2026 Town Hall

Bond Bill, Tax Credits, School Funding & What's Next

Colorado League of Charter Schools

August 21, 2026

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Agenda

- **Bond Equity Bill, What's Next:** Prateek Dutta
- **Education Freedom Tax Credit:** Eric Lerum
- **School Funding Formula:** Shannon Gossard
- **District Underpayment & Policy Recap:** Bill Bethke
- **Annual Finance Seminar:** Jen Larson

Welcome

Dan Schaller

President
Colorado League of Charter Schools

Bond Equity Bill

Prateek Dutta

VP of Policy
Colorado League of Charter Schools

05

Equitable Bond Access

Ensuring charter schools receive their fair share of public facilities funding

Colorado League of Charter Schools

Charter Schools Are Being Shut Out of Facilities Funding

Commissioned study reveals significant and persistent inequity

$17.2B

Total public facilities funding 2015–2024

90%

Share of facilities funding captured by district bond money

3.6%

Charter school share of district bond revenue

Key Finding

Between 2015–2024, district bond money accounted for $15.5B (90%) of all public facilities funding. Charters — serving nearly 16% of Colorado students — received just 3.6% of that revenue.

SB-145: A Win for Charter Schools

SB-145 creates a more inclusive process and allows charter schools to be meaningfully consulted when a district goes for a bond, and allows for more transparency in which capital projects were included.

Senate Education Committee

5 – 0

Full Senate

34 – 1

House Education Committee

11 – 2

Full House

52 – 11

Key Provisions from SB 145

- Requires at least one charter school representative on district long-range or capital-planning committees.
- Districts considering a capital ballot question must solicit charter school proposals in writing as early as practicable and no later than 120 days before board approval, with at least 45 days for schools to respond.
- Charter schools that submit a proposal have an opportunity to present their facility needs publicly to the school board or an appropriate capital-planning committee no later than 45 days before board approval.
- At least 30 days before board approval, the superintendent must notify each charter school in writing whether its proposal will be included. If excluded, the district must provide specific, proposal-related reasons and an opportunity to respond.
- Within 30 days after selecting projects, the district must publicly post the process it used and detailed reasons why each project considered was included or excluded.

Education Freedom Tax Credit

Eric Lerum

ErLerStrategies

eric@erlerstrategies.org

The Federal Tax Credit Scholarship Opportunity

and Colorado Public Charter Schools

Colorado League of Charter Schools
August 21, 2026

Education Freedom Tax Credit Scholarship (EFTC)

A New Funding Opportunity

Starting Jan. 1, 2027

Individual taxpayers will receive a **dollar-for-dollar** federal income tax credit of up to **$1,700** for contributions to state-approved Scholarship Granting Organizations (SGOs).

Student Eligibility

K-12 Students

K-12 students with a household income **<300%** of area median gross income are eligible to receive scholarships. (93% of CO students are eligible)

Education Freedom Tax Credit Scholarship Program (EFTC)

A broad variety of educational expenses are allowed:

Academic Support

- Tutoring
- Books, supplies, & equipment
- Classroom technology
- Special education support

Enrichment & Services

- Out-of-school enrichment
- Career-connected learning
- Dual-enrollment courses
- Transportation

Education Freedom Tax Credit Scholarship Program (EFTC)

League Support

All Colorado public charter schools can participate!

The League is here to help! We are planning to offer tools, templates, and technical assistance for:

- **Engaging your school community** to determine which educational opportunities you will offer your students and families
- Partnering with **an SGO**
- Developing your **fundraising plan** to maximize donations
- Developing a **marketing plan** for families so that they know about the scholarship opportunities
- Supporting families in **signing up for scholarships**

Education Freedom Tax Credit Scholarship Program (EFTC)

Next Steps & Contact

Action Required

Survey: Look out for a survey to gauge interest and the types of support your school needs – please complete it as soon as possible!

Questions? Reach out to Eric Lerum at eric@erlerstrategies.org

Education Freedom Tax Credit

Eric Lerum

ErLerStrategies

eric@erlerstrategies.org

Interest

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/clcs-taxcredit-26

School Funding Formula

Shannon Gossard

Founder
VAO Collaborative

What's my funding?

How Colorado's new school funding formula reaches your charter school, how to check your own number, and what to do if it looks off.

Colorado League of Charter Schools

portfolio.vaocollaborative.org/school-funding-check

The formula isn't new this year. The pass-through is.

