



COLORADO LEAGUE of
CHARTER SCHOOLS
focus on achievement

Quality Standards for Developing Charter Schools

Developed by the Colorado League of Charter Schools

Introduction

The following quality standards have been developed for founding groups that are in the process of designing a charter school and writing a charter application. The Colorado League of Charter Schools has created these standards in order to provide clear guidance for developing groups on what it means to be a high-quality, successful applicant. By understanding and meeting these standards, and following through with their well-developed processes, new schools are more likely to be met with success through the application and startup process. In addition, by meeting these standards and creating the foundation for a high-quality school, the developing group promotes the spirit of the League's mission by positively contributing to the charter school movement as a whole.

It is the hope of the Colorado League of Charter Schools that groups in the process of developing charter schools will use these standards to gauge their readiness for submitting an application and eventually opening a school. If a founding committee finds that they do not yet meet most of these standards, the committee may want to consider postponing their application submission until they are better prepared. The standards should serve as a guide and reference point for these groups as they work through the development process.

The League feels strongly that if a charter applicant can demonstrate that it meets these standards, it is likely to be successful in the application and startup process. In addition, should a strong application submitted by a high-quality founding group that meets these standards be denied by a charter authorizer, the school will be better positioned to appeal the decision to the State Board of Education. Meeting these standards will also better position the school, once approved, to seek operating grants and facilities financing.

The League recognizes that meeting these standards takes a great deal of time and commitment. While the League fully expects all developing schools to meet these standards, the League is also highly committed to supporting schools in their efforts to rise to these high levels of performance. The League will provide developing groups with much of the information and resources needed to meet these standards. In return, the school holds the responsibility for bringing the human resources, time, drive, and commitment to excellence to the development process.

The quality standards for developing charter schools are broken down into the following sub-categories:

- Charter School Knowledge and Best Practices
- Community Outreach
- Founding Committee
- Commitment to Accountability
- Application

Charter School Knowledge and Best Practices

The charter school founding committee demonstrates a commitment to understanding charter schools and pursuing best educational practices.

- Multiple members of the founding committee have attended at least two League-endorsed conferences or workshops prior to submittal of the charter application.
- The founding committee participates fully in the League's New Schools Development Program <http://www.coloradoleague.org/membership-and-services/new-schools-dev.php> and works actively with the Colorado League of Charter Schools during the application and startup process.
- Appropriate members of the founding committee have received training in the areas of accountability and performance management, prior to submitting their application.
- All members of the founding board of directors commit to governance, accountability, and performance management training, to begin prior to opening and to be completed within the first year of operation, to ensure they understand progress monitoring and interventions, legal requirements, and their role of oversight as they transition the school operations to the school leader.
- The founding committee is committed to understanding and implementing research-based best practices whether based on extensive formal research studies or simply on other schools with a solid history of academic success.
- Members of the founding committee have visited and informally evaluated at least three successful charter schools.
- The founding committee demonstrates a strong commitment to ongoing professional development for the board of directors, school administration, and faculty. This commitment is reflected in the school's application, calendar, and allocation of financial resources.
- Members of the founding committee have read the Charter School Act (C.R.S. 22-30.5-101 et. seq.) available at: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/chact.htm>, several strong sample applications from other schools, and a variety of additional resources provided by the League and the Colorado Department of Education. (See: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/choice/index.htm>)

Community Outreach

The founding committee actively focuses its development efforts on effective outreach practices.

- The founding committee has adequately researched the community in which the charter school will exist; has knowledge of the demographics, cultural and academic needs; and has interviewed a variety of community members to verify that there is a need and desire for the charter school in the community.
- The founding committee has adequately researched the student population to be served to understand their educational needs and what services are currently in place to meet those needs.
- The founding committee actively networks with community leaders, local legislators, and other key figures in the community in order to understand the community and to build ongoing relationships as well as garner support for the charter school.
- The founding committee proactively develops a relationship with the charter authorizer. This relationship is initiated by notifying the authorizer of the group's intent to apply for a charter and is maintained throughout the application process. The founding committee seeks guidance from the authorizer and actively works to understand the authorizer's expectations.

- The founding committee recruits additional founding committee and prospective board members in order to broaden the pool of expertise and the skill-base of those working to start the school.
- The founding committee actively educates families in the community about the school and solicits students for enrollment. The founding committee develops outreach strategies to ensure equitable access to a diverse group of families in the community. Enrollment is made available to all students.
- The founding committee understands its role in representing and advocating for the charter school movement. The school makes decisions and works in such a way that the charter school sector will be well-represented.

Founding Committee

The founding committee consists of multiple parents, community members, educators, business persons, or other stakeholders who are well-situated to successfully start a high-quality charter school.

- The founding committee has a genuine personal interest or concern for the student population to be served. This motivation can be clearly articulated by all members of the founding committee. The founding committee is not driven to create a charter school by personal financial, political, or other counterproductive motivations.
- The founding committee consists of self-driven people who have the motivation, time, and other resources necessary to undertake the challenging task of starting a charter school.
- The founding committee places integrity and ethical practices at the forefront in all decision-making processes.
- The founding committee has designated an individual or a small leadership team to provide collaborative leadership, including delegating responsibilities to other members of the founding committee, keeping other members of the committee on task, and seeing the application/startup process through from start to finish.
- The founding committee demonstrates a willingness to consider and implement outside feedback and recommendations.
- The founding committee consists of at least three individuals who have diverse skill sets (e.g. education, educational leadership, curriculum, understanding of assessment/accountability, business/finances, legal, fundraising, etc.).
- The founding committee recognizes areas of weakness and need in its composition (e.g. absence of a business perspective, legal perspective, educational perspective, real estate, etc.) and actively solicits support from outside individuals/organizations in these areas.
- The members of the founding committee are committed to working together collaboratively. Processes are in place to hear all opinions, to respect dissenting opinions, and to move forward with effective decision-making, e.g. through a code of conduct, decision-making process, etc.

Commitment to Accountability

The founding committee demonstrates a commitment to accountability and this commitment is reflected in the school's development process, application, and goals upon opening.

- The founding committee has successfully participated in the League's application review process prior to the submission of the charter application to the chartering authority.

- ❑ The founding committee commits to having the school participate in a comprehensive self-study and external site visit review, such as those provided by either CDE or the League, within the first three years of the school’s existence, and has allocated financial resources in order to support this review process.
- ❑ The founding committee understands statutory guidance on School Advisory Councils (or accountability committees) and commits to forming such a committee upon the school’s opening. (See C.R.S. 22-11-401 to 406 for additional information.)
- ❑ The founding committee is committed to having the school create a performance management plan and an annual Unified Improvement Plan (UIP), which includes specific performance goals and progress monitoring. This commitment will be communicated both in the charter application and when the applicant transitions from a founding committee to a board-governed, administrator-run school.
- ❑ The founding committee is committed to building a permanent institution that sustains the integrity of the founders’ vision and transfer of values through: written documentation and ongoing review of core values, ongoing documentation of board decisions, processes for transfer of leadership (both on the board and in administration), and effective policy making at the board level.
- ❑ The founding committee has educated themselves about the state accountability system, including the school performance framework, types of performance plans, performance indicators, Colorado Growth Model, and the unified improvement planning process.

Application

The school’s charter application reflects an overall commitment to quality.

This standard consists of several general indicators for a high-quality charter application, and then specific indicators based on the different application sections defined by state law (C.R.S. 22-30.5-106). The League has added several additional sections not specified in statute that typically appear in authorizers’ requirements for charter applicants. All sections of the application should describe a cohesive program that is tied together throughout the document.

When the League does an application review, it rates each section on a scale from 1 to 4. A score of 3 indicates that the section adequately addresses the standards; a score of 4 indicates that standards were exceeded and a score of 2 means that standards have only been partially met. The sections indicated with an asterisk (*) below are “deal-breaker” sections. We believe that a developer should only apply to an authorizer if all of these essential sections have received a score of 3 or higher.

The charter authorizer that is reviewing the application may have additional requirements that the applicant must address. However, the information below should cover most authorizers’ basic requirements.

Overview

- ❑ Members of the founding committee have authored the school’s charter application themselves. In cases where a consultant has been hired to write the application, the founding committee has worked closely with the consultant to communicate their ideas and vision for the school. Although it is certainly expected that the applicant will review several successful applications written by other schools, the applicant has not simply copied and pasted sections of another school’s application. The school “owns” its application and all of the concepts embodied within it.
- ❑ Based on the research conducted and the founding committee’s core educational values for the school, the committee has thoroughly discussed and evaluated the different aspects of the proposed school’s educational program, governance structures, and other operations. After coming to

agreement on what the various components of the school should look like, the founding committee has clearly articulated these concepts. All aspects of the school have been adequately discussed and are understood by the members of the founding committee.

