

FRIENDS
OF
EDUCATION



CHARTER SCHOOL PROGRAM GUIDE

January 2021

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Additional Resources--Refer to website www.improvek-12education.org

Friends of Education’s mission is to improve the education of children. Improving K–12 education since 1999, Friends supports programs which emphasize foundational skills and critical thinking with demonstrated evidence of increasing student achievement and post-secondary readiness.

History:

Friends of Education started in 1999, under the name “Saving Children Through Education.” The initial focus of Saving Children Through Education was an under-performing grade school in North Minneapolis. Saving Children Through Education assisted this school, Ascension Grade School, in implementing a content-rich educational program and teacher professional development, which resulted in a significant increase in academic performance. Saving Children Through Education’s involvement with Ascension grade school resulted in changing the organization’s name to “Friends of Ascension”.

After the success of Ascension grade school, Friends of Ascension decided to expand its reach, while maintaining its stated mission to improve the education of children and authorize quality charter schools. Friends of Education’s mission directs all of its activities: its Charter School Mission is to improve the education of children through quality authorization of charter schools. Friends of Education authorizes charter schools which provide foundational skills, phonics-based reading program rich in literature, and a sequential math curriculum typified by the Saxon and Singapore math programs.

In 2009, Friends of Ascension changed its name to “Friends of Education” to reflect Friends’ broad-based interest in improving the education of children. Friends of Education is not a religious organization, nor does it promote any religious activity or teaching.

Vision

Friends of Education’s vision for its Charter School Mission is to establish, through a system of metrics-based accountability measures, a network of high-quality charter schools implementing a learning program rich emphasizing foundational skills and focused on and attaining student achievement when measured against resident district and state average performance.

Friends of Education is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit Minnesota corporation. Friends of Education is a member of the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits and is registered with the Minnesota Office of the Attorney General.

Learning Program Requirements - Why Foundational Skills?

Friends of Education authorizes only those charter schools which provide students foundational skills. Why? Because foundational knowledge is critical to life success.

A primary academic difference between the advantaged and disadvantaged child is vocabulary size. Advantaged high school graduates generally know eighty-thousand words, whereas disadvantaged students know half that. Does it matter? Absolutely.

Knowledge builds on knowledge, and obtaining that knowledge requires more than phonemic skill: it requires having a wide vocabulary in order to understand what you're reading. How do you obtain a wide vocabulary? It necessarily results from exposure to a correspondingly wide knowledge.

Bill Gates frequently addresses school students, telling them that wide reading and general knowledge are critical to competence. Why does he believe that? Bill Gates, after all, is indisputably a critical thinker engaging in creative competencies which some say are more important than knowing facts. But Bill Gates, and others like him, know a lot of facts. If he didn't he couldn't be such a critical, creative thinker. In fact, psychologists tell us that knowing more makes one better able to learn new things and to think critically — that critical thinking comes only after factual knowledge.

Moreover, independent studies repeatedly demonstrate that, where schools emphasize broad factual knowledge, students become more curious and engaged. They're being set-up for success.

Learning Program Requirements

Elementary schools must implement a curriculum which emphasizes foundational skills, a phonics-based reading program and a sequential math program such as Saxon or Singapore (these are examples). Middle schools must implement curriculum which prepares students for high-school success, and high schools must implement a program which prepares students for post-secondary success.

Adapted from *Why Core Knowledge Promotes Social Justice, You Can Always Look It Up — Or Can You*, and *Why General Knowledge Should be a Goal of Education in a Democracy*, all by E.D. Hirsch, Jr.

High-Quality Charter School Replication

Operators of high-performing charter schools are invited to apply to Friends of Education to establish another school.

Application

Friends of Education welcomes proposals from operators of high-quality charter schools. Friends of Education believes that the best indicator of future performance is past performance; consequently, the replication application for high-quality charter school replicators is simplified. See the *Replication Application* in Downloadable Resources on the website, www.improveK-12education.org.

Evaluation

Friends of Education performs an initial evaluation of the application. Applications which are incomplete or which demonstrate significant academic, fiscal, or operational deficiencies do not merit additional consideration and are so notified.

Site Visit & Interview

Applications meriting additional consideration are further evaluated by Friends of Education and its review team. Friends of Education schedules a site visit to the school which will be replicated. Friends of Education's site visit team includes experts with a wide-range of experience, including charter school operations, education, and finance. The site visit team also conducts the interview on site. The purpose of the interview is to respond to questions or concerns that the review team had in evaluating the application and conducting the site visit.

Post-Site Visit & -Interview Evaluation

The Friends of Education evaluation team makes a determination as to whether the replicators provide clear evidence of capacity to establish and operate new schools successfully while maintaining quality in existing schools. Approved applicants receive feedback to further improve continuous improvement. Denied applicants also receive feedback for consideration.

New Charter School Application Process

Friends of Education is committed to supporting successful and sustainable schools. To that end, Friends of Education endeavors to evaluate whether the charter school applicant group will likely develop a quality charter school and has established a multi-stage process to facilitate that evaluation. Experience demonstrates and Friends of Education recommends that the composite board possess a broad range of skill sets in order to successfully launch and sustain a quality school.