Colorado began phasing in the HB24-1448 formula last year. What changed for FY27 is how the money reaches charter schools.

SB26-023

new charter pass-through

How your authorizer calculates your share and passes it through is what actually changed this year. That's why your number deserves a fresh look now.

30%

of the new formula applies in FY27

The phase-in began last year at 15%. It grows every year through FY32, so this year's answer is not next year's answer.

+1%

your floor over FY25-26

FY27 total program can't fall below your FY25-26 total program plus 1%. For many schools, that floor is the number.

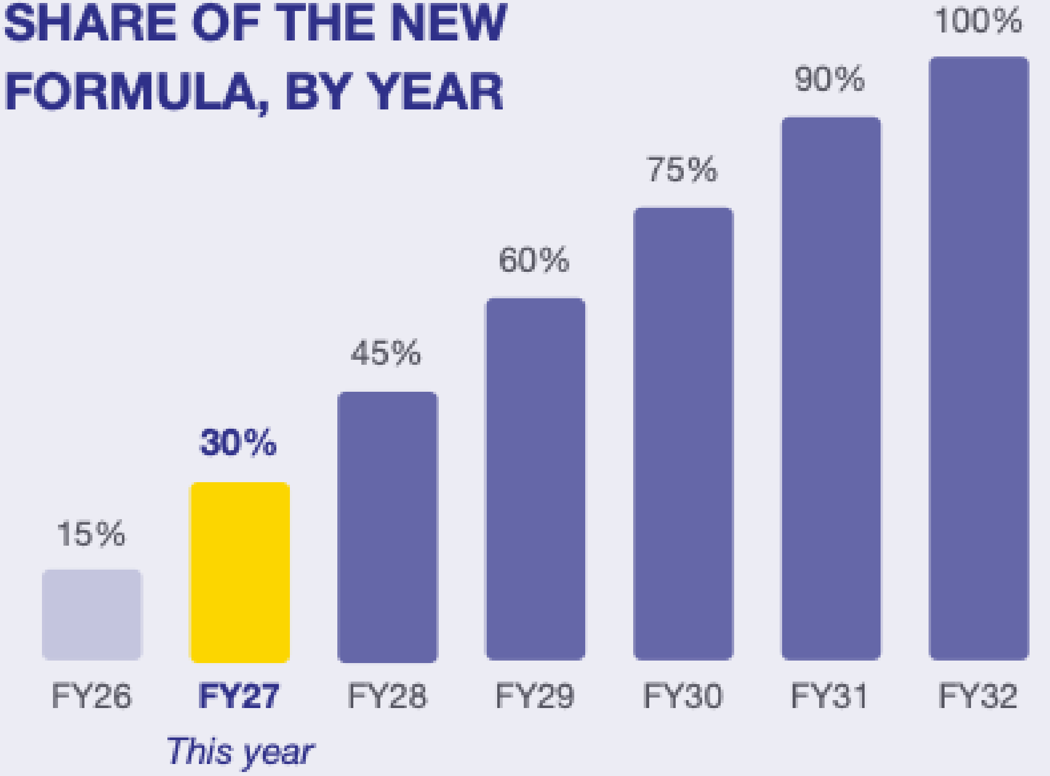
Your funding blends two formulas

FY27 pays the 1994-formula amount, plus 30% of the gain where the new formula comes out higher.

Both formulas run on your school's own counts. Each year the new formula carries more of the weight, until it stands alone in FY32.

Then one more step: the blended result is compared against your hold-harmless floor, and you receive the greater.

SHARE OF THE NEW FORMULA, BY YEAR



The schedule is the statute's intent. Each year's step must be funded through that year's school finance act, so the pace depends on the state budget.

In the new formula, your students set your rate

Statewide base. Every funded pupil starts from the same base amount.