- The committee has determined that their core educational values can realistically be implemented and sustained with limited financial resources.
- The application reflects thoughtful, researched-based ideas and practices. The application provides extensive detail on the various components of the school's program and operations.
- The founding committee understands the authorizer's timelines for submitting charter applications. The committee actively plans around the authorizer's timelines and consistently meets deadlines in a timely manner.
- The application has been edited for spelling and grammatical errors and consistency of terms, especially in areas where other best practice charter documents were used in the development of sections of the application (e.g. the application uses the correct school name throughout.) The content that is included is necessary to describe the school, and adds relevance to the design and implementation of the program once the charter application receives approval from the authorizer.

Applicants will be asked to sign a commitment to meet these standards prior to participating in the League's comprehensive review process.

The indicators for the various sections of the charter application are detailed in the following pages. For more information on the charter development process, see the Application Process Flowchart with imbedded links at: www.startacoloradocharter.org. It is advised that the Leagues' Quality Standards for Developing Charter Schools be used in conjunction with the Standard Application, also available on this website, in order to provide more complete guidance on the content of each section of the application.

Cover Letter

The cover letter introduces the applicant and application to the charter authorizer and more importantly creates a paper trail documenting the date of submission, and expected time frame for the authorizer to make a decision. The cover letter:

- Specifically addresses the authorizer from whom a charter is being requested.
- Has a respectful tone that reflects the founding committee's desire to work *with* the authorizer in providing an educational choice for students.
- Includes a brief summary of the proposed school, including its name, grades to be served, proposed location/community, and one or two key, unique characteristics about its educational program (Montessori, project-based, Core Knowledge, technology-focused, ELOB, etc.).
- Identifies a primary contact person for the proposed school and that person's contact information. This is likely the chair of the founding committee or the president of the board of directors, if a board has already been formed.
- Communicates what is being requested (for example, a five-year charter contract to operate under the charter authorizer).
- Is signed by the primary contact person.

Executive Summary

An **executive summary** is an overview. The purpose of an executive summary is to summarize the key points of a document for its readers, saving them time and preparing them for the upcoming content. The executive summary is approximately two to three pages, and concisely summarizes the charter proposal. This section of the application includes:

- Information on who is submitting, the school's name, grade levels to be served, proposed opening date (e.g. August of 2014), grade levels upon opening, and growth plan (if the school does not plan to initially open with all grade levels, show the first year's enrollment and each year's expected growth).
- Size of the school at full build-out, including the number of classes per grade level and the number of students per class.
- The mission statement, vision, and a brief explanation of the mission and vision and the impetus for their creation.
- A short explanation of the key programmatic features the school will implement in order to accomplish its mission and vision. Include an overview of the school's core values about teaching and learning, the educational program and major instructional methods and assessment strategies, and highlight the research based elements supporting these approaches with the target population.
- A summary of evidence of community need, for a school of this nature, serving the target population, in the proposed location.
- Any other unique features, such as a non-traditional school year, longer school day, key partner organizations, multiple campuses, home-based program, etc.
- Summary of the student body to be served, including key demographic data, targeted geographical area, etc.
- Brief summary of the leadership team and governance and management structure.

Vision and Mission Statements

This section of the application reflects the school's vision and mission statements as developed and agreed upon by the members of the founding committee. These statements should answer the questions, "What is the purpose for the school and what is the applicant team's vision for the school?" The rest of the application should answer, "How exactly will we get there?"

The **vision** of the school articulates how the applicants envision the school and its impact in the future (five to ten years).

- The vision statement expresses the ideal, long-term impact, scope and scale of the school. It articulates *what* the school hopes to be, but not *how* the school will reach that vision. The vision should focus on essentials, be research based, and provide guidance to the board and administration as the school grows. For example, all conversations about budget, planning, and staff development would be guided by the long-term vision.
- The vision statement is focused on the future. It concisely and succinctly defines what the school looks like when it is "all grown up."

The **mission statement** is short and concise, and no more than several sentences that present a clear, focused, compelling purpose that will guide the school's operations. (This is not a motto or marketing slogan.)

- A mission statement explains the fundamental purpose for the school.
- It is the driving force and rationale behind all other components of the application. It should be obvious to a

reader of the application that the school's goals, educational program, operations, etc. all align with and support the fulfillment of the mission. It should be meaningful, measurable, and attainable, and explain *how* the school will reach its vision.

- The mission statement should address the fundamental questions of “what do we want students to learn,” “what are the key programmatic elements that will get us to that end,” and “how will we know students have learned it.” It defines what skills, knowledge, and competencies a student who graduates from the school will possess.

An easy way to understand the difference between the vision and mission is that the mission focuses on the school's present state and day-to-day fundamentals of the school, while the vision focuses on the school's future. A strong example of a vision and mission can be found here: <http://dsstpublicschools.org/about-us/mission-and-vision/>.

Goals, Objectives, and Pupil Performance Standards*

This section focuses on the specific outcomes anticipated for the school and its students within the terms of the requested charter contract (usually three or five years). Some of the goals and objectives are focused on specific student outcomes (pupil performance or educational performance goals); others are broader school-based goals and objectives (organizational and management performance goals). The applicant need not include detailed strategies for meeting the goals in this section, as that will be covered in several different subsequent sections of the application.

Quality indicators for this section are as follows:

- Applicant has developed no more than ten to twelve broad goals, with the majority (five to six minimum) focusing on educational performance. Each goal is a clear, measurable statement of what the school will accomplish with its students after a specific length of time attending the school.¹ These should align with the authorizer's performance framework, as well as the state accreditation model/Colorado School Performance Framework with its performance indicators (achievement, growth, growth gaps, and for secondary schools, post-secondary readiness). The school's goals should also align with the authorizer's Improvement Plan, which may have goals and indicators included that are unique to them. (For more information on accreditation indicators and contracts see: <http://www.schoolview.org/performance.asp>).
- All goals are written as “SMART” goals, which means they are: **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**mbitious and **A**ttainable, **R**eflective of and **R**elevant to the School's Mission, and **T**ime-Specific with a Target Date.
- Each goal is supported by:
 - **Benchmarks or Objectives:** Clear, measurable statements of what the school will accomplish with its students at a given point in the school's development, usually showing a percent of growth each year or at more frequent intervals using (interim) assessments. Benchmarks allow monitoring of progress toward the ultimate goal, and clearly support the academic goals.
 - **Measures:** The specific assessment tools that will be used to gauge whether the goals and benchmarks have been achieved (e.g. standardized tests, internal assessments, parent surveys, School Accountability Report, Colorado Growth Model, etc.).
 - **Timeline:** The goal or benchmarks should reflect how long the school anticipates taking to meet the goal or benchmark (e.g. annually, after three years, etc.).
- Goals and benchmarks are written taking into account that baseline data is not yet available. For example,

¹ Much of the information in this section is taken from “Developing Sound Performance Goals and Measures: Guidance for Charter Schools” prepared by Margaret Lin, when she was the Senior Associate at the National Association of Charter School Authorizers.

without knowing at what level students will be able to perform when they enroll in the school, it would be premature to set a goal of 90% proficiency on TCAP at the end of the first year in any grade or subject area. A better goal would be that 90% students will make (above 50th percentile growth) as measured by the Colorado Growth Model using TCAP and any other nationally-normed assessments the school chooses to use. (For sample goals around the Colorado Growth Model see “Writing SMART Goals for Colorado’s Accountability System” on the League website: <http://www.coloradoleague.org/membership-and-services/new-schools-dev.php#res>.)

- A description is included of how the school will collect and use longitudinal assessment data to determine and improve academic progress of enrolled students, to include GT, ELL, minority, and SpEd. (See above SMART Goal example document, under “Reducing Learning Gap” goals.)
- Goals address closing the achievement gap for all groups of students. This includes goals that reflect underachieving students making adequate median growth or growth above the 50th percentile, whichever is greater. (See above SMART Goals example document.)
- There is a demonstrated understanding of and strategy for complying with state achievement and reporting requirements including those related to accountability reporting and Accreditation.
- The applicant includes several goals that demonstrate the school’s plans to meet state accreditation requirements through the Colorado performance indicators of status, growth, closing the achievement gap, and post-secondary readiness, and any additional authorizer’s goals, and a clear plan to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as defined by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).
- In addition to writing goals that cover core educational expectations (reading, writing, math, graduation rates, and other academic areas), the school has also developed goals around areas such as curriculum development, alignment of curriculum and instruction with state and district standards, professional development, attendance and re-enrollment, financial management, governance, parent involvement, community involvement, and any other aspects of the program that are unique and essential to the school (e.g. service learning, multicultural education, outdoor education, foreign language acquisition, project-based learning, etc.).