Pre-Application Informational Sessions: Friends of Education conducts informational sessions to review application requirements and common errors, address frequently asked questions, and respond to specific applicant questions. Participation in an informational session is recommended, not required. The application stages which are required are:

- 1. Letter of Intent.** Charter school developing groups must submit a Letter of Intent to Friends of Education. Friends of Education must receive the Letter of Intent no later than November 1st immediately preceding the application due date. The Letter of Intent must be signed and dated and include the following information: Name of School, Intended Grades to be Served, a statement that the school intends to submit an application by the next due date, and Contact Information; no other information should be submitted in the Letter of Intent. Friends of Education uses the Letter of Intent information to schedule sufficient Expert Reviewers to complete the application review process. Incomplete Letters of Intent or Letters of Intent received after November 1st render the developing group ineligible to submit an application for the next application due date. Refer to the website www.improvek-12education.org for the application due date and suggested (not required) Letter of Intent template.
- 2. Application.** Charter school developing groups must submit an application to Friends of Education in a specified format. Refer to the website www.improvek-12education.org for the current application and guidance; instructions and format requirements; timeline; budget and cash flow templates; and contact information.
- 3. Review.** Applicants are expected to respond to each application item in a comprehensive manner and follow the application and format requirements. Friends of Education staff perform a desk review upon receipt of each application. Applications which are incomplete, do not meet the learning program requirements, do not comply with the application and format requirements, or demonstrate significant fiscal deficiencies do not merit additional consideration, and are so notified.
- 4. Expert Review.** Applications meriting additional consideration are further evaluated by Friends of Education and its review team. Friends of Education contracts with external experts with a wide-range of experience, including charter school operations, education, governance, and finance in order to provide solid evaluation of the proposed charter school. Applications which demonstrate a thorough understanding of key issues and the capacity to successfully open a quality charter school are scheduled for an interview.
- 5. Interview.** The applicant's founders participate in an interview with the Friends of Education Charter School Committee and advisors, who review the expert reviewer's comments and scores. There are not pre-determined questions for the interview. The applicants should be prepared for specific questions regarding any aspect of their application. The purpose of the interview is to respond to questions or concerns that the review team had in evaluating the application and to determine whether the developing group has the capacity to implement the proposal.
- 6. Post-Interview Evaluation and Decision.** Friends of Education makes a wholistic determination as to whether the developing group has the capacity to successfully establish a high-quality charter school consistent with its proposal. Friends of Education informs charter school applicants of the decision, with feedback. For approved schools: note that Friends of Education requires, as part of its charter contract, that charter school board members have criminal background checks.

Between charter approval and school opening, Friends of Education monitors, on a monthly basis, the school's progress in completing start-up tasks, through a Start-Up Progress Form / Task List.

The Start-Up Progress Form / Task List consists of over 100 identified items in key areas, such as:

1. **Facilities**, such as conducting a needs assessments to determine the facility necessary to support the program
2. **Financial Management / Business Plan**, such as establishing appropriate policies and reporting systems
3. **Governance & Management**, such as adopting appropriate policies and job descriptions
4. **Learning Program**, such as aligning the curriculum with state standards and identifying local assessments to drive instruction
5. **Systems**, such as selecting finance and student information systems.
6. **School Culture**, such as developing student conduct policies and teacher evaluation protocols.
7. **Personnel & Policy Development**, such as hiring licensed staff and ensuring sufficient professional development
8. **Regulatory Issues**, such as reviewing applicable law and policy development.
9. **Special Education**, such as hiring special education director and teacher(s).
10. **Marketing**, such as creating and implementing a marketing plan to capture sufficient enrollment
11. **Accountability**, such as participating in goal setting
12. **Community Partnerships**, such as developing community relationships.

The current start-up progress form / task list is provided on the website:

www.improvek-12education.org

Charter Schools/How to Apply/New Schools/Downloadable Resources

School-Opening Conditions/Significant Target Dates

Friends of Education has identified six key start-up dates with related tasks (e.g. facility, school leader identification, enrollment, staff) which, if not met, create a rebuttable presumption that the school will not open that year. Friends provides multiple reminders to the school of these key target dates. In addition, Friends requires and monitors monthly financial statements as soon as the groups receive funds (which, in some cases, predates the federal grant). As an additional precaution, Friends requires a pre-opening evaluation to ensure each school is ready to open a quality charter school.

The Significant Target Dates/Tasks are:

March 1	School Leader Identified Facility secured
May 1	Database of interested students/families that is 125% of budgeted Enrollment
May 10	Significant renovations/build-out to facility have begun
May 31	75% of projected budgeted students officially enrolled
June 1	75% of teaching staff hired
July 1	125% of projected budgeted students officially enrolled

Where significant target dates are not met, the school board will submit a written plan to Friends of Education detailing how the condition will be remedied within thirty days and how the delay will impact the opening of the school. Where Friends does not believe the school is ready to open, Friends counsels the school to delay opening and, if necessary, intervenes to prevent the school from opening.

Friends of Education evaluates its charter schools in three primary areas:

1. Academic Performance
2. Fiscal Performance
3. Operations and Legal Compliance Performance

In addition to Friends of Education evaluating the degree to which the school is achieving its charter contract obligations related to academic, fiscal, and operational/legal performance, Friends of Education also evaluates:

1. Academic Performance: Is the school improving all pupil learning and all student achievement?

Academic Performance is evaluated based on multiple criteria:

Commissioner's Expectations for Public Schools: Friends of Education evaluates a school's academic performance in meeting or exceeding expectations established by the Commissioner for public schools.

