

**Michigan Association of Public School Academies
(MAPSA)**

Strategic Plan for 2020



MAPSA

Michigan's Charter School Association

Background

MAPSA, a non-profit 501(c)3, was founded in 1996 just shortly after the first charter school opened its doors in 1994. The vision then was to be a membership driven advocacy organization committed to promoting the development of the ideal environment for school choice to thrive. As a bi-partisan membership organization, now serving 300+ charter schools providing education to 155,000 families in Michigan, that vision hasn't changed.

As the charter movement celebrates 25 years during this strategic period, MAPSA strives to ensure that charter schools are recognized for leading the way in education reform. As a member driven organization, we will continue to advocate for the charter ideals that will empower the true innovation that will inspire quality across all sectors of education.

In the last 20 years of MAPSA, we have advocated for an environment that allows choice to thrive. We have fought to protect the autonomy of charters schools in exchange for greater accountability. We have made significant gains in closing the funding equity gap that still remains. We have built a respected brand in the legislature by acting with integrity. We have established MAPSA as an important voice for the media in the public arena. And, we have continued to take on the strong coalition of organizations that oppose charter schools purely on the basis on their existence.

In the last 20 years, in partnership with our members, we have proven that charter schools are a relevant and meaningful contributor to education reform in Michigan. The next 20 years requires greater proof of excellence where expectations are not limited by any geographic area or background of a child. We believe that the implementation of a strong A-F accountability system will be a catalyst for displaying charter school success. Yet, achieving this system may be the greatest challenge of all.

In the next five years, we are confident in our ability to leverage the experiences of our members, unify their voices and support them in surpassing their goals. Our advocacy will be influenced by the needs of the charter community – a community of educators, board members, parents and students.

Our dedicated team will embrace servant leadership to enrich the lives of individuals and to build stronger communities through education. We will listen, empathize, promote awareness, build consensus and community, conceptualize the impact of policy, maintain the foresight necessary to lead into the future, be good stewards of the movement, and live out our commitment to the growth of every individual within the charter movement.

As Michigan sets out to be in the Top 10 in 10, MAPSA will leverage the Innovators in Education academic arm to ensure that best practices piloted and proven in charters are shared across all sectors. As our state continues to realize the new challenges in educating today's youth, particularly those in poverty struck communities, MAPSA will continue to seek support to our members in finding collaborative solutions.

Our Vision

MAPSA believes that every child in Michigan deserves a choice for a quality education. In the next five years, we will lead the effort to ensure access to quality education choices for all Michigan children by advocating for and supporting an environment that empowers creative thought, fosters innovation, and leads to the implementation of practices that deliver meaningful educational outcomes.

We believe that charter schools provide the opportunity to change the trajectory of education in Michigan. We see it as our vision to help the charter vision come to life. It's a vision that is half-lived now by the actions inside of each school. We strive to see it all lived out in the next five years.

As you enter into any charter school across the state of Michigan, you quickly understand that kids are at the heart of it. You don't know quite how to explain how you know it, but you feel it. Welcomed by a smile that leads to small talk around the achievement poster hung in the entry, be it with a leader, teacher, parent or student, you hear the pride that comes with being part of the charter school community. Looking around, you feel the creativity and passion that inspired the student work that is covering the walls and a peek inside a classroom of students actively engaged in learning brings a quick and lasting smile. And, you can't help but to be a bit envious of the team that gets to spend their day with these amazing kids!

As you take a walk around town and engage with members of the community, they will tell you they value having the choice of unique models of education to best serve the students of the community. Parents will brag about the success of their charter graduates and the opportunity a different approach to learning granted them. And, without fail, they will sing the praises of the magic that teachers deliver every day and the impact it has had on building a strong community of educated kid. Soon after, you'll remember that envy you felt of those teachers that get the opportunity to teach these amazing kids and wish you had their gift.

As you take in the landscape of education around Michigan, you realize that charter schools have found their place in successfully contributing to the success of all schools in Michigan. Charter schools dream big for students and lead on innovation, successfully fulfilling their purpose of inspiring solutions that aren't yet even imagined.