Evidence of Support

The Evidence of Support section of the application provides the authorizer with detail on the student population to be served, how the founding committee has reached out to parents of targeted students, how many parents have expressed interest in the school by submitting Letters of Intent to Enroll, and what other community support exists for the school. Specifically, this section includes:

- Detailed information about the proposed school’s student body. This section reflects that the applicant has conducted sufficient research into the student population to understand their needs, educational values, and area demographics (including racial/cultural, socioeconomic, special needs, and ELL breakdown), and achievement data for the proposed school’s area. The remainder of the application reflects this understanding of the student population through a program designed specifically to meet these students’ needs.
- A description of the types of outreach the founding committee has already conducted to make the student population and their families aware of the proposed charter school. Means of outreach should be diverse and designed to reach all students in the community, thereby ensuring equal access. Applicants may wish to include strategies such as community meetings, mailings, posters, door-to-door recruitment efforts, media advertising, etc.
- A detailed timeline and description of future outreach steps the founding committee intends to take both before and after approval, and how these methods will reach all members of the community (bilingual fliers which can be included in the appendices, translators, outreach locations, etc.), and provide equal opportunity

for students to enroll.

- A summary of the number of families who have expressed interest in the proposed school through signing Intent to Enroll Forms. The summary of information includes the anticipated demographic characteristics of the students expected to enroll, as well as information describing from where they anticipate their students will come (school district, what school would otherwise be attended (neighborhood public, private, charter), specific neighborhood, etc.). Evidence must also show that an adequate number of parents, teachers, and pupils or any combination thereof, support the formation of this charter school.
- Reference to a sample Intent to Enroll form (which is included as an appendix) that has been used to gauge parent and student interest in the school. The Intent to Enroll form requests detailed information about the student(s) who intend to enroll in order to address authorizer questions about the anticipated student population, while still assuring families of non-discrimination. For example, forms should include a non-discrimination statement and assurance that there are no criteria for enrollment. If there are concerns, questions such as socioeconomic level, special needs, and race could be gathered on a separate anonymous form that doesn't request a name, in order to gather data but not give the impression of bias in enrollment decisions.
- Information about community members and leaders who have stepped forward in support of the school. Letters of Support should be included in the appendices whenever possible.
- Information is provided concerning any planned partnerships to include any services that will be provided by a partner organization, or an overview of the contents of an agreement. A Letter of Intent or a signed agreement should be included in the appendices for each partnership mentioned in the application, as applicable. The application describes how the school will continue to develop additional partnerships as it matures.
- Information about the school's founding committee, in the form of [short] bios, should be included in this section. The bios should explain the expertise each member brings to the founding team for developing the school.

Educational Program & Standards

This critical section of the application details an effective, well thought out, research-based educational program. This section should clearly align with the school's mission, goals, and the student population to be served. Everything in this section is research-based, whether based on extensive formal research studies or simply on other schools with a solid history of academic success. The application's authors specifically cite the research basis throughout this section. It is not assumed that the reader of the application will be familiar with common best practices or widely-known research within the field of education or charter schools.

In summary, the Educational program should address the interrelationship between the following:

- Goals - Overall school goals to ensure student and school progress;
- Curriculum - What you want your students to know and be able to do;
- Instruction - The activities and methodology for getting the curriculum to the students;
- Evaluation - The ways in which you will assess if students actually master the curriculum;
- Interventions - How you will respond if some or all students do not master the curriculum (e.g. the school will use (RtI), tutoring, etc.). Special Education and at-risk could be a subsection of interventions or just a bigger category for considering all areas.

Because this is such a substantial section of the application, it is strongly recommended that the applicant break this section down into the following subsections:

Educational Program & Standards: Educational Philosophy

- This section describes the founding committee’s core beliefs about education and how students learn since this is the driving force behind the school’s educational program.
- This section also describes the founding committee’s core beliefs about what a school of excellence looks like, as this too will drive the school’s educational program and operations. For example, if the founding committee believes that secondary students learn best when work is focused around group-based, interdisciplinary “real-life” projects, then the application presents a picture of how this style of learning (which is based on a set of beliefs about how students learn) will be implemented in the school.

Educational Program & Standards: Curriculum *

The narrative in this section should describe the critical aspects of each component of the curriculum; lengthy research, full scope and sequence, a full-curriculum alignment with standards, etc. should be included in the appendices rather than the application.

- This section provides a detailed description of the school’s curriculum, including an overview of what will be taught at each grade level and all subject areas, a curriculum framework, along with the appropriate levels of detail for objectives, content, and skills for each subject and for all grades the school will serve.
- If using an established school-wide program (e.g. Expeditionary Learning/Outward Bound, Core Knowledge, Montessori, etc.) or another successful school as a model (e.g. High Tech High, Big Picture School, etc.), the application provides detailed information and research about the program or model. When possible, this should include research, experience, or objective evidence about the success of the chosen program/model, and in particular why it was chosen for this specific population. It should be obvious how use of such a program supports the school’s mission, goals, student population, and educational philosophy. Again, the applicant does not assume that the reader of the application will be familiar with or supportive of an established curricular program.
- In all subject areas: If the founding committee has selected subject-specific skill-based programs or texts (e.g. Success for All, Open Court Reading, Everyday Math, Saxon Math, Step Up to Writing, etc.), detailed information is provided about these programs and how they support the school’s mission, goals, and educational philosophy. It is important to include the research-basis behind these programs as the authorizer may not be familiar with them. If the school will develop its own curriculum, sufficient detail should be given to understand the content at each grade level, scope and sequence, alignment to standards, implementation practices, and how these will all be communicated and tracked. Details of the plan for developing curriculum should also include staffing needs and cost to accomplish this, and the timeline for completion and implementation. Choosing a textbook is different than choosing curriculum; the latter should address the important question of “what we want students to know and be able to do”, and should relate to the state standards.
- The application defines how the school will ensure that the curriculum meets or exceeds the district educational and state content standards. It explains how the school will ensure alignment of its curriculum with the state standards, and the timeline outlining curriculum development during the pre-opening phase, with a full alignment to be completed within one year of opening for each grade level served. This alignment is explicit and not simply assumed because a certain program or model is being used. (Colorado Academic Standards and suggested grade level expectations can be found online at <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeassess/UAS/CoAcademicStandards.html>)
- The application defines how the school will ensure the horizontal alignment of curriculum between classrooms and the vertical alignment of curriculum across grade levels.
- A clear outline of how the school will monitor the implementation of the curriculum is given. This plan should include a complete set of learning standards for one grade level, and exit standards for each division (e.g.

middle school, high school.) The plan identifies a timeline, a lead contact and specific action steps to track implementation (e.g. using curriculum mapping as a way for the staff to discuss essential elements such as content/skills).

- The application provides a clear rationale for the appropriateness of the curriculum for the school's anticipated population and describes actions the school may take if, upon actual enrollment of students or baseline data is developed, it is determined that adjustments or revisions to the curriculum and/or instructional methodology (see below) are warranted.

Educational Program & Standards: Instruction

- As much as possible, the application defines the teaching methods and any unique instructional methodologies that will be used to deliver the curriculum described above to the school's students (e.g. direct instruction, Socratic seminars, lab-based learning, etc.), and why they are the best choice for getting the curriculum across to the target population. If teachers will be allowed to develop their own instructional methods, guidelines on how this will be integrated into the program's mission and culture (e.g. teaching writing based on a school-wide rubric, guided reading instruction, etc.) will be explained.
- The application defines the methods and systems the teachers will use to differentiate in order to meet the needs of students coming into the school with varying educational backgrounds, abilities and learning styles. At a minimum, these methods should include how the Response to Intervention (RtI) model will be incorporated into the school's instructional program. (See section on Evaluating Pupil Performance for a link.) It is also clear how this information will be tracked, and how professional development will support these areas.
- The application defines the basic school culture, learning environment, class size, and structure. In essence, this section provides the reader with a clear picture of what a typical day looks like as the school delivers the specified curricula. (An added description of a day-in-the-life for both a regular and a special needs student may be helpful.)

