

CHARTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY: PATTERNS OF PRACTICE  
AMONG MULTIPLE SPONSORING AGENCIES

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(ABSTRACT)

Since 1991, charter schools have become a popular school choice option. Charter schools are independent public schools free from most state regulations in exchange for a written contract specifying that certain results will be obtained. Charter school accountability depends on both the specific charter school law and the agreement that has been struck between the sponsoring agency and the individual charter school. This study explores the patterns of practice in the accountability processes used by multiple sponsoring agencies in Minnesota. Minnesota's charter school law allows local school districts, post-secondary institutions, and the state education agency to sponsor charter schools. One central overarching question was addressed in this study: How do the micro accountability systems of multiple sponsoring agencies within Minnesota compare? In addition, several subquestions provided the framework for the research:

1. How is the charter school accountability process defined in the state legislation?
2. How is the charter school law interpreted by the state education agency?
3. How do sponsors determine the accountability processes they require of their charter schools?
4. How satisfied are the charter school directors and the sponsoring agencies with their accountability process?

This qualitative study utilized research methods suitable for a multiple case study. The two primary data collection methods were document analysis and interviews. Individual case reports for each type of sponsoring agency were written that discussed specific elements of the accountability systems in use by each type of sponsoring agency within the state. A final report outlining the patterns of practice in the accountability processes used by all sponsors is included.

Any measurement of the macro accountability dimensions in the charter school movement may be confounded by the different micro accountability indicators used by

the different sponsoring agencies. This study provides information about the specific accountability processes being adopted by the sponsoring agencies. The results of this study will help sponsoring agencies of charter schools focus on the types of accountability to which they may hold their charter schools accountable.