

Leadership Summit

October 10, 2025

The Ritz-Carlton, Denver

forward→ 2025



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CO League of Charter Schools - Leadership Summit 2025



Authorizing Basics

What It Is and Why It Matters

October 10, 2025



Dr. Mackenzie Khan, ED

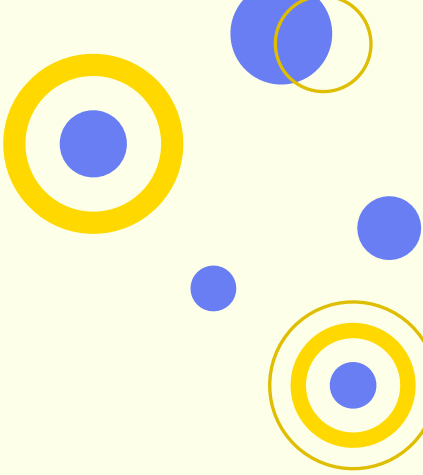
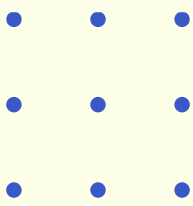


cacsa

Colorado Association of
Charter School Authorizers

Who is in the room?



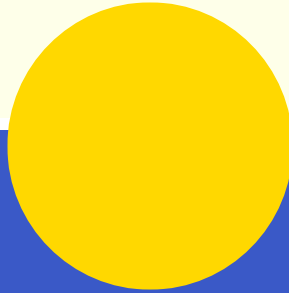


Purpose of Today's Session



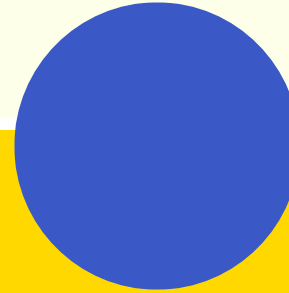
Understand what authorizers do

Explore the essential responsibilities and decision-making powers of charter school authorizers—and why they're more than just gatekeepers.



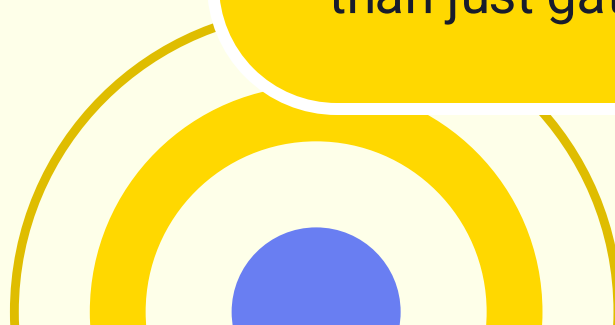
See why it matters for students and families

Learn how strong (or weak) authorizing directly impacts student outcomes, school quality, equity, and community trust.



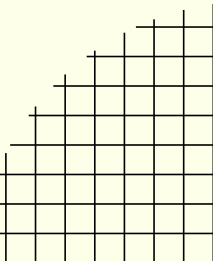
Connect to your work in education

Reflect on how your role intersects with authorizing and what it means for accountability, innovation, and student-centered systems.



Take 5 minutes to discuss with a partner:

- **What do you already know (or think) about how charter schools are approved or overseen?**
- **What questions do you have about charter authorizing?**
- **What do you believe the #1 role of a charter authorizer is?**



What is Charter Authorizing?

Charter authorizing is the process of approving, monitoring, renewing, and, if needed, closing charter schools.



"Authorizers are ultimately responsible for the overall performance of their portfolios of schools."

Charter application approval/denial

Authorizers evaluate and decide whether proposed charter schools meet the criteria to open based on academic, financial, and organizational plans.

Performance monitoring

Authorizers regularly oversee charter schools to ensure they are meeting agreed-upon outcomes and complying with laws and contractual obligations.

Charter renewal or closure

At the end of a charter term, authorizers determine whether a school's performance merits renewal—or if persistent underperformance requires closure.