Educational Program & Standards: Supplemental Programs, Specials or Electives,

- The application defines any unique curricular aspects of the school's program, such as a service-learning component, arts, music, technology, character education, outdoor education, multicultural education, after school program, electives (during and after school), sports, clubs, etc., and is based on the Colorado Academic Standards when available.
- Any supplemental curriculum and texts are thoroughly described where appropriate, and the research base is provided.
- The application clearly defines if the school will offer summer school, and describes the program to be offered, the criteria for selection of participants, the times of operation, and how many can attend.
- A plan to fund any supplementary programs is given, along with what the funding information is based on, to include staffing. (An explanation should be included concerning any additional stipends for volunteer positions. If summer school is part of the job expectation, the application clarifies if that work includes a stipend or is part of the annual salary.)

Educational Program & Standards: Professional Development

- The application provides a description of methods the school will use to ensure the ongoing professional development of its faculty and staff, such as individual professional development plans, staff-wide training, assessment of progress made towards professional goals, etc.
- The application defines how the inaugural staff will be trained and prepared prior to the school opening, and includes a list of critical topics that will be covered. Further, this section explains how, after the first year, the school will support and assimilate teachers new to the school (regardless of their level of experience in education).
- If the school anticipates that it might hire teachers new to the field of education, the application explains how the school will support these teachers to ensure that they are successful.
- The application includes a clear outline of how the school will use information from the curriculum monitoring process to facilitate professional development and continuous improvement in the education program.
- In addition to professional development, strategies are defined for supporting the faculty through mentorship and regular evaluation, and building a positive staff culture in order to maintain high faculty retention rates.
- A plan is in place for manageable evaluation of staff based on clear criteria linked to the school's mission, educational program and student achievement goals, and evidence of how the staff will be held to high professional standards.
- The application discusses how the budget reflects the school's professional development plan (e.g. a professional development allocation for every staff member, a certain percentage of the annual budget as defined by the board, instructional coaches dedicated to professional development, travel and lodging as needed, etc.).
- The professional development plan identifies a timeline, a lead contact and the specific action steps that will be taken.
- School calendar reflects time allotted for professional development.

Educational Program & Standards: Annual Calendar and Daily Schedule

- The application provides a draft of the annual calendar so the authorizer understands the number of proposed student contact days, teacher work and professional development days, and total hours of instruction. This is especially important when the annual calendar differs from the district's calendar.
- The application includes a draft of both the teachers' and students' daily schedules so the authorizer understands the number of hours of instruction per day and week, and can see how the allocation of time on a daily and weekly basis reflects the school's mission and goals, teacher training and plan times, and academic interventions, etc. within the school day. The daily schedule reflects adequate time each day in which to implement the intended program(s), and gives the length of the school day with the hours and minutes/day and week dedicated to academic instruction in each grade, and core instructional areas of Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies.
- The school's proposed annual calendar and daily schedule reflect the minimum number of hours required by state statute (1,056 hours for secondary students; 968 hours for elementary students; no fewer than 160 days per year for all students; see C.R.S. 22-33-104 for more information), and notes whether the proposal includes an extended day/year.

Plan for Evaluating Pupil Performance *

This section expands on the goals section earlier in the application by defining how the school will determine whether it is meeting its goals. It focuses both on internal assessments used to drive instructional decision-making, as well as external assessments used to communicate academic achievement and growth to stakeholders. A quality assessment plan will include summative (end-of-year) assessments, as well as interim (more frequent, end of unit or assessments used formatively) and formative (daily and weekly checks for understanding) assessments to track student skill and knowledge development. The plan will include how this data will be used to guide professional development of teachers as well as how this data will be used to guide refinement of the curriculum and instruction. Be aware that all Colorado public schools including charter schools are subject to the Transitional Colorado Assessment Program (TCAP), which is aligned with the Colorado Academic Standards. (See the CDE website: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeassess/index_assess.html for detailed information regarding this program.)

- The application provides a detailed description of how the school will use internal assessments, including summative, interim, and formative assessments to ensure that students are making progress towards both short- and long-term goals. The application describes the types of assessments that will primarily be used at the school, such as tests, projects, essays, portfolios, and how these align with the mission and clearly defined academic goals.
- The application describes what formal assessments will be used in addition to TCAP. These evaluation methods align with the school's goals outlined in the Goals, Objectives, and Pupil Performance Standards section. For example, if the school has a goal on the percentage of students reading on grade level by the end of each academic year, then there must be an assessment tool included to provide this information since TCAP begins in 3rd grade. The school has chosen assessments that will provide useful data for the school, rather than just using assessments for the sake of using assessments. Both interim and summative assessments should be identified (or timelines to identify them should be included along with the process to determine what assessments to use), to show sufficient frequency of assessments without over-testing. A minimum testing interval should be three times/year for interim assessments.
- The application defines how the school will gather baseline data on all students and what will serve as the baseline. It is recommended that all schools administer a standardized test at the start of the school's first year to all students. This ensures that baseline data is available to determine progress made by students during the first year (rather than having to wait until the end of the second year when the school would have student achievement data for two consecutive years).
- The application explains how the school will use longitudinal data analysis to measure its success and what systems will be put in place to allow teachers to regularly analyze and collaborate around useful data in order to drive instruction. The authors have listed the assessments to which the school will apply school level and student level growth data to measure success. For example, using Colorado's Growth Model, one can set reasonable, but attainable student level growth targets around performance. (For more information, visit <http://www.schoolview.org/learningcenter.asp> and http://www.schoolview.org/documents/CGM_FAQ.pdf. For help with goals, see the Goals, Objectives, and Pupil Performance Standards section above.)
- The application defines what assessments will be used for literacy testing in order to comply with the Colorado Basic Literacy Act (CBLA), which mandates that students are to be reading on grade level by the end of the 3rd grade. It explains how this data will be used to complete and monitor Individual Literacy Plans (ILPs). (See the Colorado Basic Literacy Act for more details C.R.S. 22-7-502 et. seq. or <http://www.cde.state.co.us/coloradoliteracy/cbla/index.htm>.)
- Identified formal assessments demonstrate that the school understands and intends to comply with the Colorado accreditation requirements as articulated in the Colorado Performance Framework. (For information on the four Performance Indicators, see the Rules for Administration of Statewide Accountability Measures (1 CCR 301-1), at [http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdegen/downloads/SB163/1CCR301-1\(2.25.11\).pdf](http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdegen/downloads/SB163/1CCR301-1(2.25.11).pdf). Alternatively, ask the authorizing district for information about their accreditation contract.)
- Identified formal assessments comply with the district's methods for determining whether the school has met

the federal mandates of ESEA and made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). (Additional information may be found at <http://www.cde.state.co.us/FedPrograms/danda/ayp.asp>)

- The application explains how the school will collect, analyze, triangulate, and manage data on an ongoing basis. There is a Performance Management plan in place to support teachers in the analysis of evaluation data in order to help them clearly inform their instruction based on what the data says. The student assessment information monitoring is also used to facilitate continuous improvement in the school's entire educational program, and professional development planning. A timeline is included with the lead contact, and specific action steps that will be taken. (Performance management planning documents are available on the League website (<http://www.coloradoleague.org/membership-and-services/new-schools-dev.php#res>) and additional support in developing a performance management plan is available upon request.)
- The school has created a performance management plan including how they will utilize the three "systems": 1. Student Information System (SIS) 2. Interim Assessments 3. Data Management System (a data warehouse) to capture and effectively manage student and school level data. This plan is included as an appendix and this section provides a summary of the plan. It identifies what other tools and resources will be used for data management purposes, such as an internal database, data management service, etc. This section also explains how budget resources have been adequately allocated to support staffing, system start-up, and ongoing implementation costs. This section also contains a timeline for performance management system acquisition and implementation.
- The application defines how the school will communicate individual student progress to parents and guardians, and what that progress is based on (i.e.: grading scale and report card examples, portfolios with rubric examples, exit standards for each grade level, etc.). If the school does not plan to use traditional grades, the application explains what alternative methods will be used to communicate individual academic success to families, and includes a sample rubric in the appendices. This section also describes conferencing requirements.
- If the school includes a high school, the application includes clear information on course offerings and descriptions, promotion requirements to move to the next grade, planned graduation requirements, indicators for post secondary readiness, and how these requirements meet or exceed the school district's and Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE) requirements. For a summary of college admissions standards, go to: <http://highered.colorado.gov/Academics/Admissions/coursecompletion.html>
- The application provides information on how the school will annually review and report its assessment data and academic success to the parent community, the broader community, and the school district.
- In compliance with C.R.S. 22-30.5-106 (f), the application provides a description of the charter school's procedures for taking corrective action in the event that pupil performance at the charter school falls below the achievement goals approved by the authorizer in the charter contract to include specific action steps (such as a Response to Intervention (RtI) model <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdegen/downloads/RtIGuide.pdf> , timeline, responsible person, and staffing changes and financial support as appropriate.)

