

Q Comp

Update to 2009 Evaluation Report

Problems Identified

- **Uneven Application Review Process.** School districts and charter schools that entered Q Comp in more recent years were held to more stringent standards than earlier entrants. Further, a statutory requirement to assess all applications within 30 days of receipt using a group of external reviewers led to compromises in the quality of application reviews.
- **Inadequate Communication.** The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) did not provide clear guidance for annual goal updates required of all participating schools and did not clearly communicate to program applicants which Q Comp standards were required and which were recommended. Also, despite publicly stating otherwise, MDE used its program review process to assess compliance with statutory requirements.
- **Inconsistent Oversight.** Program reviews coordinated by MDE sometimes produced conflicting results, such as the same program component receiving a passing score one year and a failing score the following year. The department also uncritically accepted all annual reports required by state law, even when they clearly did not meet the statutory intent.

Changes Implemented

- **Legislative Changes to Application Reviews.** The 2009 Legislature amended state law to require MDE to respond to applications within 30 days of preset deadlines, instead of 30 days from receipt. Additionally, the Legislature removed the requirement that external reviewers evaluate each application. The Legislature also mandated that MDE increase its assistance to Greater Minnesota districts interested in Q Comp.
- **Improved Communication with Program Participants and Applicants.** MDE has revamped its program materials to provide greater clarity about application standards, program reviews, and annual goal requirements.
- **Improved Monitoring of Program Participants.** MDE has begun a process to ensure that all participating Q Comp school districts and charter schools meet the department's current requirements. MDE has also introduced changes intended to improve consistency in program reviews and has clarified the requirements for annual reports.

Action Needed

- **Continue Improvement Efforts.** The department has addressed most of our major recommendations. We encourage MDE to continue to learn from experience and further refine the program.