Absolute Proficiency: Expecting proficiency for each student, Friends of Education evaluates the percentage of students meeting or exceeding state standards on the state assessment tests.

Comparative Proficiency: Expecting each charter school to fulfill its statutory obligation to improve student performance, Friends of Education evaluates how well the charter school performs compared to its resident district, and state average performance and may compare to a nearby district school that the charter school students would otherwise likely attend and other traditional districts.

Growth: Expecting growth for each student, Friends of Education evaluates the growth students achieve on the state and other assessments.

Achievement Gap: Expecting all students to achieve academic success, Friends of Education evaluates the degree to which traditionally-disadvantaged students achieve growth and proficiency.

Academic Governance: Friends of Education evaluates the school board's demonstration that it critically evaluates and strategically leads academic performance.

2. Fiscal Management: Is the school fiscally sound?

Fiscal Performance is evaluated based on multiple criteria:

Charter Contract Fiscal Obligations. Friends of Education evaluates the degree to which the school is achieving its financial management obligations contained in the charter contract.

External Audit: Friends of Education evaluates external audits and expects its schools to work towards elimination of deficiencies.

Fund Balance: Friends of Education evaluates a school's fiscal health based on its ability to pay unforeseen expenses.

State Finance Award: Friends of Education considers whether a charter school has received the Minnesota Department of Education Finance Award, which recognizes sound fiscal health and management policies and procedures.

Governance: Friends of Education evaluates the school board's demonstration that it pre-approves and maintains a balanced budget; reviews monthly and annual budget reports and requires explanations for out-of-budget spending; receives required board training; and has adequate time to review board materials.

3. Operations and Legal Compliance: Is the school well-managed and legally compliant?

Operations and Legal Compliance is evaluated based on four criteria: Compliance with Applicable Law, Minnesota Department of Education Audit Results, Charter Contract Reporting Obligations, and Leadership.

Charter schools must comply with all applicable laws, such as admissions, teacher licensing, and special education requirements. Friends of Education evaluates the degree to which the school complies with these requirements.

Effective operations and governance are fundamental to a quality charter school. Consequently, Friends of Education evaluates effective operations through attendance at board meetings, review of board meeting minutes, discussions with staff and other stakeholders, MDE audit results, and the adherence to charter requirements.

Friends of Education regularly monitors and evaluates other measures of school performance such as, near-term and long-term fiscal health metrics. These measures inform Friends of Education's oversight but generally are not used in determining charter renewal unless the measures impact charter school obligations contained in the charter contract.

Friends of Education engages in site visits as one tool in its oversight program. Site visits may be announced or unannounced. In addition, Friends of Education may hire educational experts to pose as parents interested in enrolling children in the school to also engage in site visits.

To ensure consistency in high standards and quality for the schools, Friends of Education applies a framework utilizing quality standards of academic achievement, financial management, and operational / legal accountability including:

1. School progress towards meeting charter contract goals.
2. School achievement on state assessments
3. School financial indicators
4. School health and safety factors
5. School compliance

Friends of Education provides written feedback to the school leader and board chair regarding the site visit. The feedback contains an evaluation both of selected charter contract requirements, such as status of academic outcomes and fiscal management, and of general school improvement areas not specified by the charter contract, such as school culture, lesson plans, and teacher evaluations. Where Friends of Education believes certain actions may lead to school improvement, but those actions are not required by the charter contract, such actions are identified as “recommended” for the school’s consideration. Similarly, where certain actions are mandatory, whether by law or the charter contract, those actions are noted as “required.”

Reporting Requirements

The charter contract sets forth numerous reporting requirements for authorized schools (generally found in Article VI).

To minimize the burden on high-performing well-managed schools, Friends of Education waives selected contract reporting requirements annually for schools which:

Attained a 90%+ compliance reporting rate for three consecutive years

and

obtained state recognition of compelling academic performance on state assessments or high-quality designation in the immediately preceding school year

and

received the state finance award in the immediately preceding school year

Charter contract reporting requirements are waived EXCEPT for the following:

- Monthly board minutes
- Monthly board packets
- Monthly financial statements
- Board member assurances
- Final budget for upcoming school year
- Annual report
- External audit
- Charter Renewal Proposed Goals
- Statutory or MDE required reporting items (e.g. World's Best Workforce).

Friends of Education provides written notice to schools which have earned the waiver.

Friends of Education may withdraw the waiver at any time if warranted, in Friends of Education's sole discretion. Examples of circumstances which may result in waiver withdrawal include, but are not limited to: change in leadership, loss of positive state designation, and unfavorable state designation.

Expansion Application

Friends of Education supports successful and sustainable schools and encourages expansions of its charter schools which demonstrate success and capacity for growth.

Due Date to Friends of Education: July 1st (approximately 14 months prior to expansion implementation)

Response from Friends of Education to School: September 1st

Requirements: Expansions – for additional sites or grades – require an application to Friends of Education. The application to Friends of Education is only the first step in the expansion process. If Friends of Education approves the application, Friends of Education is required by law to submit an affidavit to the Minnesota Department of Education for approval. The then-current affidavit may require additional information not addressed herein, and in completing its review, the Minnesota Department of Education may similarly request additional information.

TIP: Friends of Education believes that one of the best indicators of future performance is past performance and, consequently, places great emphasis on and comprehensively evaluates a school's historical performance.