Who Can Authorize in Colorado?



- A school district
- Charter School Institute – the statewide charter school authorizer

An applicant cannot apply to a district unless a majority of the proposed students reside in the chartering district or contiguous districts.

CSI may authorize schools if their district has not retained exclusive authority to authorize or if the district board gives permission to the applicant.

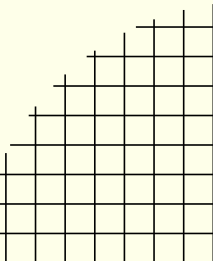
Why give permission?

- Lack of capacity at district level for support & monitoring
- Operational challenges (facilities, transportation, etc.)
- Financial incentives
- Local priorities and complex situations

Who can authorize charter schools nationally?

- School districts (90% of all authorizers)
- State education agencies
- Higher education institutions
- Independent charter boards
- Mayors and municipalities
- Nonprofit organizations

Note: Most authorizers oversee 1–5 schools, but a few manage over 100.



What else does the Charter School Act cover?

- **C.R.S § 22-30.5-106**
 - Applications
- **C.R.S § 22-30.5-107**
 - Application Reviews: Approval & Denial
- **C.R.S § 22-30.5-108**
 - Appeals
- **C.R.S § 22-30.5-105**
 - Charter Contracting
- **C.R.S § 22-30.5-110**
 - Ongoing Oversight & Evaluation
 - Charter Renewal
 - Nonrenewal & Termination

Authorizer

Standards

NACSA Authorizing Standards

- Blueprint for effective authorizing that helps charter authorizers balance diverse and competing interests, regardless of the policies and laws of a given state.

Colorado Authorizing Standards

- State Board passed a permanent rule in 2012 to establish standards for charter schools and charter school authorizers.
- Reflects similar best practices to NACSA authorizing standards, while meeting CO requirements and needs.
- Based on recommendation of state-wide stakeholder task force.



Principle 1: Maintain High Standards



A quality authorizer will:

- Set high standards for approving charter applicants
- Maintain high standards for the schools it oversees
- Effectively cultivate quality schools that meet identified educational needs
- Oversee charter schools that meet the performance standards and targets set forth in the charter contracts
- Close schools that fail to meet standards and targets set in law and by contract

Principle 2: Uphold School Autonomy



A quality authorizer will:

- Honor and preserve innovations and core autonomies crucial to school success, including governing board independence, personnel, school vision and culture, instructional programming, design, and use of time, and budgeting.
- Assume responsibility, not for the success or failure of individual schools, but for holding schools accountable for their performance.
- Minimize administrative and compliance burdens on schools.
- Focus on holding schools accountable for measurable outcomes rather than processes.

Principle 3: Protect Student and Public Interests



A quality authorizer will:

- Make the well-being and interests of the students the fundamental value informing all actions and decisions.
- Hold schools accountable for fulfilling fundamental public education obligations to all students and the public.
- Focus on the mission of chartering high-quality schools, transparency in authorizing policies, practices and decisions, effective public stewardship and ethical conduct, and compliance with all laws and regulations.
- Support parents and students in being well-informed about the quality of education provided by charter schools.

Take 5 minutes to discuss with a partner:

- **Which of these principles—high standards, autonomy, or protecting student/public interests—feels most important or most challenging to you?**



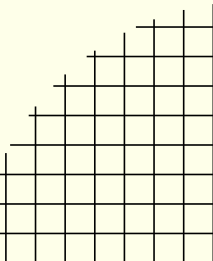
What is a Charter Contract?



A charter contract is a legally binding agreement between a charter school and its authorizer that defines the terms under which the school will operate, including performance expectations and accountability measures.