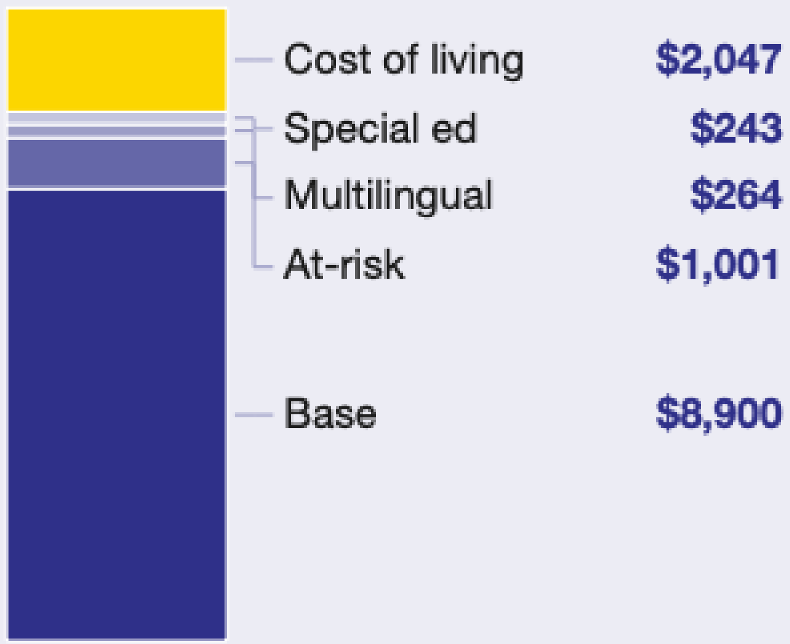
At-risk weight. Each FRL-eligible student adds about a quarter of base. More in high-concentration districts.

Multilingual learners. NEP/LEP students receiving services, within the five-year window.

Special education. Students in the October special-education enrollment count.

District factors. Size, cost of living, and locale scale the whole rate up.

SAMPLE SCHOOL: THE RATE, BUILT UP



$12,456 new-formula rate, per pupil

The floor: you can't fall below last year plus 1%

Your blended FY27 formula
1994 leg + 30% of the gain, on your counts

FY25-26 total program + 1%
The hold-harmless floor. One number, worth confirming first.

You receive the
GREATER
of the two

It protects your total program. The floor guards the whole dollar figure, not the per-pupil rate.

Enrollment decline doesn't remove it. The floor holds even if your count drops.

It's an FY27 construct. Later years compute hold-harmless differently.

The counts behind your number

COUNT	WHAT FEEDS THE FORMULA	WHY YOUR REPORTS MAY DIFFER
Enrollment / FTE	The October count, funded pupils only	Students carrying not-eligible-for-funding codes drop out, so this runs below your published PK-12 enrollment.
At-risk	Free-and-reduced-lunch eligibility	Direct certification (SNAP, Medicaid) plus the family income form plus categorical eligibility.
Multilingual learners	NEP/LEP, receiving services, within the five-year window	Much narrower than published NEP/LEP totals. Students past year five of services don't count, and exited students don't either.
Special education	The October 1 special-education enrollment	A separate count from the December child count, which drives categorical funding instead.

When your figure and your authorizer differ, start here. The gap could be one of these definitions, not the formula.

Your authorizer calculates and distributes

District-authorized schools

Your district calculates your share and passes it through. Most districts will work from CDE's charter pass-through model, published this July.

Districts may retain an administrative fee before pass-through. Ask for the before-and-after figures in writing.