The application to Friends of Education must contain:

- I. **Evaluation of Planned Growth:** Provide an explanation of how the expansion will affect the school facilities, staff, and enrollment. A quality application will include:
 - a. **Facility:** Describe how the expansion will affect the school's overall facilities plan and comply with health and safety regulations. Identify the potential location and the impact of the expansion on the school's transportation plan, demonstrating ability for access to the school by disadvantaged students.
 - b. **Staff:** Describe how the expansion will affect staffing needs, including the need to hire additional teachers, managers and support staff to complete the expansion. Include brief job descriptions for each staffing change. Attach a copy of the current staff organizational chart and proposed staff organizational chart for the expansion. The current staff organizational chart should include current teacher names and assignments. The proposed staff organizational chart should include 1) current staff names and assignments for existing staff, 2) position titles and assignments for proposed new staff (ex. teacher – social studies), and 3) clearly identify which staff is to be hired in which year.
 - c. **Need:** Provide evidence of need. Indicate by grade, the school's prior year and current student enrollment, waiting list number, and projected enrollment for four years (by site, if applicable). Provide evidence for the projected enrollment with the expansion. Demonstrate board, parents and staff support for the expansion. Identify existing public schools that serve the same grades in the targeted area and why the expansion will serve an unmet need.
- II. **Evaluation of Current School Academic and School Performance:** Provide an evaluation of school performance. A quality application will include:
 - a. **Academic Performance:** Provide evidence of improving all pupil learning and all student achievement, including, by subgroup and consolidated: (1) meeting the Commissioner's Expectations for All Public Schools; (2) significant student growth on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments for the preceding three years, (3) a summary of the three most recent years of the school's performance data on state assessments showing the school is improving all pupil learning and all student achievement, and (4) the extent to which the school has attained its charter contract academic goals. Evidence must include at least one full year of state assessment performance data for all grades chartered.

- b. **Staff:** Provide evidence that current teaching staff is appropriately licensed or have received appropriate waivers from the Minnesota Board of Teaching.
- c. **Governance & Management:** Provide a copy of the current school board roster which includes member names and positions on the board. Describe the extent to which the school has a successfully functioning board including, but not limited to, adequacy of membership (by skill sets in chart form showing experience in charter schools, curriculum, instructions, management, facilities, finance, and law), fulfillment of training requirements (dates and session description), and extent of member involvement in board and committee meetings. For grade expansions: Explain why the school did not initially or with a subsequent grade expansion) request a charter for the expansion grades sought and the extent to which it reflects adequate planning and governance/management capacity. Provide evidence that the school has the management capacity to implement the expansion, while maintaining quality in the existing school program, which includes meeting reporting obligations, below.

- III. **Evaluation of Legal and Fiscal Performance:** A charter school requesting an expansion must provide evidence of being financially sound and has the financial and operational capacity to implement the expansion. A quality application will:
- a. **Reporting:** Identify the extent to which the school met all MDE and charter contract obligations during the existing contract period and, if less than three years, the preceding contract term, and explanation for any deficiencies and extent to which they reflect adequate growth capacity.
 - b. **External Audit:** Provide evidence that any findings in past audits have been corrected and that the two most recent audits reflect no material weaknesses or significant deficiencies.
 - c. **Fund Balance:** Evidence that the school has a fund balance exceeding 20%.
 - d. **Financing:** Evidence that the financing the school needs to implement the proposed expansion exists.
 - e. **Budget:** Evidence that the expansion will become self-sustaining. Five budgets (revenue and expenditure budgets) must be submitted. Budget one is the current year. Budget Two is the subsequent year without expansion. Budget Three is the subsequent year with the expansion proposal. Budget Four is the second expansion year; Budget Five is the third expansion year. Budgets 1, 2, 3 and Budgets 3, 4, 5 must be displayed side-by-side for ease of comparison (two side-by-sides; Budgets 1-3 and Budgets 3-5). Each budget must contain the anticipated end-of-year fund balance. Budgets are complete year budgets and are line- item reports, subtotaled by program. A narrative must be attached that contains a detailed description of the budgetary changes that result in the expansion budget. Detailed budget development assumptions are also contained in the narrative.

Temporary Site Expansions: For **temporary** additional site expansions (e.g. when a facility build-out or addition is delayed) after the initial contract term has expired, Friends of Education may consider, **if warranted**, deviations from the stated requirements as long as the school demonstrates overall academic, fiscal, and operational strength. For example, Friends of Education may approve a temporary site expansion when a charter school does not have a 20% fund balance but presents a credible plan to achieve it.

Additional Site Expansions: Friends of Education may consider deviations from the stated requirements for additional site requests due to normal growth. For example, Friends of Education does not expect a K-12 charter school to lease all space needed for its K-12 program in its early years and may consider exceptions to accommodate the charter school's normal and anticipated growth, in Friends of Education's discretion.

Mergers: Friends of Education may also consider deviations from the stated requirements for additional site and grade level expansions due to mergers where the resulting school offers no additional grades other than those currently offered by the merging schools and/or where the resulting number of sites does not exceed the combined number of the existing sites.

Expansion Application Evaluation Rubric

Friends of Education analyzes the evidence in all areas of school performance and planning when considering a charter school's application for site expansion or grade expansion.