A charter contract typically includes:

- The school's mission and vision
- Academic performance goals and metrics
- Governance structure and leadership roles
- Enrollment policies and procedures
- Financial management and reporting requirements
- Student support and equity commitments
- Operational and organizational standards
- Terms and timelines for renewal, non-renewal, or revocation
- Compliance with applicable state and federal laws



Introduction & Recitals	Establishment of School	Enrollment	Educational Program
Academically Exceptional Students	Special Education	School Performance Standards & Evaluation	District-School Relationship
Intervention & Revocation	Charter Renewal	School Closure	Operational Powers
Employment	Facilities	Funding	Dispute Resolution
General Provisions			

CACSA Standard Charter Contract

The Charter School Life Cycle



Approval

Authorizers evaluate and decide whether proposed charter schools meet the criteria for approval based on academic design, community need, operational capacity, and alignment with state law and local priorities.



Oversight

Authorizers provide ongoing monitoring of academic, financial, and organizational performance, ensuring that schools meet the goals outlined in their charter contracts and comply with applicable laws and regulations.



Renewal

Authorizers conduct a comprehensive evaluation at the end of a charter term to determine whether the school has met its performance standards and merits continuation under a renewed charter contract.



Closure

When a charter school fails to meet expectations or violates its contract, authorizers are responsible for initiating and managing closure, ensuring a transparent process that protects students and upholds public accountability.

Approval



Purpose

Evaluate whether proposed charter schools demonstrate strong academic design, community need, operational capacity, and alignment with state law and district priorities.



Why It Matters

Sets a strong foundation for school quality and accountability by ensuring only well-prepared applicants are approved.



Steps

- Review written application
- Conduct interviews with founding team
- Evaluate criteria for approval
- Negotiate and execute a charter contract

Oversight



Purpose

Monitor charter school performance to ensure academic success, financial health, and compliance with laws and contract terms.



Why It Matters

Ensures schools are delivering on their promises to students and families while maintaining public trust and fiscal responsibility.



Steps

- Review annual reports and audits
- Conduct site visits and performance reviews
- Provide feedback, support, and interventions as needed



Renewal



Purpose

Evaluate whether a charter school has met the academic, financial, and organizational performance standards required for continued operation.



Why It Matters

Promotes continuous improvement and ensures only schools meeting expectations continue to serve students.



Steps

- Analyze multi-year performance data
- Conduct renewal site visit
- Gather stakeholder input
- Recommend renewal or non-renewal



Closure



Purpose

Protect students and uphold accountability when a charter school fails to meet performance expectations or violates its contract.



Why It Matters

Ensures that students are not left in failing or unsafe schools by enforcing accountability and managing a fair, transparent transition that protects students and public trust.



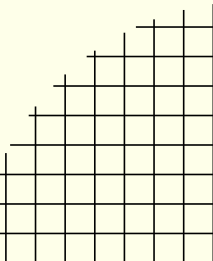
Steps

- Notify stakeholders and plan transition
- Oversee student placement and records transfer
- Manage financial close-out and compliance reporting



Take 5 minutes to discuss with a partner:

- **Which stage — approval, oversight, renewal, or closure — do you think most affects student outcomes? Why?**
- **Where do you think authorizers have the most power to influence equity?**



Students are protected.

In NACSA's Principles & Standards, a quality authorizer "evaluates performance and monitors compliance; ensures schools' legally entitled autonomy; protects student rights; informs intervention, revocation, and renewal decisions."

Families have trustworthy choices.

NACSA (and related guidance) does emphasize setting rigorous, quantifiable standards, holding schools accountable, applying consequences, and transparency.

Schools are held to fair expectations.

The Fordham Institute report "Do Authorizer Evaluations Predict the Success of New Charter Schools?" discusses how authorizers that use formal performance frameworks and transparent renewal criteria are more likely to have schools with stronger academic outcomes.

Poor authorizing creates inequity and instability.

Weak authorizing allows inconsistent oversight and uneven quality across schools—leaving students in underperforming environments, widening equity gaps, and eroding public trust in the charter sector.

Quality Authorizing Matters

Why?



Take 8 minutes to discuss with a partner:

- **What might quality authorizing look like from your perspective?**
- **What areas of authorizing need to be prioritized in your district in your opinion?**



What are the common challenges with new authorizers?



