



**Colorado Charter Schools
Annual Conference**

February 25-27, 2026
Denver Marriott Tech Center



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Future Ready by Design: From Classroom to Career

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Colorado Charter School Institute

Larkspur
February 26, 2026 | 8:30 – 9:30 AM
Hot Topics



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Colorado League of
Charter Schools



We make it our priority to **advocate** for high-quality public charter schools across Colorado.



Be a part of the action.



Vision for Impact

Future Ready by Design Envisions a System Where:

- ❑ Students graduate with direction, credentials, and real options;
- ❑ Schools align academics with careers, college, or both;
- ❑ Authorizers have tools to support innovation with accountability;
- ❑ Families understand and trust workforce-aligned pathways; and
- ❑ Employers are true partners in education design.



Redefining College & Career Readiness Through Practice

Focus: *Workforce-aligned charter schools expand readiness beyond a single post-secondary outcome.*

- Across exemplars, strong models integrate:
 - Academic rigor with career-connected learning
 - Early exposure with later specialization
 - Multiple postsecondary options rather than a single pathway
- Strong Practices Surfaced
 - Integrated academic + career pathways (not add-on CTE)
 - Career exploration beginning before high school
 - Clear articulation of postsecondary options for students and families



National Exemplars: School Spotlights



- **Fully integrated aviation-themed model:** WMAA embeds aviation and aerospace concepts across core academics, ensuring career relevance is not an add-on but the organizing framework of the school's instructional program.
- **Authentic industry partnerships:** Located at an active airport, the school leverages deep partnerships with aviation, engineering, and transportation employers to provide students with real-world exposure, mentoring, and applied learning experiences.
- **Clear pathways from high school to careers:** Students graduate with industry-aligned skills, credentials, and postsecondary readiness for aviation, engineering, military, and STEM-related career pathways, including strong alignment to workforce and higher-education demands.
- **Early and sustained career awareness:** Beginning in early grades, students develop professional skills, technical literacy, and an understanding of aviation careers through hands-on projects, simulations, and career-focused coursework.
- **Replicable, mission-driven design:** WMAA demonstrates how a high-quality charter school can successfully align academics, culture, partnerships, and outcomes around a single career theme while maintaining strong instructional rigor and student engagement.



- **Growing multi-school CTE network:** Elevate Charter Schools operates four career-focused charter schools across Idaho, serving students in grades 6–12, with additional campuses approved or planned.
- **Career pathways as the core model:** Each Elevate campus is intentionally designed around career and technical education, integrating academics with hands-on pathways aligned to regional workforce needs.
- **Industry-aligned programming:** Students engage in CTE pathways such as construction, welding, culinary arts, medical careers, business, cybersecurity, and manufacturing, with opportunities to earn industry-recognized credentials.
- **Workforce readiness by design:** The network emphasizes employability skills alongside technical training, including structured workforce readiness certification and applied learning experiences.
- **Replicable, workforce-driven approach:** Elevate demonstrates how a charter network can scale career-connected learning across multiple regions while maintaining a clear, consistent program model.



Early Learning #1: Some Practices Travel Better Than Others

What NCSI Is Beginning to See

- Certain practices appear consistently across geography, industry, and authorizing context.
- These practices are less dependent on a single founder or local condition and more amenable to codification.
- Practices to Anchor
 - Embedding career learning into core academics
 - Structuring employer engagement with clear roles and expectations
 - Designing pathways that remain flexible across student goals
 - Student, family, employer, community input
- Why This Matters
 - These practices are strong candidates for replication and dissemination.
 - They help clarify “what good looks like” for authorizers and funders.





Early Learning #2: The Biggest Gaps Are Between Practice and Policy

What NCSI Is Beginning to See

- Many high-quality workforce-aligned schools demonstrate strong instructional and partnership practices.
- Friction emerges when those practices:
 - Do not map cleanly onto traditional accountability indicators
 - Raise questions during authorization or renewal that existing frameworks were not designed to answer
- Tensions to Surface
 - Workforce outcomes valued by families and employers but underrepresented in evaluation
 - Flexible staffing and scheduling models encountering compliance uncertainty
- Why This Matters
 - Reframes challenges as alignment issues rather than quality deficiencies.
 - Sets up the need for shared tools and updated review approaches.



