

Case Study: Mountain View Preparatory Charter School Renewal

Mountain View Preparatory Charter School (MVP) is up for renewal after operating for 15 years. MVP serves 620 students in grades 6-12. Its academic results appear superior to the district on state assessments and graduation rates. Many families rate MVP as the strongest in the area.

The district had limited authorizing infrastructure when it approved MVP and has conducted minimal formal oversight since then. Monitoring consists of reviewing annual reports and basic compliance documentation. The district has not conducted site visits or performance reviews. The district recently launched a more thorough review, during which financial questions emerged that had not been examined previously.

MVP, an established charter school with strong academic results but new questions about finances, comes up for renewal in a district with minimal historical oversight. The board must determine whether to renew its charter, and, if so, for how long and under what conditions.

Key Elements of the Renewal Review

Financial Health: The school's financial position appears stable. MVP has received clean annual financial audits and maintains a healthy reserve balance and stable enrollment--despite declining district enrollment.

During the recent review, staff identified reporting inconsistencies in older records and transactions between the school and a related nonprofit that provides undefined "operational support." To date, there are no confirmed findings of fraud or misuse of funds.

District staff note that because the authorizer historically lacked robust financial monitoring systems, it is difficult to determine whether the inconsistencies reflect routine accounting issues, documentation gaps, or more significant concerns. District staff believe additional investigation is needed to understand the transactions.

MVP's board members imply these issues are consequences of the district's limited oversight rather than misconduct by the school. District board members have raised concerns that renewing the charter exposes the district to financial or reputational risk.

Background Information:

Student Services and Special Education: MVP enrolls a significantly lower percentage of students with disabilities and a smaller proportion of students with more significant disabilities than the district own schools. Students with disabilities at the school show lower growth rates than other student groups in MVP and lower growth than the district's students with disabilities.

Governance and Operations: An independent nonprofit board governs MVP, with several members serving since the school opened. The school leader has served for 10 years and is

widely-credited with building the school's academic program, but she also appears to receive little oversight from the school's board.

Community Context: MVP has a loyal parent community and strong public support. During recent board meetings, several parents spoke in favor of renewal. Parents of students with disabilities have reported that MVP staff discouraged them from enrolling their students in MVP.

District Perspectives: District staff emphasize they are working to strengthen authorizing practices. Some board members are concerned that renewing MVP without strengthening accountability reinforces the perception that its charter schools operate with too little oversight. Others argue MVP's academic results prove it serves students well and should be renewed.

Board Decision

The board must now decide whether to renew MVP's contract. Possible decisions include:

- Renew the charter for a full term
 - Renew the charter for a shorter term
 - Renew the charter with conditions or increased oversight requirements
 - Do not renew the charter
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Discussion Questions

1. What evidence suggests that the school is successfully serving students?
2. What concerns arise from the lack of historical oversight?
3. How should the board evaluate enrollment patterns and performance gaps among student groups?
4. How should the board respond to financial questions that have emerged during the renewal review but have not yet been fully investigated?
5. If the school has performed well academically, should governance, oversight, or financial concerns influence the renewal decision?
6. If the board chooses to renew the charter, what conditions or expectations might be appropriate moving forward?