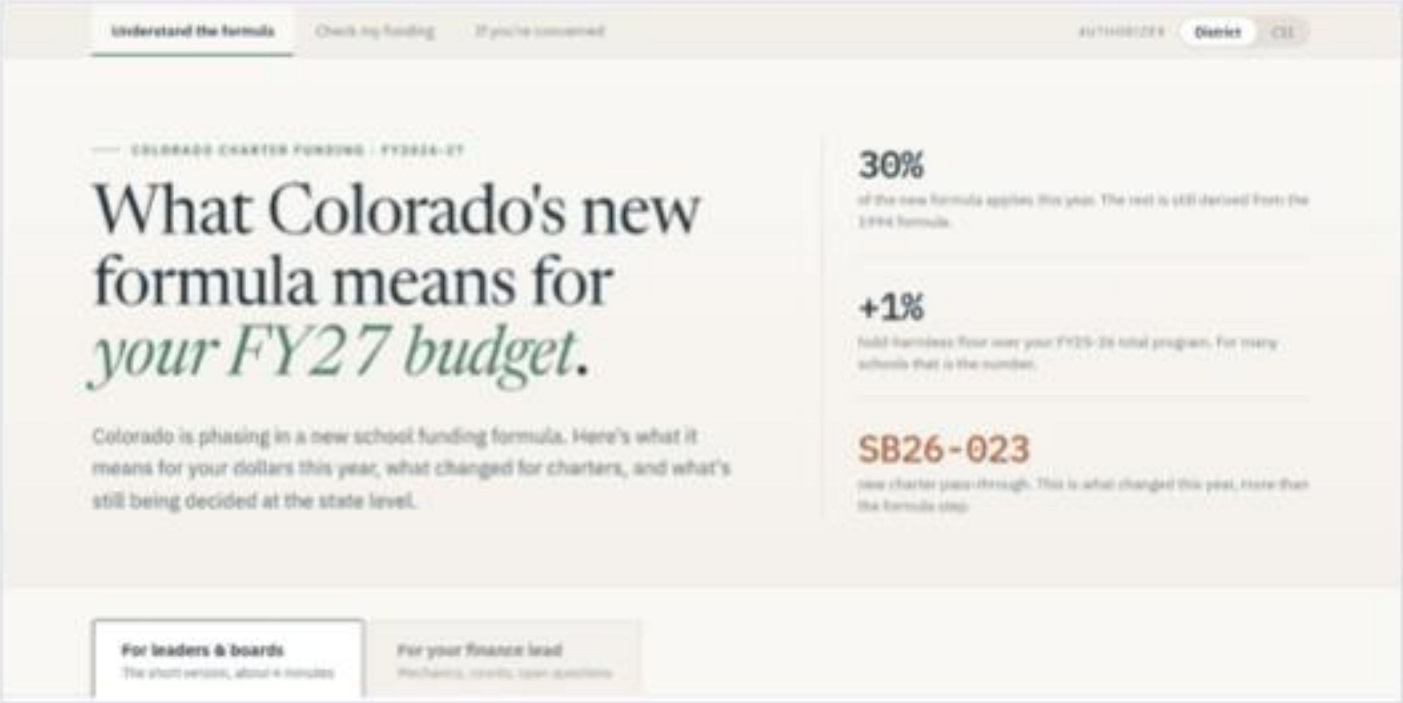
CSI-authorized schools

CSI publishes school-level PPR estimates each July that show the whole build-up, line by line. Your number is CSI's number.

CSI schools are also eligible for multi-year enrollment averaging, which cushions a declining count. District-authorized schools aren't eligible for it.

Where the two published tools differ, the question is which count applies. CDE and CSI read a few provisions differently today. Those conversations are active at the state level, several have already been resolved, and the differences are narrowing. The practical takeaway for you: know your own counts, and confirm which figure your authorizer started from.

Understanding your school's numbers



portfolio.vaocollaborative.org/school-funding-check

01 Understand the formula

The short version for leaders and boards, and a deeper cut for your finance lead.

02 Check my funding

Type your school's name for an FY27 estimate: your rate, your total, and whether the floor binds.

03 If you're concerned

What to do when your number doesn't match your authorizer.

Built on CDE's FY26-27 pass-through model and CSI's July 2026 PPR estimates. Decision support, not an authoritative calculation. Confirm your figures with your authorizer.

Your rate, your total, and your floor status

Your school (manual entry)

District-authorized · ADAMS 12 FIVE STAR SCHOOLS · 320 funded FTE

ESTIMATED FY27 FUNDING

$11,955 per pupil

$3,825,617 total program

ABOVE THE FLOOR

Your phased new-formula total ($3,825,617) is above the floor of $3,434,000, so the floor doesn't bind this year. Worth confirming your base in case counts shift at the October true-up.

WHAT MAKES UP YOUR RATE

Base per pupil	$8,900 /pupil
At-risk weight	$1,001 /pupil
English learner weight	$264 /pupil
Special education weight	$243 /pupil
Cost of living	$2,047 /pupil
New-formula total	**$12,456 /pupil**
Old-formula total	$11,740 /pupil

FY27 pays the old-formula leg plus 30% of the gain above it, then compares that against the hold-harmless floor.

The badge is the key fact. ABOVE THE FLOOR means your counts drive the number, so count accuracy pays. ON THE FLOOR means your FY25-26 base drives it, so confirming that base figure comes first.

Enter this fall's counts. Preview the true-up.

YOUR COUNTS, AND WHAT THE TRUE-UP WILL PAY

Your initial FY27 figure runs on the counts on file, typically prior-year until the October count is final. Enter your current-year counts to preview the January true-up.

COUNT	ON FILE	CURRENT YEAR
Funded FTE	320	320
Enrollment (October)	320	320
At-risk (FRL)	144	160
ELL (NEP/LEP)	38	38
Special education	35	35

On the current-year counts you entered, you'd be at $12,035 /pupil ($3,851,134) versus $11,955 /pupil ($3,825,617) on file, a $25,517 increase to expect at the true-up if your authorizer is funding you on the CDE charter pass-through tool.