Early Learning #3: Approval and Funding Are Interdependent

What NCSI Is Beginning to See

- Authorization clarity reduces financial risk.
- Funding confidence increases when models are legible, structured, and replicable.
- Employer and philanthropic engagement deepen when roles are clearly defined.

Implication

- Approval, funding, and sustainability are not separate problems; they reinforce/compound one another.
- This insight directly informs the CSP MDD deliverables focused on risk reduction and clarity.

These national signals show up very clearly in Colorado's charter landscape.

High School Programming in Colorado

Required

- Individual Career & Academic Planning (ICAP)
- Concurrent Enrollment
- Graduation Guidelines
- School Performance Framework with PWR indicator

Optional

- Alternative Teacher-Pupil Instruction
- Accelerating Students through Concurrent Enrollment (ASCENT)
- Career Development Incentive Program (CDIP)
- Teacher Recruitment Education & Preparation Program (TREP)
- Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-Tech)
- Career & Technical Education (CTE)

Optional PWR Programs



Alternative Teacher-Pupil Instruction: Asynchronous Teacher Led Courses
Blended Learning, Independent Study, Supplemental Online, and Work-Based Learning



Career Development Incentive Program (CDIP): Financial incentive for successful completion of high-demand Industry Recognized Credentials & Internships



Teacher Recruitment Education & Preparation Program (TREP)
Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-Tech)



Career & Technical Education: Coursework that supports students in building career competency and technical skill; Access to CTE funding

Closing the Gap between Policy & Practice

HB25-1278: Accountability



Change the PWR Indicator on the School Performance Framework (SPF) by Fall 2027

- Moves SAT to Achievement
- Creates new PWR sub-indicator
- College and career readiness before graduation: The “Big Three”
 - College credits (CE, AP, IB)
 - Industry recognized credentials (IRC)
 - Work-based learning

SB25-315: Funding



Comprehensive reorganization of PWR programs and funding streams

- Start-up Fund (3 years of funding beginning 2025-2026)
- Sustain Fund 2026-2027 and beyond
- Buckner Innovation Fund – need based funding for schools based the new PWR measure on the SPF (beginning in 2027-2028)

Colorado's Big Three

12 College Credits (CC)

Industry Recognized
Credential (IRC)

Work-Based Learning
(WBL)

Animas High School

Academic rigor with career-connected learning



Freshman:

- Career Cluster Surveys/Interest Inventories
- Career Fair at school
- Career Site Visit Field Trips

Sophomore:

- Inspire Week - WBL Service Project

Junior:

- LINK internship January

Senior:

- Capstone
- 2nd internship opportunity



Colorado Early Colleges Network

Multiple postsecondary options rather than a single pathway



- Concurrent enrollment
- CTE
 - Aerospace
 - Business, Management, Marketing
 - Computer & Digital Technology
 - Engineering
 - Health Aide
- Certification Labs
 - Adobe
 - Cybersecurity
 - Entrepreneurship
 - Information Technology
 - Microsoft Office
 - Python
 - Quickbooks



The Academy of Charter Schools

Early exposure with later specialization



- K-12 PWR Lessons (August - May)
- 8-12 Career Exploration Day & Course Selection (February)
- Course catalog aligned to Career Clusters
- Internships
 - Aviation
 - Autotech
 - Banking
 - Hospitals
 - IT Department (The Academy)
 - Machining & Tooling
 - National Security Agency
- CTE
 - Business, Management Marketing
 - Multimedia



Bringing It Together: From Early Learnings to Field-Level Tools

CSP deliverables are designed to: codify transferable practices, bridge gaps between practice and policy and reduce risk.

Looking Ahead Over the Life of the Project:

- Replication readiness tools
- Authorizer and operator facing resources
- Family facing materials
- National dissemination and learning

All resources will be openly licensed and adaptable.

Colorado stakeholders are well positioned to inform and test these tools.



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