management Leadership Team to coordinate and conduct all activities required of a charter school authorizer as described in Minnesota Statute 124E.05. The MLT has diverse backgrounds and expertise related to charter schools and school operations. To that end, a set of job functions has been put into place for each MLT member [Attachment A.11.1]. Those job functions differentiate responsibilities to ensure the effective and

efficient completion of duties.

1. The treasurer of the IQS management team will assume all responsibilities related to submitting the organization's financial data as required by Minnesota Statute to the MDE in a timely manner.
2. Each member of the management team has primary oversight for approximately 1/3 of the schools in IQS's portfolio. Managing new/renewed contracts will be shared by each member of the IQS management team in a timely manner and in accordance to Minnesota Statute.
3. Minnesota statute requires the submission of an annual report of progress of the schools in its portfolio. The management team leader will have overall responsibility to submit this report on an annual basis; supported by the directors of the management team. A calendar of state reporting requirements is developed annually and reviewed by the management team each fall.