I. Planned Growth		
	Meets Expectations	Does Not Meet Expectations
a. Facility Describes how the expansion plan will affect the school's overall facility plan.		
Identifies the potential location		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the potential location will adequately serve students</i>		
Identifies the impact the expansion will have on school's transportation plan.		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the school has adequately evaluated the expansion's impact on the school's transportation plan.</i>		
Demonstrates access to the school by disadvantaged students.		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the application persuasively demonstrates that the school will reach-out and serve all students</i>		
b. Staff Describes how the expansion will affect staffing needs (additional teachers, managers and support staff).		
Includes a brief job description for each staffing change.		
Provides a current organizational chart which includes staff names and assignments		
Provides a proposed staff organizational chart for the expansion and includes:		
1. Current staff names and assignments for existing staff		
2. Position titles and assignments for proposed new staff (ex. teacher—math)		
3. Identification of which staff is to be hired in which year		
c. Need Provides evidence that the expansion will serve an unmet need.		
Identifies, by grade, the school's prior year and current student enrollment, waiting list numbers, and projected enrollment for four years (by site, if applicable).		
Provides evidence for the projected enrollment with the expansion.		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the enrollment projections are persuasively demonstrated.</i>		
Provides evidence of board support for the expansion.		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which board support is persuasively demonstrated.</i>		
Provides evidence of parent support for the expansion.		

Expansion Application

<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which parental support is persuasively demonstrated.</i>		
Provides evidence of staff support for the expansion.		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which staff support is persuasively demonstrated.</i>		
Identifies existing public schools that serve the same grades in the targeted area and why the expansion will serve an unmet need.		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the application persuasively demonstrates that the expansion will serve an unmet need (e.g. no area schools serving grades, etc.).</i>		
II. Current School Academic and School Performance		
	Meets Expectation	Does Not Meet Expectation
a. Academic Performance		
1. Provides evidence of meeting the Commissioner's Expectations for All Public Schools		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the school's performance persuasively demonstrate that the school is improving all pupil learning and all student achievement.</i>		
2. Significant student growth on state assessments for the previous three years.		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the school's state growth data persuasively demonstrates that the school is improving all pupil learning and all student achievement</i>		
3. Summary of school's state assessment academic performance data for the last three years showing the school is improving all pupil learning and all student achievement.		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the school's historical state assessment data persuasively demonstrates improving all pupil learning and all student achievement.</i>		
4. Extent to which charter contract goals are satisfied and achieved.		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the school persuasively demonstrates charter contract goal fulfillment.</i>		
State academic performance data for at least one year for all chartered grades.		
b. Staff		
1. Current teaching staff is appropriately licensed or has waiver status per MN Board of Teaching.		
c. Governance & Management		
Current governing board members and positions.		
Describes functional governing board with skill sets and experience in charter schools, curriculum, instruction, management, facilities, finance, and law.		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the board adequately functions.</i>		
<i>Describe the degree to which the board has adequate experience: to what degree is the board comprised of experience charter schools, curriculum, instruction, management, facilities, finance, and law</i>		
Board member training compliance.		

Expansion Application

All board members received required initial board training		
All board members received ongoing board training		
Extent of board member participation in board and committee meetings.		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the board members actively participate in committees.</i>		
If a grade expansion, an explanation why the school did not initially request a charter for the expansion grades sought and the extent to which failing to do so reflects adequate planning, governance and management capacity.		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the explanation reflects adequate capacity.</i>		
School has management capacity to implement the expansion and performs its obligations.		
III. Legal and Fiscal Performance		
	Meets Expectation	Needs Improvement
a. Reporting & Legal Compliance Identify compliance with MDE obligations during existing contract period and, if less than 3 years, during the preceding contract period term.		
Identify compliance with charter contract obligations during existing contract period and if less than 3 years, during the preceding contract period term.		
Explanation for any deficiencies and extent to which they reflect adequate growth capacity.		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the school persuasively demonstrates adequate capacity through compliance with MDE and charter reporting obligations.</i>		
b. External Audit Evidence that findings in past audits that have been corrected.		
The two most recent external audits reflect no material weaknesses or significant deficiencies.		
c. Fund Balance The school has a fund balance exceeding 20%.		
d. Financing Funding is available to implement the proposed expansion.		
e. Budget 1. The expansion will become self-sustaining.		
2. Submission of five (5) budgets (revenue and expenditure) with line items and sub-total program totals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current Year • Subsequent Year Without Expansion • Subsequent year With Expansion Proposal • Second Year of Expansion • Third Year of Expansion 		
3. Budget development assumptions are detailed and included in the narrative.		

Expansion Application

4. Detailed description of the budgetary changes that result in the expansion project.		
5. Estimated end-of-year fund balance for each of the budgeted years.		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the budgets reflect reasonable income and expenses.</i>		

ADDITIONAL REVIEWER COMMENTS:

Early Learning Programs – Expansion Application

Due Date: March 1st (approximately 18 months prior to the implementation of the Early Learning Program)

Response from Friends of Education to School: Notice of denial or site visit will be scheduled within 60 days. Final determination by September 1st.

Requirements:

An Early Learning Program (pre-K, preschool, or early childhood health and development screening) requires an application to Friends of Education.

The application to Friends of Education is only the first step in the process. If Friends of Education approves the application, Friends of Education is required by the Minnesota Department of Education to submit a request to the Department for official recognition of the program.