Budget and Finance *

This is a substantive, important section of the application that details the school's budget, the school's plans for an independent financial audit, and other aspects of the school's fiscal management. (The CDE requirements for financial management and reporting are available in the Financial Policies and Procedures manual at www.cde.state.co.us/cdefinance/sfFPP.htm . An additional resource with general information is the Colorado Charter School Financial Management Guide at <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/fin/pdf/FinanceGuide.pdf> .)

- This section includes reference to a five-year balanced budget that is included as an appendix in the application. (A budget template is available at: <http://www.coloradoleague.org/membership-and-services/new-schools-dev.php#finance>.) The budget reflects a separate realistic cash flow projection for the 1st year of operation. (A cash flow statement accurately reflects the timing of income and expenses in order to

help the school manage possible cash shortfalls.) The budget also reflects an understanding of specific statutory requirements, including the ability to track federal, state and foundation grant funding income and expense by grant code (e.g. any income from categorical or special funds (e.g. Title I, grants, etc.), is clearly shown as separate in a column reflecting expenditures for that area.) The budget has the required 3% TABOR reserve each year. The attached budget includes an assumptions sheet that shows income and expense projections/or quotes that are realistic, and assumptions are based on the best possible sources (e.g. per pupil revenue (PPR) at 100% of the district's PPR except for small attendance areas (see CRS 22-30.5-112) for the estimated number of students with Kindergarten students figured at .58 of the per pupil amount, per pupil costs of other charters schools in the district, insurance quotes from the district and another company, etc.).

- This section includes a summary of the budget, including all major revenue and expense items, and should also indicate that the school plans to use conservative budgeting. A plan is in place to address funding shortfalls and replacement, and the developers should reference a contingency budget that is included as an appendix. The contingency summary and budget, or at minimum the planned cuts noted in the narrative, should reflect what happens if 100% of the expected enrollment or PPR is not achieved. The summary and budget both reflect the minimum enrollment needed for solvency.

NOTE: The summary reflects that the school has reviewed several operating charter schools' budgets and understands the reality of revenues and expenses within the school district and the larger market. Specifically, on the revenue side, the school has gathered and used accurate information for projected per pupil revenue, mill levy funds, title funds, etc. On the expense side, the school has gathered and used information that reflects district administrative costs, competitive salaries, benefits, a plan for making accurate retirement contributions (see the PERA website at www.copera.org or the specific chart located at <https://www.copera.org/pdf/5/5-123.pdf>), special education costs as required by the authorizer, professional development expenses based on the proposed professional development plan, data management services, assessments, legal fees, audit costs, average market lease rates and associated facility costs, commercial insurance premiums, curriculum expenses, furniture, fixtures, and equipment (FFE) to supply a fully operating school building, startup and replacement costs, and costs associated with any special school focus or emphasis, etc.

- The budget is set up in such a way that it is most useful to the school's board and leadership for making effective short and long term decisions, and reflects an understanding of the Colorado Department of Education's Chart of Accounts. The narrative should indicate that the school will meet district budget reporting requirements throughout the year (which will be negotiated with the district after charter approval), the Financial Transparency Act (that requires finance information to be posted on the school's website), and that the budget will be finalized each year by the January 31st CDE chart of accounts budget submission deadline. (For information on the Financial Transparency Act, go to: <https://www.coloradoleague.org/membership-and-services/new-schools-dev.php#finance>. The working budget should be easily cross-walked to the required CDE chart of accounts budget, and the financial information should be accurately translated into the year-end district-negotiated format for the Automatic Data Exchange (ADE) trial balance. Preschool funds are not co-mingled with the state and federal general fund, where public funds would be paying for the program, except for income and expenses for qualifying students for which the school receives state aid. Expenditures are clearly noted as coming from the appropriate funding category or area. (For example, a column for Title I shows allowable areas the funds are used for, in that program, and the fund zeroes out at the end of the year.)
- The budget does not include any "soft funds," such as unknown foundational funding or contributions; it includes only grants or donations that have already been received or for which commitments have been received. Evidence is provided for anticipated fundraising and grants, if cited in the application.
- The proposed budget balances each year and includes a 5 year plan to reach at least a 5 percent reserve (in addition to the TABOR reserve) that the school can use for emergency purposes or as a long-term reserve.
- The budget narrative includes a basic startup plan (facilities funding and FFE acquisition), the curriculum and professional development plan, and the school growth plan. The growth plan should include student count and needed staffing projections that fit the educational narrative, along with adequate financial allocations and anticipated timelines that all of these will be in place. There is an adequate and reasonable plan to manage

startup costs without complete dependence on federal or private grant funds.

- The application describes the process the school will follow to contract with a Certified Public Accountant to conduct an annual, independent financial audit. It explains how the school will comply with any GASB (Governmental Accounting Standards Board) provisions. (GASB is an oversight entity that develops accounting standards for state and local governments.) An explanation is also given as to how the school will remain fiscally solvent; adhere to generally acceptable accounting practices; have no material breaches; will address any management letter concerns; and will disseminate the results from the audit with the school district, the public and required state agencies.
- The application provides financial policies and procedures and a management plan that the board and administration will implement and follow to ensure that the school remains fiscally solvent. Appropriate internal controls are implemented to ensure a sound financial management system that includes checks and balances in cash disbursement.
- The application provides financial policies and procedures that ensure that the school's financial priorities are aligned with the mission and goals as well as the growth, curriculum and professional development plans. Included is a description of an annual process for evaluating whether financial allocations have effectively supported the school in carrying out its mission and meeting its goals.
- If any financial services are to be provided by the state, a school district, or another third party, the applicant has provided a description of the manner in which these services will be conducted, to include a management contract or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) where applicable.
- If a school is a 501(c)3, it states how it will ensure proper reporting to the federal government by submitting a 990 form (indicates compliance with Sarbanes Oxley requirements.) The school will also comply with state and federal requirements, including GAAP (Generally Accepted Accounting Principles) and GASB. (See CDE finance guide at <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/fin/index.htm> for more information.)

Governance *

This section provides detailed information on the role and make-up of the board and the role of the school's administration in carrying out the school's mission and meeting its goals. Charter school governance is extremely important to the success of a charter school. There should be clear information given as to the founding committee or board, how this group will transition to an official governing board, and the chief administrator's responsibilities should also be stated. The number of directors on an official charter school board should not be less than five and it's generally considered a best practice to have no more than nine directors. (Many sample best practice documents for charter school governing boards are available online at <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/gov/index.htm> . Also, for more information on the Open Meetings and Open Records laws see:

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/gov/pdf/OpenMtgsRecordsMemo.pdf>

Essential components of this section are as follows:

- This section includes a summary of the school's proposed or approved by-laws, which should be included as an appendix. In this section of the application, the founding committee highlights key features of the school's governance model as set forth in the by-laws. Specifically, the school addresses the board's powers and duties, how board members are elected or appointed, when elections or appointments take place and who can vote, who can serve on the school's board, the length of board terms, whether there are term limits, how many directors serve on the board and what the minimum number of directors is, what constitutes a quorum, a summary of board officers and their roles, how members can be removed, how vacancies will be filled, and how often the board will meet. This section should also explain the school's status as a non-profit organization and include a copy of the Articles of Incorporation, if available, and a plan for filing as a non-profit organization,

which is required for CSI schools.

- If a board of directors has already been appointed, information is provided on how that process took place. If the initial board of directors will be elected or appointed following charter approval, a description is provided of that planned process, and includes a timeline. This section provides detail on how the founding committee will transition from its role as an informal committee into an operating school board following approval, and the school's opening, to allow for a smooth shift of responsibilities. Information should also be provided to address how decisions will be made and recorded both prior to and after authorization. A description should be given as to how the vision and mission will be brought to fruition. A list of individuals making the transition to the official board should be provided, along with when they will be seated and assume responsibility for school governance. Resumes of the developing team and/or the founding board, whichever is applicable, are included in the appendices.
- The application includes a definition of who can serve on the board (parents, community members, etc.). The application also defines who will be targeted for board participation, and how they are selected and recruited (e.g. parents vs. community members or a combination of both). Consideration should be given to areas of expertise that are needed in order to open the school, when adding new members.
- A description of the composition of the board of directors is included. The board represents the diversity of the school, which represents the diversity of the larger community. The board also represents a diversity of skill sets (e.g. people with legal, financial, governance, education, fundraising, etc. expertise). The application defines what the school's ideal board of directors would look like. If this does not match the current composition of the board of directors, a plan for soliciting board participation in order to accomplish this vision is defined.
- A detailed description of the board's primary responsibilities and the administration's primary responsibilities is included. It is essential that the difference between the roles and responsibilities of the board and administration are well thought out and articulated. An organizational plan clearly outlines roles and responsibilities for implementing the school's program successfully including an internal and external evaluation plan. This plan clearly defines the relationship between the board, the lead administrator and the committees.

