Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is a Charter School?
A: A charter school is a free, public school open to any student who wishes to enroll. Charter schools receive additional flexibility under *Minnesota Statutes 124D.10* and in return are held accountable for results by authorizers. Charter schools are independent and have their own school boards separate from those of traditional district schools.

Q: What is an authorizer?
A: Authorizers provide oversight to charter schools by using a clear performance framework to monitor their financial, academic, and organizational <u>outcomes</u>, as well as compliance with the law. Authorizers protect charter school autonomy by leaving management decisions to schools' boards and directors. Authorizers push mediocre schools to improve, set high expectations for new schools, and close underperforming schools, all with the hope of improving students' access to a great education. As articulated by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers, "effective authorizing is critical to the quality of the charter school movement and to the lives of the more than two million children who attend charter schools nationwide."

Q: Why does the University of St. Thomas authorize charter schools?
A: The Authorizing Program is one way in which UST can work to meet its mission of *educating morally responsible leaders who think critically, act wisely, and work skillfully to advance the common good.* In its current strategic priorities document The University of St. Thomas expresses its desire to be 'in and of the city,' and to 'seek to find ways of being educationally relevant and responsive to the changing needs of our community.' We believe that quality authorizing assists in the creation and maintenance of quality schools and work toward a reality in which all students and families have access to high-quality educational options.

UST is uniquely positioned to offer a high quality authorizing program due to the large number of faculty members with expertise in areas relevant to authorizing. The current Charter Accountability Board brings together experts in school finance, accounting, gifted and special education, general education, and governance from across the various colleges and schools that make up the broader University.

Q: What criteria does UST use to select the schools in its network?
A: When determining whether an existing or developing charter school is a good fit for the UST authorizing program a rigorous, multi-step application process is employed and the areas of academic, financial, and organizational health are assessed.

For existing schools, this includes an examination of the application narrative, three years' worth of data on student performance, audits, annual reports, and a variety of other information. UST also conducts a site visit and interviews key school stakeholders. Developing schools hoping to secure their first charter undergo a similar process with a detailed application and founding-team interview to assist UST in determining whether the proposed charter has a high potential for

success.   The processes for both existing and developing schools are available in the Authorizer Manual posted in the Charter School Resources section of the website.

Once a school's quality or potential quality has been established, the authorizing program works to determine whether the school's mission and vision are compatible with that of UST:

Inspired by Catholic intellectual tradition, the University of St. Thomas educates students to be morally responsible leaders who think critically, act wisely, and work skillfully to advance the common good.

UST expects the schools in its network to have strong mission statements that answer community needs and offer something unique. The schools in the UST Charter School Network are expected to use their mission statements to drive their programmatic success.

Q: Are the charter schools authorized by the University of St. Thomas 'lab' schools?
A: The schools in the UST Charter School Network are not 'lab' schools and are not obligated to partner with UST in any way. Schools that are interested in relationships outside of authorization, for example, serving as a host site for student teachers or receiving volunteers through the Tutor-Mentor program, may reach out to the appropriate staff in those departments. In order to prevent conflicts of interest, the Authorizing Program does not coordinate or oversee these additional relationships and utilizes a Conflict of Interest Policy (available in the Charter School Resources section of the website) to ensure that UST charter schools maintain their full autonomy.