Reset to filed counts

Your initial FY27 payments run on the counts on file, usually prior-year, until the October count settles. The January/February true-up pays on what you actually enrolled.

So enter what you're seeing this fall, and the tool shows the swing coming.

SAMPLE SCHOOL

16 more students qualify for FRL than the count on file.

+$25,517 at the true-up

$11,955 to $12,035 per pupil. Every eligible student you document by the October count is money at reconciliation.

Get to a better number, legitimately

The formula pays for documented students. The moves below are count accuracy: making sure the students you already serve actually get counted.

Chase every FRL form

Direct certification catches SNAP and Medicaid families automatically, but the family income form is on you. Each qualifying student adds roughly a quarter of base to the new leg.

Audit your multilingual-learner roster

Confirm each NEP/LEP student is coded as receiving services and check where they sit in the five-year window. Only those students carry the weight.

Tie special education to October 1

The count that pays is the October special-education enrollment. Make sure IEPs in process are resolved and recorded before the count date.

Keep a source for every count

FTE, at-risk, ELL, special education: one line each, with where it came from. You'll want exactly this at reconciliation.

Diagnose before you call

1 Is the floor binding?

If you're on the floor, count changes may not move this year's number at all. The figure to verify is your FY25-26 total program.

2 Which counts did they use?

Compare their FTE, at-risk, multilingual, and special-education counts against yours, one line at a time. This is where most gaps live.

3 Which FY25-26 figure?

Calculated total program or the amount actually received? Before or after the administrative fee? Both sides can honestly hold different numbers.

4 What's the timing?

Initial payments often run on prior-year counts and reconcile in January or February. Nothing has to be settled in one meeting.

Raise it well: one line, three documents

WHO TO TALK TO, IN ORDER

1. **Your authorizer finance office**
   District finance for district-authorized schools; CSI finance for CSI schools. Start here, in reconciliation mode.

2. **CDE School Finance**
   For questions the two of you can't tie out, especially count definitions and the FY25-26 base.

3. **The League**
   The League can support the conversation if you need to escalate beyond the first two steps.

BRING THREE THINGS

- **Your FY25-26 year-end settlement figure**
- **The FY27 pass-through figure from your authorizer**
- **Your funded counts, with a source for each**

Walk in with a number and a specific question, not a general worry.

Lead with the one line that differs. “Help me tie your figure to mine on the multilingual-learner count” gets much further than “you're paying us wrong.”

Thank you.

Your counts drive your number. Your floor protects your total.

Check both this week, and raise anything that looks off while the true-up can still catch it.

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VAO Collaborative · Shannon Gossard

Colorado League of Charter Schools

District Underpayment & Legislative Recap

Bill Bethke

Kutz & Bethke, LLC

Complaints Of District Underpayment

WILLIAM BETHKE, KUTZ & BETHKE LLC

Colo. Rev. Stat. § 22-30.5-112(9)

- Provides a state department and board remedy if a district has underpaid the school under its contract and section 22-30.5-112.
- Section 22-30.5-112 starts charter school funding at 100% payment (before deductions) of PPR . Thus, every alleged underpayment of PPR (and many other forms of shortfall) can be remedied under subsection (9).
- The complaint goes to the state board but is immediately forwarded to the finance unit at CDE.
- The finance unit analyzes the dispute, can require information and argument from the school and the district, and makes a recommendation to the state board.
- As these issues tend to be technical, the department's recommendation will likely be followed by the board.

Timeline

- A complaint must be filed "with in the next fiscal year following the year in which " the underpayment occurred. This allows "reconciliation" to occur while leaving the school with ample time to file.
- So, for example, if a district underpays PPR in 2026-2027, the deadline (effectively a statute of limitations) for filing with the state board will be June 30, 2028.
- The deadline will be extended if the charter contract requires the school to engage in an internal dispute resolution mechanism that runs into the next fiscal year.
- For example, if a 2026-2027 dispute went into required dispute resolution under the contract that was not completed until some time after June 30, 2027, the deadline would move back one fiscal year to June 30, 2029.

Outcome

- The state board can order the district to pay any amount owed.
- If the district does not pay, the state board can withhold funds from the district and pay the charter school directly. Notice that a district defying a state board order would also be subject to loss of exclusive authorizing.
- The losing party (school or district) is required to pay the department the cost it incurs in conducting its review.