Innovative strategies that are proving to raise achievement for all students are prevalent across charter and traditional schools. You recognize a charter educator wherever you go because they are the first person to admit that we haven't achieved success until we've achieved failure. They have learned to celebrate the setbacks of innovation, embracing them as the first step to discovering greatness, and are revered in the community for the ability to lead through defeat.

As the charter school community and stakeholders discuss the future of charter schools, it is clear that when true innovation is embraced, supported and owned as a responsibility to kids, the unimaginable can be achieved.

Our Mission

Our mission is to support charter schools in improving educational outcomes for Michigan's children by advancing quality education through choice and innovation.

The Charter Ideals

"We ought to be impatient because we have not made the changes in education that we need to make. The movement's soul is not about new school models or pedagogy or standards or technology. It's about our children's lives." – Howard Fuller

Charter schools are a necessary and permanent model for continuous improvement for all public schools; to fulfill this purpose charter schools must have the flexibility to be innovative.

At the heart of a successful charter school are freedom, resources and quality: freedom for the school to operate independently and for teachers and families to select it; human and financial resources that enable it to succeed; and the expectation that all its students will gain the skills and knowledge they need and that society expects.

Student success must be measured in a meaningful way, reflective of the uniqueness of students and the varying paths to achievement.

All parents, regardless of residence, race, wealth or heritage, should be able to choose among diverse, high quality, equitably funded educational options and are in the best position to make that decision.

Systems of accountability must set standards of performance while allowing space for managing risk that is inherent to innovation.

A robust system of multiple authorizers, anchored by strong accountability, will enable more dynamic reform through innovation and keeping students first.

Key Considerations

In each strategic initiative, we will work to include the following categories of key activities we have identified as important for reaching our vision. Initiatives will be most successful when they are implemented with fidelity, and are inclusive of every key activity as it relates to the strategic initiative.

Advocate

Develop and implement a grassroots advocacy and communications strategy to promote progressive policies and practices that support our goal of a quality education for every child.

Support

Provide support and access to resources that will enable chartered public schools to deliver on the original promise of innovation and excellence in education that can in turn, benefit every child.

Connect

Connect individuals, convene groups, and facilitate initiatives to foster creative problem solving and innovation.

Build

Build the capacity of MAPSA and our member schools to support quality, innovation and advocacy by developing resources and infrastructure to achieve our vision and goals.

Strategic Focus Areas

Using feedback from our board, our members, our internal staff, and research on school quality, we have chosen to impact our vision by implementing the following strategic focus areas. By selecting these focus areas, we are leveraging resources in a way that has the most impact on a broad range of outcomes.

Promote and Preserve the Charter Ideals

The charter ideals are the foundation of the optimum environment for choice. At heart of the charter movement is community and it is the responsibility of the charter movement to meet the needs of the community. Charter schools do not exist merely as another choice. Charter schools exist because they offer unique approaches to education yielding greater student engagement and success.

Charter schools are accountable. Yet, the trade-offs for accountability have not yet been recognized in autonomy. Overused policy and regulations without effective implementation will stagnate innovation and perpetuate the status quo - a status quo in which less than 50% of students in Michigan are proficient in nationally normed testing. To change our trajectory of education in Michigan, innovation must be incentivized, not stifled. Choice must be embraced and supported appropriately, particularly financially.

We believe that our greatest offense and defense in achieving and protecting the charter ideals is to **build a recognized brand of quality** within the Michigan charter movement. Further, we must continue to **nurture our position of influence**. And, finally, **we must leverage regulatory and legal measures** to address roadblocks to innovation. To accomplish this, we will:

- **Develop strategic partnerships with organizations having shared beliefs.** To more effectively advocate for the necessary reforms in Michigan, MAPSA will proactively develop strategic partnerships with organizations across the state that share a similar belief. These partnerships must extend beyond the charter movement, leveraging common ground among traditional and private education groups. Building on a bi-partisan philosophy, MAPSA must engage with organizations on both sides of an issue and lead on finding solutions of mutual benefit.
- **Become a recognized resource invited to critical conversations.** As innovators, charter experience must be represented in all critical conversations surrounding education. MAPSA must actively engage member feedback to inform this dialogue and serve as a conduit for collaboration solutions. MAPSA must be willing to listen, conceptualize the impact and promote consensus to ensure forward progress is achieved.
- **Build an active and responsive grassroots and engagement strategy.** Education is key. MAPSA will listen, empathize and promote awareness around critical policy strengthening or threatening the charter ideals. While parents are at the heart of a strong grassroots strategy, we will be most effective by engaging them through the educators who are charter schools. We must recognize the value of those who are leading innovation each day and those who are customers of education. We must learn from these stakeholders the challenges in order to advocate for solutions. And we must make each individual's voice greater through a unified movement.
- **Proactively build awareness and support for the charter ideals among members of the legislature.** In the next five years, the legislature will see two new classes of House Representatives and members of the Senate. We will experience two lame duck years and a change in Governor. Building awareness around the charter ideals is a tireless effort. And, yet, it's perhaps the most important role for MAPSA in fulfilling our purpose. The coming years will require evidence of performance, bi-partisan collaboration and diligent monitoring to ensure the legislature is a good steward of the choice movement.
- **Implement a proactive PR strategy.** In the past few years, the media has fueled expansive attacks on charter schools in Michigan. This fueling of the fire has spun messages of incoherence and avoided the truths of the impact of a dynamic environment of choice. To lead the charter movement into the future, MAPSA must implement a proactive public relations strategy that goes beyond today's discussions. MAPSA must maintain foresight on future conversations and lead ahead of them. We will hold strong to not falling trap to the fire and instead inspiring our own fury of messaging around the charter ideals.

- **Leverage grassroots and engagement strategies to promote the charter brand.** As we seek to strengthen the brand of charter schools, we must first start within. We must embrace the voices of our educator workforce, parents and students to tell the story of charter schools. Data can show impact on outcomes. Real stories can show impact on life. We must evoke a sense of pride to every educator who is part of a charter school and to every parent who has chosen a charter and empower them to tell the charter story.

Lead on Quality

The charter movement is built on a promise to deliver greater outcomes on student achievement. In Michigan, and across the nation, charter schools continue to achieve beyond the models of status quo and yet that achievement continues to be minimized. And, in Michigan, it will be until our state adopts an accountability system and performance measure reflective of the realities of success.

In Michigan, having less than 50% of students proficient, and some of the highest performing charters struggling to reach that goal when measured in both math and reading, leading on quality is a tough sell. Yet, we know that charter schools truly are making a difference in the lives of the youth they serve, particularly those that are among high-risk, at-need populations. A difference that a measure of growth illustrates progress of multiple grade levels in any one school year.

There is a reality of which can point to charters as “no better than” when measuring proficiency. And there is a reality that exists that quality is made up of more than growth. Proficiency is necessary. Proficiency must be attainable. And finding the innovation to make it attainable and then go beyond is the heart of the charter movement.

As Innovators in Education, charter schools must continue to dig deeper, push harder, and demand higher expectations. They must empathize with the challenges existent in the families served and lead on the solutions to overcome. They must embrace servant leadership and learn to truly understand this new generation of students and the new challenges in education that must be addressed.

As a movement built on community need and market forces, charters must lead on quality. To better measure quality, we must **advocate for a more meaningful measure of school performance that is reflective of growth and proficiency** and we must **embrace and manage the consequences of accountability**, understanding that failure is inherent to the movement. MAPSA will lead quality around the following:

- **Influence the design of a state accountability system and assessment strategy that is well understood and utilized both by educators and the public.** The newly passed Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is a catalyst for an A-F school performance measure to inform accountability. MAPSA will engage all stakeholders around the construction of this model in an effort to build consensus for calculations that are meaningful at the school level and that the assessment tool chosen produces usable data at the classroom level. It is vital that the state adopts a single accountability system relevant to all stakeholders and that incentivizes innovation to achieve beyond proficiency
- **Lead opening, closure and replacement strategies that move students to higher performing options.** Closure has too long been a process that assumes an ending. MAPSA must lead the development of strategies that ensure students are being served by increasingly higher performing schools. Charter schools are community schools, born out of community need. Yet, across the state, we can find underserved communities. We can find examples of schools revered for serving a community, despite the poor quality of outcomes. To achieve the charter vision, the next five years must look different. We must see coordination of efforts to ensure that schools are opened according to community need and we must see closure find a balance with replacement strategies. We must ensure that the interest of students remains at the heart of the charter movement, fulfilling the promise always to find innovative pathways to improving educational outcomes for all students.

Best Practice Strategies Influence Policy

In alignment with servant leadership, good policy must be coupled with the foresight to lead into the future. Be in legislated regulation or department policy, the future is defined by effective implementation. The innovations that have been piloted inside Michigan charter schools can prevent well-intentioned plans from falling flat. MAPSA's role in the next five years will be to **create meaningful opportunity to engage with members** so that we can learn from the innovation that is taking place and inform policy implementation from those lessons. Further, we must embrace our commitment to lead on quality and **lead collaborative solutions to critical challenges**. True success in education has not yet been realized. It is the responsibility of the charter movement to lead innovation to discover best practice strategies and corresponding policy supporting and incentivizing practices for all schools. To actively engage with our members and support them in leading innovation, MAPSA will:

- **Implement a strategic grant strategy aimed at supporting engagement opportunity and best practice pilot projects.** Innovation is costly at the front end. And, with high-stakes accountability it is also risky. Further, collaborative opportunities within charter schools are often limited due to the individualized nature of them. MAPSA seeks to engage members in collaboration to identify root cause hypotheses, developing strategies to overcome identified challenges and actively measure the impact of the activity. To most effectively do this, grant funding must be obtained, as the vision for significant reform is shaded based on limited financial resources available to charter schools.
- **Plan and coordinate networking and learning opportunities.** Through MAPSA's academic arm, Innovators in Education, we will create engagement opportunities among members that are cost effective and convenient. MAPSA will actively develop workgroups of high performing charter school representatives to collaborate and build grant proposals, strategies and/or to inform policy implementation practice. Towards achieving our vision for charter schools, we envision an environment in which competition for students is no longer a concern, but rather, education is seen as a community and all schools, charters and traditional, work together for students.

Strategic Objectives

The strategic focus areas above will work in coordination to lead us to achieving our strategic objectives.

- By June 30 of each year, MAPSA will engage with at least 10 organizations outside of the charter movement to promote the charter ideals or policy.
- By 2020, MAPSA will build a database of 50,000 grassroots advocates, with an engagement rate of 10% on each advocacy initiative.
- By June 30 of each odd numbered year, MAPSA will meet with all new members of the legislature, as well as members of the education committees and House and Senate leadership, to educate them on the charter ideals and issues currently facing charter schools.
- By June 30 of each year, MAPSA will coordinate at least 20 meetings between members of the legislature and charter community members including educators, board members and parents.
- By June 30 of each year, MAPSA's public relations strategy engagement, as measured by website hits and open rates, will grow by 20% from the previous year.
- By June 30, 2017, Michigan will pass an A-F performance measure aligned with statewide accountability.
- By June 30, 2017, Michigan will adopt a cohesive assessment strategy that is meaningful from the state level to the classroom level.
- By June 30 of each year, the percentage of students in higher performing charters, as defined by a grade of A, B or C, will increase by 10%.
- By June 30 of each year, the % of student attrition in charter schools will decrease by 10%.
- By June 30 of each year, the % of all students in a higher performing school, as defined by a grade of A, B or C, will increase by 5%.
- By June 30 of each year, MAPSA will apply for at least 20 grants supporting innovative solutions developed through collaborative opportunities.
- By June 30 of each year, MAPSA will engage in-person with at least 50% of all member schools.
- By June 30 of each year, MAPSA will host at least 5 focused workgroup collaboration opportunities.
- By 2020, the charter vision will be a reality.