The application to Friends of Education must contain **all** components of the expansion application found in the Charter School Program Guide. In addition, an application for an early childhood program must also contain:

- **For Early Childhood Health and Developmental Screening:** Provide a comprehensive description of the school's plan and capacity to provide an Early Childhood Screening program in accordance with Minn. Stat. 121A.16-121A.10 and Minnesota rules 3530.3000, 3530.3300, and 3530.3400.
- **For Early Learning Programs, the application must include:**

I. Program Description.

- a. **Early Learning Programs.** Describe the type and provide a comprehensive description of the program including:
 - (1) Key components / Core qualities
 - (2) Philosophy
 - (3) Staffing licensure with file folder number and other credentials
 - (4) Minimum Staff: Child Ratios not to exceed 1:10
 - (5) Maximum Class Sizes, not to exceed 20
 - (6) Teacher content knowledge in early childhood curriculum content, assessment, instruction
 - (7) Describe the licensed staff development on early learning curriculum and programs, instructional practice and assessment completed in the past five years.
 - (8) Daily (or weekly if the daily program differs) schedule illustrating time dedicated to various activities
 - (9) Instructional Methods: how program will be provided to ensure high-quality learning program.

II. Enrollment Process & Transition Plan.

- a. **Enrollment Process.** Describe the enrollment process for the early learning program and the kindergarten enrollment process.
- b. **Transition Plan.** For early learning program students who are accepted into the kindergarten program, explain the transition plan which should include meaningful planning and coordination with kindergarten teachers and engages families in a variety of ways to support the child's learning and successful transition. For early learning program students who are not enrolled into the kindergarten program, describe a plan for providing guidance to families for alternative programs.

III. **Assessments.** Describe the assessment process used to measure individual student progress in all early learning program classes and the instrument(s) used, such as High Scope Child Observation Record (COR), Teaching Strategies Gold, or Work Sampling System.

- a. Describe the domains the assessment will assess, including language and literacy and mathematical thinking.
- b. Describe the timing of the assessments. Note that the assessment must be used at program entrance and program exit.

Early Learning Programs – Expansion Application

- IV. **Instructional Practice.** Describe an instructional practice plan aligned with the state early childhood learning standards and kindergarten standards that is based on early childhood research and professional practice focused on a children’s cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills and development and prepared children for the transition to kindergarten, including early literacy skills.
- a. Describe how the program content and instructional practices are aligned with the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress: Minnesota’s Early Learning Standards (ECIPs).
 - b. Describe the curriculum to be used.
 - c. Describe how the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress: Minnesota’s Early Learning Standards (ECIPs) are incorporated into the program
 - d. Provide an overview of instructional practice to support children’s early literacy skills development.
- V. **Community-Based Services.** Provide a description how the program coordinates with community organizations and how those resources are shared with families.
- VI. **Screening.** Describe how and where participating children receive developmental screening. Provide a plan for those children who do not successfully complete early childhood screening.
- VII. **Success.** Describe how the school will determine if the program is successful.

Expansion – Early Learning Programs Evaluation Rubric

Friends of Education analyzes the evidence in all areas of school performance when considering a charter school’s application for site expansion or grade expansion.

Expansion Application – complete Expansion Application Rubric, then proceed		
	Meets Expectations	Does Not Meet Expectations
Program:		
Early Childhood Health & Screening: application describes the school’s plan and capacity to provide a screening program in accordance with applicable law and rule.		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the application comprehensively describes the program to be provided and how the program will comply with all applicable law (e.g. an assurance of compliance is insufficient).</i>		
Early Learning Programs. Application contains:		
Key components/core qualities		
Philosophy		
Staffing licensure with file folder number		
Other staffing credentials		
Minimum Staff:Child ratios not to exceed 1:10		
Maximum class sizes, not to exceed 20		
Teacher content knowledge in early childhood curriculum content		
Teacher content knowledge in early childhood assessment		
Teacher content knowledge in early childhood instruction		
Staff development on early learning within the past five years		
Schedule illustrating time dedicated to various activities		

Early Learning Programs – Expansion Application

Instructional methods		
Enrollment and Transition:		
Describes the enrollment process for both the early learning program and the kindergarten program.		
Describes the transition plan to kindergarten.		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes meaningful planning and coordination with kindergarten teachers 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engages families in a variety of ways to support the child’s learning and successful transition 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan to provide guidance for families not enrollment in the school’s kindergarten program 		
Assessments		
Identifies the assessments to be used		
Describes the domains the assessment will assess		
Describes the timing of the assessments		
Instructional Practice		
Describes how the program content and instructional practices are aligned with the ECIPs		
Describes the curriculum to be used		
Describes how the ECIPs are incorporated into the program		
Provides a summary of the instructional practices to support the child’s early literacy skills development		
Community-Based Services		
Provides a description how the program coordinates with community organizations		
Describes how community organization resources are shared with families		
Screening		
Describes how and where participating children receive developmental screening.		
Provides a plan for those children who do not successfully complete early childhood screening.		
Success.		
Describes how the school will determine if the program is successful.		

QUALITATIVE REVIEWER COMMENTS: *Describe the degree to which the school has comprehensively and adequately described an early learning plan meeting the minimum state requirements.*

Change of Authorizer Application

The application and evaluation rubric for a change in authorizer application are available on Friends of Education's website, www.improvek-12education.org.

TIP: Friends of Education believes that one of the best indicators of future performance is past performance and, consequently, places great emphasis on and comprehensively evaluates a school's historical performance.

