

# Unique roles DEFINED IN OHIO'S COMMUNITY SCHOOL SYSTEM



State laws define the roles and responsibilities of each entity that comprises Ohio's system of community schools, and serve as the foundation for clear, reasonable expectations for performance. Community, or "charter," schools are not-for-profit, public schools that receive state and federal funds and are, therefore, subject to appropriate accountability and transparency.

## OHIO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

### Key responsibilities:

- Initial sponsor approval/renewal
- Oversight of all sponsors
- Evaluation of all sponsors (using the Sponsor Performance Review tool)
- Providing technical assistance to sponsors
- Preparing annual community school report (for key policy-makers)
- Legal sufficiency review of all community school contracts
- Revocation of sponsor authority

**ODE / SPONSOR CONTRACT** – provides for the number of schools a sponsor may authorize, the physical territory in which the schools may be located, and outlines the sponsor's obligations under state law and administrative code



## SPONSOR / AUTHORIZER

### Key responsibilities:

- Oversight and monitoring of each school
- Annual assurances (of compliance) provided, in writing, to ODE at least 10 business days prior to each school's opening
- Maintaining a representative located within 50 miles of each school
- Meeting with each governing authority and reviewing each school's financial records at least once every two months
- Special education fiscal assessment/documentation for each school
- Contract renewals/non-renewals (based on assessment of student performance, fiscal management, violation of contract or state/federal laws, other good cause)
- Placing schools on probation (when appropriate)
- Suspension of operations of non-complying schools

**SPONSOR / GOVERNING AUTHORITY CONTRACT** – must specify: the educational program of the schools (including mission, student characteristics, students' ages/grades, curriculum focus); academic goals (and method of measurement); performance standards; admissions standards; dismissal procedures; facilities to be used; qualifications of teachers; governing authority selection; financial plan/budget; management/administration of the school; and more.



## GOVERNING AUTHORITY / BOARD

### Key responsibilities:

- The ultimate responsibility for every aspect of the school's operations and performance
- Hiring/firing/evaluating the "operator" (principal/head of school or management company)
- Fiscal management
- Development/adoption of administrative policies and procedures
- Continuous, comprehensive assessment of school performance and compliance (attendance, enrollment, discipline, special education, HR, testing results, parent issues, planning, etc.)

**GOVERNING AUTHORITY / OPERATOR CONTRACT** – Governing authorities may choose to enter into contracts with individual "operators" or principals of schools, or they may choose to enter into contracts with management companies that serve as operators.



## PRINCIPAL / HEAD OF SCHOOL

### Key responsibilities:

- As defined in individual contracts; may include any or all of the key responsibilities of a management company

## MANAGEMENT COMPANY

### Key responsibilities (contract may include any or all):

- Day-to-day operations of the school
- HR management (recruitment, hiring, retention, certification, discipline, professional development, mentorship, etc.)
- Data management (student records, test scores, etc.)
- Curriculum selection/implementation/alignment to state standards
- Testing/assessments
- Special education services
- Student services (counseling, social services, identification of at-risk students, health services, etc.)
- Coordination of transportation
- Stakeholder relations (students, staff, parents/caregivers, board, district, state, media & community)
- Facilities management
- Fiscal management
- State/federal compliance
- Technology
- Security
- Food services

WHAT IS A

# sponsor?



## Charter school sponsors play key “oversight” role

*Just as the Ohio Department of Education is responsible for “oversight” of sponsors (also referred to as authorizers), sponsors are responsible for oversight of the charter schools they authorize. State law does not specifically define “oversight” – a word commonly used to describe “watchful care, management or supervision.”*

While convenient to expect sponsors to assume responsibility for the day-to-day operations of the charter schools they authorize, to do so fails to recognize the intent of state law with respect to the role of sponsors and the autonomy that serves as the conceptual foundation for charter schools.