2026 Legislative Recap

William P. Bethke

Kutz & Bethke LLC

Quick Hits

- A new exemption exists for school readiness plans. BH 26-1050.
- The safe drinking water law, testing, and money for remediation now extends to 12^{th} grade. HB 1391.
- Licensing requirements for school counselors are becoming more demanding. SB 26-153.
- Our law on civil rights protection in places of public accommodations has been made more explicit when it comes to public schools. HB 26-1411.
- Certain PERA options (including opportunities to buy service credit) have been modified and made accessible to more employees. HB 26-1026.
- Licensed child-care programs must disclose that they are mandatory reports and disclose their policy and practices for any video recording at the center. SB 26-050

Not Quite as Quick 1

- HB 26-1417 clarifies that all licensing, professional, trade-related, secondary and post-secondary testing is subject to state anti-discrimination law, particularly with regard to disability accommodation. This places what was primarily a matter of federal enforcement clearly within state jurisdiction.
- SB 26-004 allows schools to file for "red flag" or "extreme protection" orders. These are the restraining orders that allow a court to temporarily order confiscation of firearms. This is obviously and extreme step, but one now available to schools.

Not Quite as Quick 2

- SB 26-103 is a somewhat confusing statute that appears to require adopting what is called an ACCESS policy. What the law may accomplish is incentivizing schools to modify their UIP to clearly direct "resources and supports" to at-risk students, and it provides a nonexclusive list of measures a school *may* undertake that qualifying as directing resources and supports to at-risk students. If this in in your posted UIP, you are exempt from the statute.
- SB 26-104 requires exterior key boxes at schools that are part of a plan for local law enforcement emergency access to the school. The requirements are somewhat detailed, but clear. And some compliance flexibility is provided.

The Mid-Majors 1

- SB 26-145 tightens up district behavior related to charter schools seeking bond or MLO monies. Districts must solicit charter school plans, provide some hearing to such plans, and explain any denial of such plans. Inclusion (or degree and form of inclusion) remains a district choice, but timelines are now provided and the political incentives that favor including charter inclusion should become more salient.

The Mid-Majors 2

- SB 26-1299 takes three steps to reduce regulatory burdens:
  - Schools no longer need a written policy to guide use of pencil and paper options on state assessments.
  - Charter school networks with fewer than 1,200 students and one authorizer can complete one plan instead of a plan for each school code.
  - CDE is barred from trying, directly or indirectly, to force voluntary data disclosures by schools (in other words, voluntary means voluntary).

The Mid-Majors 3

- SB 26-125 was a major effort by disability advocates to create a state remedy that would make up for federal indifference/hostility to enforcement of Section 504 and title II of the ADA to public schools.
  - The substance of federal protection has been passed into state law. Thus, anyone who was thinking they could ignore these rules because OCR was out of commission (hopefully no one) should think again.
  - Schools must have policies, as a matter of state law, that reflect obligations, requirednotices, etc., that would otherwise be due under the federal statutes.
  - And yet, the attempt to create a state *enforcement* mechanism is (in an abundance of irony) on hold due to lack of funding for CDE. Stay tuned to see if this gets fixed in 2027.

The *pièce de resistance*

- SB 26-023 (non finance provisions).
- The statute puts in place a new scheme for part-time (.5 FTE) homeschool support programs, restricting them to homeschool support, but now creating clear rules for extraterritorial .5 FTE programs (to be based on regulations adopted this December; stay tuned).
- There is a hold-harmless status for some programs for this year. Because ERBOCES has evaporated, some worthy programs are looking for a qualified sponsor. Charters are qualified sponsors. The (new) application deadline for *this* school year is September 4.

Annual Finance Seminar

Jennifer Larson

Director of Business Services
Colorado League of Charter Schools

Colorado League of Charter Schools

Save the date or register

Annual Finance Seminar

- August 28, 2026, AllCopy Offices, Denver

Leadership Summit 2026

- October 2, 2026, The Westin, Denver

Annual Conference 2027

- March 4-5, 2027, Gaylord Resort, Aurora

Contact Us

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Thank you.

Town Hall Survey

Policy One Pagers

https://bit.ly/policy1pgrs

Tax Credit Interest Form

Colorado League of Charter Schools

CLCS Action

Great Schools Colorado