NOTE: This is a typical point of tension in operating schools and the more this can be defined in advance of hiring a school leader, the better. To better understand these differences, the League recommends that founding committees do substantial research into successful governance models and obtain governance training. While it is expected that the board will take on some functions of management prior to the school leader's hire and even during initial startup, the board should understand its role in governing the school, not in managing or operating it on a day-to-day basis.

- A detailed plan is included on how the lead administrator will be recruited and hired, and includes a timeline and financial considerations. If the school is not able to hire a lead administrator until just a couple months before the school's opening, **the application explains how the transition of leadership (from the founding committee and/or board to the school administration) will take place.**
- This section includes a list of the school's primary governance and operational policies that the board has either already adopted or will adopt prior to the school's opening, as well as additional policies needed to ensure the sound governance and operations of the school. The basic premise of these policies should be explained in the narrative along with either an explanation of how and when the founding board will develop and adopt a full set of policies, or a draft copy of the initial board policies should be included in the appendices.
- The application contains a draft or final conflict of interest policy and a policy for hearing parent, staff and student grievances. These policies are clear, show how conflicts of interest will be handled, and follow an appropriate route for delineating how grievances will be addressed for resolution of concerns that are raised. Among other things, the conflict of interest policy should address potential nepotism, employees serving on governing boards, and self-dealing.
- The application offers an explanation of any non-traditional governance structures, such as an all-parent board,

staff members serving on the board, the lead administrator serving on the board, etc. It explains how any potential conflicts of interest will be avoided on a non-traditional board. A plan for ongoing comprehensive board training and capacity building is included in a board calendar, and includes both annual board training in vital subjects to include Open Meetings and Open Records laws, for new board members, and board self-evaluation and a program effectiveness review. (Online Board Training Modules can be accessed free at: <http://www.boardtrainingmodules.org>)

- Financial resources are in place to support board transition and administrative hiring plans, as well as board training, legal document and policy development, internal and external evaluations, and self-evaluation needs.
- The application includes a description of steps the school will take to remain in compliance with the Open Meetings Act (C.R.S. 24-6-401).
- The application includes a description of steps the school will take to remain in compliance with the Colorado Public Records Act (C.R.S. 24-72-201).
- The application includes a description of steps the school will take to remain in compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (20 U.S.C. Sect. 1232).
- A detailed description of the responsibilities of the school's accountability committee and its role in relation to the school's board of directors and administration is included. This section demonstrates that the applicant thoroughly understands statutory guidance on School Accountability Committees and commits to forming such a committee upon the school's opening (this is an area where the school may not request a waiver). (See C.R.S. 22-11-401 to 406 for additional information.)
- The application includes a description of any other ongoing committees that will be put into place and their roles, along with a plan for meaningful involvement of parents and community members in the governance of the school.
- If the school will be contracting with an Educational Service Provider (ESP) or services provider, a full description of the relationship and associated fees/costs should be provided. (See later standards section for details.)

Employees

This section provides a variety of information on the school's employees and employment policies, and the relationship that will exist between the charter school and its employees. This section includes:

- A clear explanation of how the school plans to classify its employees and communicate that when hiring. If all of the school's employees will be "at-will" employees, the application provides a definition of what this means.
- An organizational chart is included with a delineation of who is responsible for employment decisions and oversight at each level of the organizational chart (board of directors or lead administrator) including recruiting, hiring, performance evaluation, renewal decisions, and firing.
- Administrator and teacher qualifications. Teacher qualifications must include ESEA requirements for Highly Qualified teachers, which is not the same as licensure. (See Highly Qualified Teachers' Workbook at http://www.cde.state.co.us/FedPrograms/tii/a_hqt.asp. Colorado charter school law does not require charter school teachers to be licensed (if the school has obtained a waiver), except in the case of Special Ed teachers; however, some charter schools have made this an explicit expectation.) Clear standards are in place to determine staff qualifications. Job descriptions for all key employees, including teachers and administrators are included, with a clear delineation of the role of the head administrator in the area of employee hiring, evaluation and firing. These job descriptions are especially important and will help the reader better understand the school when non-traditional or unique roles/jobs are planned.

- A staffing plan for the first 5 years of the school is explained in the narrative and provided in the appendices, and includes all administrative, auxiliary, and educational staff to include para-professional and specialty positions such as specials, ELL and Special Education. This should include information on the student/teacher ratio and the student/adult ratio in the school.
- A reference to the school's employee policies or a clear plan for timely development and intent of such policies are included in an appendix. The school will need to adopt many personnel policies and the founding committee should review several quality schools' employee handbooks for examples. Some key policies that need to either be included or the intent explained in the application narrative include, but are not limited to, employment practices, benefits, leave policies, grievance policy, conflict of interest policy, harassment, drug-free workplace, classroom practices, evaluation practices, salary range and performance structure if applicable, if the school will use contracts, etc. A clear plan of support for staff development and funding is included.
- A clear plan is in place to develop a comprehensive evaluation plan in alignment with the school's mission, goals, curriculum, assessment, academic expectations and professional development of staff with the intent of that plan described. Employee evaluation tools that have already been developed for the school are attached in the appendices.

Liability and Insurance

This section explains what types of insurance the school plans to carry to protect itself and its students. Schools are encouraged to carry, at a minimum, liability, worker's compensation, directors and officers, errors and omissions, property (building, if appropriate, and contents), educators' legal liability, and student accident and catastrophic accident insurance. Quotes or adequate cost information have been included in the budget, and show reasonable assumptions.

Parent and Community Involvement

This section is designed to address the roles parents/guardians, community members, and community organizations will play as part of the school community. This section includes:

- An overview of how parents will be or have been involved in the charter application process and how this involvement will carry over once the school is opened.
- A description of the parent/guardian volunteer requirement, if one exists. If the school does plan to have such a requirement, it is important to note that this is an expectation, rather than an enforced requirement with any type of punitive consequence for families not fulfilling their hours. For example, the school cannot restrict enrollment only to families who serve a certain number of volunteer hours.
- There are indications of a sound plan for outreach to a diverse population that includes the at-risk and under-served populations, and a timeline, action steps, and a specific recruitment contact person are provided.
- Detail is provided about the types of roles parent/guardian and community volunteers will serve within the school, such as serving as board members, front office support, teacher support in the classroom, clerical support (photocopying, stuffing folders, etc.), committee roles, event organizers, etc.
- Information about how community organizations will be involved with the school or how the school's students will be involved with community organizations. Any existing or planned relationships with outside organizations should be described to include planned partnerships and the anticipated or actual agreement(s). These can be provided in the form of Letters of Support, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), or a Letter of Intent (LoI). The narrative should include how the school is welcomed by the larger community and how the school reflects

the community needs and interests.

Enrollment Policies and Procedures

This section explains how students who want to attend the school will be admitted and enrolled. Because the Evidence of Support section provides detail on how students are being recruited, this section focuses more on how the school manages the students once they are interested in attending the school. This section should include:

- An enrollment policy, or description which specifies that enrollment is available to all students without regard to race, creed, color, sex, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, ancestry, disability, or need for special education services.
 - The policy specifies any other priority enrollment groups, such as children of founders and staff members (in which case “founders” also need to be defined), siblings, and students seeking to change schools under the public school choice provisions of ESEA Title I. Priority seats for children of founders and staff may not exceed 20 percent of available seats.
 - The policy specifies whether enrollment will be determined by waitlist or lottery in the case that the school is oversubscribed.

Note: The school’s enrollment policy must be in compliance with federal guidelines if the school wants to receive federal startup funding. The founding committee may want to have the CDE Schools of Choice Office review the enrollment policy for compliance prior to submitting the charter application. See also the U.S. Department of Education’s Non-Regulatory Guidance: Title V, Part B, Charter Schools Program, available at: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/nonregguidance.htm>.