The application process is:

- **Application.** Charter schools must submit an application to Friends of Education. Refer to the website www.improvek-12education.org for the current application and guidance; instructions and format requirements; evaluation rubric; and contact information.
- **Review.** Applicants are expected to respond to each application item in a comprehensive manner. Friends of Education staff perform a review upon receipt of each application. Applications which are incomplete, do not meet the learning program requirements, do not demonstrate compelling academic achievement, do not demonstrate adequate fiscal management, or do not demonstrate adequate operational capacity, do not merit additional consideration and are so notified. Applications meriting additional consideration are further evaluated by Friends of Education and its review team. Friends of Education contracts with external experts, including charter school leaders who have completed successful expansion, with a wide-range of experience, including charter school operations, education, governance, and finance in order to provide solid evaluation of the expansion. Applications which demonstrate a thorough understanding of key issues and the capacity to successfully expand are scheduled for a site visit and interview.
- **Site-Visit.** Friends of Education schedules a site visit. School personnel participating in the site visit should be prepared for specific questions regarding any aspect of their application. The purpose of the site-visit is to respond to questions or concerns raised in evaluating the application and to determine whether the school is or has the capacity to be a high-quality charter school.
- **Post-Site-Visit Evaluation and Decision.** Friends of Education makes a wholistic determination as to whether the school has demonstrated improving all pupil learning and all student achievement, whether the school is fiscally well-managed, and whether the school demonstrates operational capacity. Friends of Education informs the charter school applicants of the decision, with feedback.

Communications and Remediation

Friends of Education believes that communication, from and to the school, is critical to the relationship between school and authorizer and to prevent “surprise”.

Communications may be:

School Initiated. If the School fails to make adequate progress towards achieving its academic outcomes / goals, financial targets, or comply with applicable law or other requirements, the school may at any time prepare and implement an improvement plan to overcome such deficiencies. The school may at any time submit the plan to Friends of Education for review and comment prior to adoption and implementation.

Friends of Education Initiated. If Friends has a concern about the school, or if the School fails to make adequate progress towards achieving academic outcomes / goals, or to meet financial performance requirements, or to comply with applicable law, or other requirements, Friends shall provide the following notices, as applicable.

Notice to School Leader or Board Chair. Friends shall notify the school leader or board chair of area(s) of concern for correction. Friends may specify a target date for correction.

Formal Notice to School. If the situation remains uncorrected without reasonable explanation, or if the situation involves an urgent concern, Friends of Education will formally notify the school board of the area(s) of concern for correction and may ask the school board to adopt a specific performance improvement plan. If Friends of Education requires the School Board to retain a third-party investigation, the school shall retain the investigator within ten (10) days of such requirement, in addition, the third party investigator must be acceptable to Friends of Education and the School Board shall authorize such investigator to provide status reports to and communicate with Friends of Education. Friends of Education specifies a target date for correction which may, if circumstances warrant, be amended.

Notice to School Board of Charter Revocation/Termination. Friends of Education initiates notice whereby charter authorization will be withdrawn pursuant to the charter contract.

Charter Contract Amendment Process

Occasionally, circumstances may warrant a charter contract amendment.

Schools may request charter contract amendments. Friends of Education may also, on occasion, request a charter contract amendment.

As provided by the charter contract, all charter contract amendments must be in writing.

Request: A charter school may request a charter contract amendment by submitting the request, in writing, to Friends of Education. The request should clearly explain the amendment being sought and the rationale.

TIP: for significant changes, include a red-line of the contract provision.

Decision: The timing of any amendment consideration depends upon the circumstances and will be determined by Friends of Education on a case-by-case basis.

Please note that, generally, Friends of Education does not amend charter contract requirements, including academic goals or targets, due to failure to achieve them or failure in making progress towards achieving them without other compelling factors (e.g. identified state assessment is discontinued). Failure to achieve charter contract requirements, including goals and targets, will be considered in the charter renewal process.

By September 1st of the school year in which the charter contract terminates, the School shall submit a renewal application to Friends of Education which shall contain three parts: (1) School Performance. An analysis and evaluation of the School's performance under the charter contract, which shall include a comprehensive evaluation of each charter contract goal for each year of the charter contract, as well as an evaluation of governance performance, compliance with reporting obligations, and fiscal management, (2) Proposed Goals. A proposal for goals for the following charter contract period; the goals must be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound, and must be designed to meet or exceed expectations adopted by the Commissioner for public schools; and (3) Other Information. Any other information the School desires Friends to consider. The School agrees to provide to Friends documentation supporting the School's evaluation if requested by Friends. As provided under Reporting Requirements, Friends of Education may, by written notice to the school, waive the renewal application – except for Proposed Goals – for high-performing well-managed schools.

Friends will notify the School within four weeks of receipt of the School's external audit (final, not draft) for the most recently completed fiscal year as to whether Friends intends to offer the School a renewal charter contract.

Improving all pupil learning and all student achievement is the most important factor Friends will consider in determining contract renewal, which determination shall be based substantially on the school's attainment of its academic outcomes and goals identified in the charter contract. Friends will consider other factors in its renewal determination, which factors are secondary to improving all pupil learning and all student achievement. Specifically, Friends will consider the achievement of statutory purposes (other than improving all pupil learning and all student achievement), and financial and operational performance obligations and compliance with applicable law. The school will be eligible for renewal only if the school has improved pupil performance and student achievement, notwithstanding superior performance in financial, operations, or legal compliance factors.