However, **sponsors do, indeed, have a significant obligation to the public to monitor the charter schools they authorize** to help ensure full compliance with state and federal laws. This includes a representative of the sponsor meeting with the school’s governing authority (its board of directors) and **reviewing the financial records of the school at least once every two months**, as specifically required by Ohio law.

The contracts between authorizers and the schools they sponsor serve as the foundation for appropriate oversight, including – as required by Ohio law – academic goals to be achieved and the method of measurement that will be used

to determine progress toward those goals (which includes statewide achievement assessments), as well as performance standards by which the success of the school will be evaluated.

The contracts between the authorizer and each school also outlines the specific duties of the sponsor including providing **technical assistance** – defined in Ohio Administrative Code as “providing relevant knowledge and/or expertise ... including training, information, written materials and manuals” – in complying with the law. Additionally, authorizers must conduct **comprehensive site visits** to schools while classes are in session at least twice a year, and prepare written reports that must be provided to the Department of Education on request.

State laws also require “annual assurances” by sponsors. Specifically, authorizers must provide **written assurances of compliance in key aspects of operations** to the Department of Education at least 10 business days prior to the opening of a

## BY THE NUMBERS...

# 2

Number of the 41 U.S. states and localities with charter school laws that require a formal evaluation of sponsors. In 2006, Ohio’s requirement to evaluate sponsor organizations was recognized as unique at the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) annual conference. In 2009, Minnesota became the second state to adopt a charter school authorizer evaluation process.

# 56

Number of traditional public districts that sponsor charter schools in Ohio.

# 8

Number of not-for-profit organizations that sponsor charter schools in Ohio.





school, including (but not limited to): appropriate filing of the contract between the school and its sponsor; the plan and demonstrated capacity for providing **special education and related services**; the plan and procedures for administering **achievement and diagnostic assessments**; appropriate school **personnel** training, knowledge, resources and criminal background checks; teacher licensure; **fiscal officer** requirements; proof of property ownership or lease; liability insurance; satisfactory **health/safety and fire inspections**; and more. Sponsors must also conduct pre-opening school site visits for the year for which the assurances are provided.

Sponsors have the authority to place a charter school on **probation** (through the end of the current school year) after receiving from the school's governing authority reasonable assurances that action will be taken to remedy the conditions that warranted such probationary status.

Ohio law also specifically provides for the **termination or nonrenewal of contracts** between sponsors and charter schools. The reasons a sponsor may choose not to renew (or terminate at any time) a contract with a school at its expiration include "Failure to meet student performance requirements ..." and "Failure

to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management ...". Unfortunately, **authorizers are penalized for closing or not renewing contracts with schools – even if the decision is based on the school's underperformance.**

As state law has been modified in recent years to provide for greater sponsor accountability, the fees they receive from schools that help ensure adequate capacity to deliver the required services have remained capped at three percent of the total amount of payments for operating expenses that the school receives from the state.

The **Ohio Department of Education (ODE) is responsible for the oversight of all sponsors** ... from initial approval (and renewal) of charter school authorizers, to ongoing monitoring of effectiveness in fulfilling their roles. ODE's Office of Community Schools uses the **Sponsor Performance Review** – described by the department as **"a high-quality set of professional standards and a system of evaluation that lead to improved authorizer practices which support quality school outcomes"** – to measure sponsor capacity and compliance with statutory obligations. ODE has the ultimate authority to revoke a sponsor's approval to sponsor community schools.

77

Total number of Ohio charter school sponsors.

2

Number of comprehensive site visits Ohio authorizers must make to sponsored schools each year. Written reports of these site visits, which must occur while classes are in session, must be made and provided to the Department of Education on request.

10

Number of educational service centers (ESCs) that sponsor charter schools in Ohio.

50

Maximum number of charter schools an authorizer may sponsor under Ohio law (with an exception made for those that sponsored more than 50 at the time the cap was enacted; the one sponsor that currently authorizes more than 50 schools will eventually reach that cap through attrition)



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