- Application and enrollment procedures, including when open enrollment happens, when the lottery takes place, and the annual deadline for enrollment (if the school has one). It should be noted that charter schools cannot set enrollment criteria for admission (e.g. academic, audition, etc.). Once enrolled, charters can test students to determine their academic knowledge. (As such, it is important to distinguish between admission decisions and academic placement decisions.) Information may also be included as to how the lottery works (e.g. computer, bingo numbers, etc.)
- A plan is included on how the community will receive information about the formation of a new charter school, and as part of an ongoing marketing plan.
- Information is given concerning what happens to the names not drawn in the lottery.
- The means by which the school will track Intent to Enroll forms and manage the applicant pool, including how communication will take place and who will be responsible for this.
- Notification procedures of placement and how long parents have to make a decision to accept or decline a seat are provided.
- The contents of the enrollment packet, which a parent/guardian fills out once a student has been admitted to the school. This reflects an understanding of the types of documentation the district requires for safety, medical, legal and financial purposes. The school should commit to having all student files set up prior to the school’s opening.
- Any requirements of parents to reaffirm intent to enroll on an annual basis and the procedure to do so are provided.
- A clear process (or plan for developing a process) is in place for withdrawals and transfers of student records to support the transition of existing students from one school to another.

Transportation

This section addresses whether the school plans to offer any transportation services to its students. Charter schools are not required by law to provide transportation; however, the founding committee should give some thought to how students' transportation needs will be met without transportation services. Finally, many federal and state rules and regulations relate to the provision of transportation services. One specific rule to be aware of is that any small vehicles or school buses owned and operated by a charter school, or under contract, must meet the safety and operating standards as prescribed in State Board Rules 1 CCR 301-25, 301-26 and 301-29. (For more information, see www.cde.state.co.us/index_nutri_transpo.htm.)

- If the school does plan to offer transportation, the applicant explains how this will be provided to include field trips, before and after school, and extra-curricular activities (e.g. through the district, private transportation service, school-purchased buses). Further, the applicant must be able to demonstrate that the budget accurately reflects the cost of providing student transportation and insurance, and addresses safety needs using private, public, or school vehicles.
- If the school does not plan to offer transportation, the applicant provides some alternative means for meeting students' transportation needs to include low-income students (e.g. arranging carpools, purchasing bus passes for older students, etc.).
- This section of the application also reflects a commitment from the school to meet the transportation needs of students with IEPs or 504s that require transportation services. (This is usually negotiated in the authorizer contract.)

Food Service

This section addresses whether the school plans to offer food service to its students. Schools with a significant number of students who qualify for the free and reduced lunch (FRL) program are strongly encouraged to offer some sort of lunch program. (For more information see the nutrition and transportation link under transportation.)

- If the school does plan to offer a lunch program, details about how this service will be offered should include expectations on reimbursement through an authorized School Food Authority (SFA) and any other applicable state or federal regulations. There should also be reference given to obtaining FRL forms and having a compliant kitchen that will meet federal regulations (to include warming or storing food, or a contract with an approved food service vendor in the case of schools that choose not to prepare their meals onsite), and a viable financial plan to support the program needs.
- If the school does not plan to offer a lunch program, this section addresses how the school will address the needs of students who forget or cannot provide a lunch.

Facility *

This section provides information on the school's short- and long-term facility plans. If the founding committee has not already identified a definite school facility, the committee has identified at least two prospective facility sites and the application contains a cogent strategy for acquiring one or more of the prospective sites. This section should include as much of the following information as possible:

- A facility needs assessment, including how many classrooms are needed, how many specials rooms are needed (art, music, gym, special education), minimum size of each classroom, library space needed, number of

bathrooms needed, number of offices needed, amount of common space needed, outdoor space needed, square foot needs/student, etc.

- Target location for the school building (geographical boundaries based on student outreach and enrollment).
- As much detail as possible about the planned or prospective facility/facilities or plan including a proposed schedule to find one; location (or general location if confidentiality is important due to lease negotiations); size; square foot needs (per pupil and total) including shared spaces; zoning and occupancy requirements; assurance that the facility will meet applicable building codes, health and safety laws, and ADA if needed for opening; the timeline and a sound plan for acquiring and renovating a facility; and how each facility aligns with the facility needs assessment as well as the school's mission. It is advisable to include a minimum of two potential sites, even if the school anticipates using a district building.
- An explanation of how funds are being realistically allocated for facility costs in the budget. This includes potential lease costs, renovation expenses, cost per square foot, average cost/square foot in the area, utilities, insurance, upkeep and maintenance, and any other expenses involved in preparing the building for use as a school, as well as the percentage of the budget designated for facility needs. If additional funds or financing will be needed to bring a facility on-line, the application narrative and attached budget identify potential grants and/or lending sources. (Many charter schools have been able to finance their own facilities with tax-exempt bond financing through the Colorado Educational and Cultural Facilities Authority (CECFA). These are typically established schools. Information can be found by calling CECFA at 303-297-2538.)
- Reference to the type of professional assistance the founding committee is accessing in order to effectively navigate the real estate market. Any budget impacts should be included as well as a brief description of the relationship.
- Letters of Intent are included for prospective sites as applicable.
- There should be a clear understanding that building permits and inspections have been or will be obtained. (The state is responsible for issuing certificates of occupancy for public schools and information can be obtained by calling the Department of Labor at 303-572-2919. The applicant should also check with local officials in the planning and zoning department and the district facilities director for information concerning the inspection and permit and life and safety requirements of the local entities.)

Waivers

It is suggested that schools include a statement at the beginning of this section acknowledging a commitment to comply with all laws and policy that are not waived. However, this section focuses primarily on the waivers being requested and is broken down into two primary sub-sections: state waivers and district waivers. The requested waivers should match the proposed autonomy, school mission and goals, operations, governance, and employment relationships of the proposed charter school. It is advisable for an applicant to obtain legal counsel when seeking waivers from either the state or the authorizer. If an authorizer provides a listing of automatic statutory and policy waivers, or the school plans on taking the automatic state waivers provided for in law, the application needs to reflect that the school will request those waivers, plus any other additional waiver requests, and provide the detailed information identified under each section below.

- The state waiver section includes a list of the state statutes for which waivers are being requested. In addition to listing the statutes, the applicant also provides a policy or plan for what the charter school will do instead, as well as the rationale or purpose for requesting the waiver, expected financial and implementation impact, and how the effectiveness of the waiver will be evaluated. (The founding committee is encouraged to review the waivers that the Colorado Department of Education has previously approved for charter schools: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/download/CharterWaiversJune2011.pdf> Applicants may also access information on applying for waivers from the state on the CDE Charter Schools Web site:

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/waivers.htm>).

- The district waiver section includes a list of the district policies for which waivers are being requested. Again, in addition to listing the policies, the applicant includes a draft replacement policy or explains the replacement plan that the school will adopt, as well as the rationale or purpose for requesting the waiver, the expected financial and implementation impact, and how the effectiveness of the waiver will be evaluated. The founding committee is encouraged to visit with other charter schools under the authority of the same authorizer to determine typical waivers that are granted. (An example of a waiver application can be found in the CDE Charter Schools Guidebook of Best Practices: www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/gov/index.htm.)

Student Discipline, Expulsion, or Suspension

This section defines how the school intends to handle student discipline and establish a student culture in which all students are able to learn. Refer to C.R.S. 22-33-106 *et seq.*, and 22-33-203, the Suspension, Expulsion and Denial of Admission law, for more detailed information. Further detail is provided in a publication prepared by the Attorney General's office at:

http://www.coloradoattorneygeneral.gov/sites/default/files/uploads/violence_prevention/svpm2008.pdf. This section includes:

- A proposed discipline policy and procedures, that include levels of infraction, are provided in the appendices.
- An explanation of how disciplinary expectations will be communicated to parents/guardians and students.
- A description of how the school will handle discipline for students with disabilities to ensure compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and 504 regulations to include Manifestation Hearings and Behavior Plans as appropriate.
- Expulsion or Dismissal procedures and due process rights for students and parents/guardians. This will also include a process for appealing an expulsion decision, and how a student will be removed from the school and for what offenses. If there are other district schools that an expelled student would be prohibited from attending, these should be noted in the application.
- An explanation of how the charter school will provide the expelled student with an alternative education, if applicable.
- A description of steps the school will take to develop a positive student culture, thereby reducing the number of disciplinary infractions and reliance on negative consequences.