Charter Termination or Non-renewal

Friends of Education terminates and does not renew charters for failure to improve all pupil learning and all student achievement, failure to meet fiscal management standards, failure to comply with applicable law, and other violations of the charter contract.

As discussed under “Charter Renewal,” improving all pupil learning and all student achievement is the most important factor Friends will consider in determining contract renewal, which determination shall be based substantially on the school’s attainment of its academic outcomes and goals identified in the charter contract. Friends will consider other factors in its renewal determination, which factors are secondary to improving all pupil learning and all student achievement. Specifically, Friends will consider the achievement of statutory purposes (other than improving all pupil learning and all student achievement), and financial and operational performance obligations and compliance with applicable law. The school will be eligible for renewal only if the school has improved pupil performance and student achievement, notwithstanding superior performance in financial, operations, or legal compliance factors.

If the charter is terminated, the charter school must be dissolved. Similarly, if a charter is not renewed due to the charter school’s failure to achieve academic goals, failure to meet fiscal management standards, failure to comply with applicable law, and other violations of the charter contract the charter school must be dissolved.

Friends of Education complies with all laws relating to charter termination and non-renewal.

Friends of Education believes that it has a duty to the state of Minnesota in exercising charter school oversight responsibilities. In furtherance of this duty, Friends of Education has adopted a conflicts of interest policy which:

- Prohibits individuals involved in Friends of Education charter school oversight or decision-making, or individuals working on behalf of Friends of Education in any aspect of charter school oversight or decision-making, from participating in any discussion or decision involving an authorized charter school or a charter school applicant, in which the individual has a financial, personal, or other interest.
- Prohibits individuals involved in Friends of Education charter school oversight or decision-making, or individuals working on behalf of Friends of Education in any aspect of charter school oversight or decision-making, from working in any capacity or volunteering in any capacity at an authorized charter school.
- Requires objective, merit-based decisions in all aspects of charter school oversight.

Pursuant to Minnesota law, Friends of Education's role *vis-à-vis* its authorized charter schools is limited to oversight: Friends of Education oversees the school board's management and operation of the school. Specifically, Friends of Education monitors and evaluates the fiscal, operational, and student performance of its authorized schools and holds schools accountable for their performance. Following are Friends of Education's guiding principles in furtherance of this statutory duty:

- Friends of Education does not manage or operate any charter school. Friends of Education monitors and evaluates school performance and takes no action making it responsible for school performance.
- No member of Friends of Education or any individual working on behalf of Friends of Education in any aspect of charter school oversight or decision-making may be on the board of an authorized charter school.
- No member of Friends of Education or any individual working on behalf of Friends of Education in any aspect of charter school oversight or decision-making may be employed by, does contracting work with, or volunteer at an authorized charter school.
- Any technical assistance offered by Friends of Education to its authorized schools is voluntary and not required.
- Friends of Education strives to minimize burdens on charter schools in conducting oversight.
- Friends of Education oversight decisions are merit-based.

Introduction

This guidance establishes the process by which Friends of Education strives to address complaints regarding its authorized schools.

As a charter school authorizer, Friends of Education is required to monitor and evaluate the fiscal, operational, and student performance of a school, Minn. Stat. 124E.10 Subd. 3. Where a school fails to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management, commits violations of law, or fails to meet the required pupil performance requirements, the authorizer, after complying with statutory notification and hearing requirements, may cancel the charter of the school, Minn. Stat. 124E.10 Subd. 4. The Minnesota Commissioner of Education is also empowered to terminate the charter of a school with a history of repeated or major violations of law, financial mismanagement, or failure to meet required pupil performance requirements, Minn. Stat. 124E.10 Subd. 4(c). Accordingly, Friends of Education seriously considers and reviews allegations of illegality or failure to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management and, if circumstances warrant, allegations regarding failure to meet pupil performance requirements¹ relating to its authorized schools.

Procedure

- (a) Notice of Complaint. The complaint must identify the complainant and provide a method of contact. Friends of Education will not investigate oral or anonymous complaints. IF applicable, the complaint must specifically authorize Friends of Education to review any student information or documentation in the school's possession relevant to the inquiry.
- (b) Notice of Receipt. Friends of Education will generally acknowledge receipt of the complaint.
- (c) Reasonable Inquiry. Friends of Education will conduct a reasonable inquiry for the purpose of verifying whether the allegations provide sufficient evidence to establish the alleged violation(s) of law or fiscal mismanagement.¹ The extent and manner of the reasonable inquiry is in Friends of Education's discretion. If the reasonable inquiry provides sufficient evidence to establish the alleged violation(s) of law or fiscal management,¹ Friends of Education will notice the school and require action as necessary and appropriate, in Friends of Education's discretion.
- (d) Friends of Education Response. Although the length of the reasonable inquiry will vary depending upon the scope, complexity, and specificity of the complaint at issue, Friends of Education's goal is to respond in writing to the notice within thirty days. If circumstances warrant, Friends of Education may require additional time, in which case it will generally advise the complainant.

¹ Attainment of pupil performance requirements is generally a factual inquiry, evaluated throughout the term of the charter, and generally not subject to point-in-time grievance; however, if warranted by the circumstances, Friends of Education will seriously consider and review allegations regarding failure to meet pupil performance requirements.