Note: It is strongly recommended that the applicant meet with someone who handles discipline at the district level prior to submitting the charter application in order to gauge how the authorizer views charter schools and discipline issues.

The founding committee should ensure that discipline plans are in compliance with statutory requirements and district policy. If not, ensure that an appropriate state or district waiver is being sought to allow for flexibility in implementing student discipline and that an appropriate replacement policy and plan are well-defined.

Serving Students with Special Needs and At-risk *

This section addresses how the school will meet the needs of a variety of "special needs" students who may enroll at the school. Specific research-based instructional programs, practices and strategies should be employed to produce a continuum of services to help ensure academic success for all students that is supported by good assessments. There are many CDE resources available for charter school applicants to consider when writing this

section. Those resources are available at: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/sped/index.htm>
Specifically, this section addresses how the school will successfully serve:

- Students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs).** This section should address the legal requirements such as IDEA and Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in a Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) as well as the program design. The plan includes a summary of special education staffing plans, allocation of resources to special education, student evaluation processes and the role of the special education staff (e.g. pulling students out vs. working with teachers and students in the regular classroom). This section also includes an explanation of how the school will know whether it has been successful in meeting these students' needs. The budget adequately reflects funding (at least \$400 or more per enrolled student – check with the authorizer to determine an accurate amount) allocated to cover special education costs, and a list of the specific services the district is expected to provide. (A child study process used to be in place at most schools for intervention and assessment decisions, but that has recently been replaced by a more comprehensive Response to Intervention (Rti) approach designed to specifically intervene when students are struggling academically so students may not need to be referred for special education assessments, if they respond to earlier interventions.)
- The Response to Intervention (Rti).** This process includes specific action steps to meet the learning needs of all students, including those with special needs (<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdegen/downloads/RtiGuide.pdf>), that addresses a need for intervention, progress monitoring, revisions and adaptations, or special education assessments and staffing. A lead contact is identified along with an intervention process with specific action steps (Tiers of Intervention) for meeting the learning needs of all students, including those with special needs, along with any applicable timelines. The steps of identification should be provided along with how the school will avoid misidentification or refer students for evaluation, as applicable. (For more information on Rti visit: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/rti/LearnAboutRti.htm>)
- Students with 504 Plans.** The school addresses how 504 plans will be prepared and evaluated to ensure that students' needs are being met.
- English language learners (ELL).** The applicant has developed a plan for meeting the needs of ELL students. Those groups that are targeting a community with a significant number of ELL families should give particular focus to this section. The application addresses how the planned curriculum and instructional strategies will be used to meet the needs of ELL students. (Information on the recently adopted World-class Instruction Design and Assessment Standards (WIDA) as the Colorado English Language Proficiency (ELP) standards can be found at: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeassess/UAS/Crosswalk/ELP_Crosswalk.html). In addition, the application reflects an understanding of how ELL students will be evaluated to determine whether they qualify for services (e.g. a Home Language Survey, and Colorado English Language Acquisition (CELA) testing), what types of services will be provided, who will provide the services, what resources are being allocated to meet these students' needs, and how the school will know whether it has been successful in meeting ELL students' needs. (For more information on the CELA testing requirement see: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeassess/co_law.html#Laws_regarding_CELApro.)
- Low income students.** This is primarily determined by whether students qualify for the free and reduced lunch program. Applicants have addressed how they will meet the unique needs of these students, including their physical needs (providing food services, waiving student fees, providing uniforms, addressing transportation needs, etc.). This section also includes an explanation of how the school will know whether it has been successful in meeting these students' needs.
- Low performing students.** The school will undoubtedly attract students who enter below grade level. The application should include some thoughtful, realistic strategies for bringing these students up to grade level and ensuring their success in the school. These strategies must be compatible with proposed staffing structures and budgetary restrictions.
- Students with physical disabilities.** The application acknowledges a commitment to finding a facility that is American's with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant (or renovating to ensure ADA compliance) and to providing

any physical/occupational therapy as required by a student's IEP.

- Gifted and talented students (GT).** The founding committee addresses how it will differentiate instruction and curriculum to meet the needs of gifted and talented students. In addition, this section addresses how gifted and talented students will be identified and an Advanced Learning Plan (ALP) developed, how resources will be allocated to meet the needs of these students, and how the school will know whether it has been successful in meeting GT students' needs.
- The application states how strategies for serving students with special needs *will actually be implemented*. The application specifically identifies the number and type of instructional or other staff that will teach or support special needs students, as well as special needs services to be provided by contracted providers. In addition, the application will identify additional supports or programs that will be provided to students with special needs. A plan is in place to have adequate staff to meet the needs of these students to include a licensed Special Education, ELL, and other identified teacher(s) through hiring or contracted services as needed.
- The plan for serving special needs and at-risk students aligns with the overall school mission, curriculum, and instructional approach. Professional development needs and financial considerations have been adequately addressed in the budget.

Note: It is strongly recommended that the applicant meet with the district's special education director or a representative from the district's special services department prior to submitting the charter application. The purpose of this meeting is to gain an understanding of how the authorizer views charter schools and the handling of special education issues.

Dispute Resolution Process

This section is simply a paragraph or two that reflects the school's understanding of and compliance with C.R.S. 22-30.5-107.5, which explains how the school and its authorizer agree to resolve disputes that may arise concerning governing policy provisions of the school's charter contract.

- The dispute resolution plan shows a clear understanding for compliance with statutory requirements for both the charter school and the authorizer. This should include a process to reach an agreement within 30 days of receipt of notice.
- The dispute resolution plan demonstrates reasonable method(s) for resolving disagreements, which arise between a charter school and its chartering district or authorizer, concerning governing policy provisions of the school's charter contract. Methods of settling a dispute if an agreement cannot be reached by mutual consent may include mutually agreeing to use an alternative dispute resolution process and the findings of a neutral third party and agreeing to be bound by their findings, or may include an appeal to the State Board of Education for a final decision. Any decision by the State Board is final.

Note: This is different from a grievance process which parents, staff and students can access in order to address areas of concern within the school. It will be important to include a grievance process within the school's policies.

School Management Contract (Only for schools contracting with an ESP/services provider)

If the proposed charter school intends to contract with an education service provider (ESP), such as a charter management organization (which includes a board serving over multiple schools with a central office for business services), education management organization, or any other type of school management or services provider, the application addresses the

following issues:

- A logical explanation of how and why the ESP/services provider or central services configuration was selected.
- Demonstrated evidence that the ESP/services provider has been successful in the academic and/or business operation aspects of other schools, including demonstrated academic achievement with the target population, as well as successful management of non-academic school functions (e.g. back-office services, school operations, extracurricular programs).
- Reasonable management contract terms and fees along with clear performance measures, penalty clauses, and contract severing provisions for both parties.
- Clear evidence that the ESP/ services provider is authorized to conduct business in Colorado.
- Details sufficient to assure there are no potential conflicts of interest between the ESP/services provider and the governing board. There is a clear plan for monitoring and evaluating performance of the ESP/services provider and adequate internal controls are in place that include how the governing board will ensure fulfillment of performance expectations.
- A clear description of which staff members will be hired, report to, and be paid, evaluated and terminated by the ESP/services provider, and any relationship with the governing board on these decisions.
- Clear understanding of financial obligation to the ESP/services provider and if it increases, decreases or stays the same for the duration of the relationship. This includes investments and disbursement of any excess revenues, ownership of products obtained with the use of public funds (e.g. textbooks, curriculum alignments to Colorado Academic Standards, etc.), and building ownership if the developers are making payments to the ESP/services provider.
- The following items should be attached to the charter application:
 - Term sheet is included with clear performance measures and contract severing provisions. The terms sheet also sets forth the proposed duration of the management contract; roles and responsibilities; scope of services and resources to be provided by the ESP/services provider; performance evaluation measures and timelines; compensation structure including clear identification of all fees to be paid to the ESP/services provider and what is provided for those fees; methods of contract oversight and enforcement; investment disclosure; and conditions for renewal and termination of the contract.
 - Proposed draft management contract including all of the above terms and a clear Conflict of Interest statement.
 - Documented evidence that the ESP/services provider is authorized to do business in Colorado (e.g. licensed), has demonstrated academic success with students similar to the target population (e.g. assessment data), has sound business practices (e.g. a copy of a recent audit), and has successfully managed other schools (e.g. references).

For more information on working with an ESP, see Educational Service Provide Guidelines on page 33 of *Sample Contract Language and Attachments* available at:

http://www.charterschoolquality.org/media/1184/BCSQ_SampleContractLanguage.pdf.