Navigating legal and policy frameworks



Ensuring high-quality oversight



Building relationships with operators

Limited staff and funding

National Practices in Supporting Authorizers



Professional Development & Training

- National Conferences & Workshops
- Online Learning & Webinars
- State-Centered Programs (CACSA)

Collaborative Networks

- Statewide Authorizer Networks
- Cross-State Learning Initiatives
- National Authorizer Networks

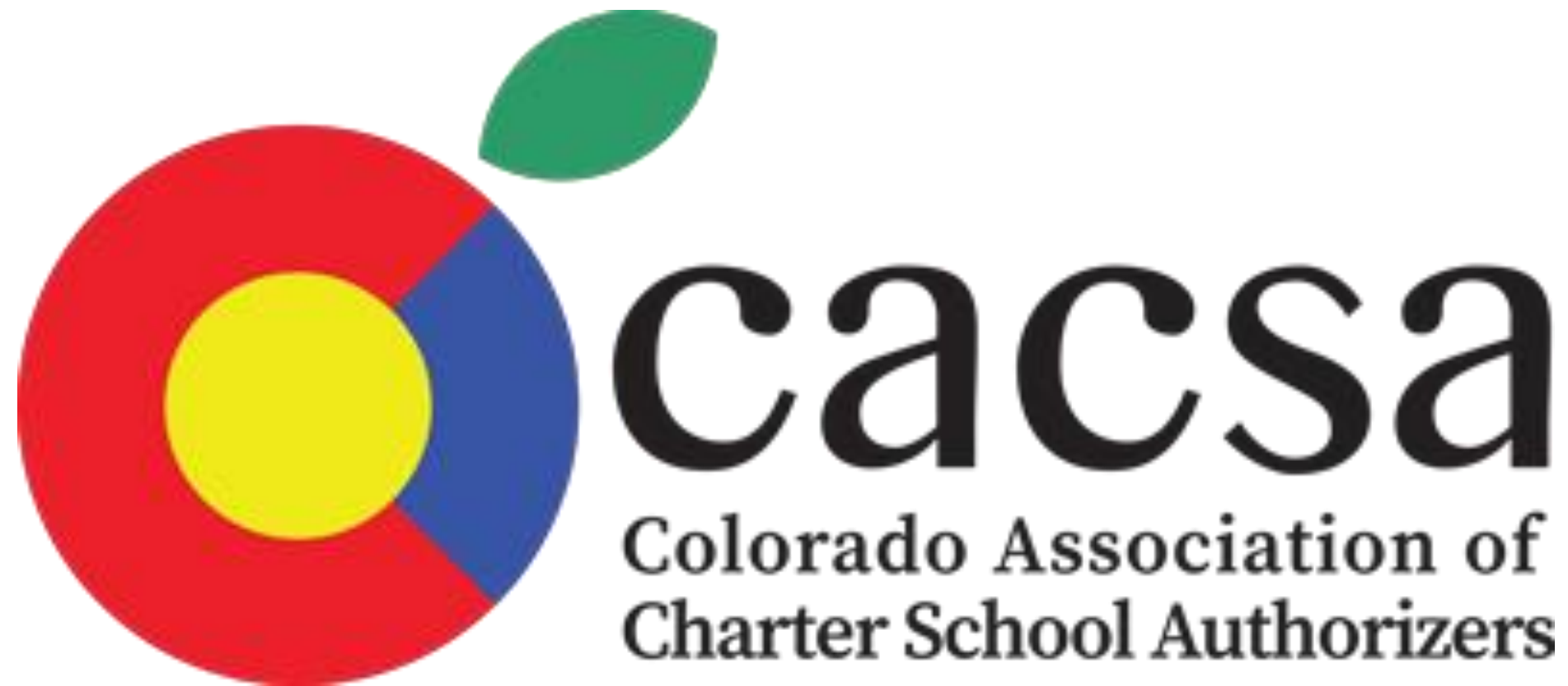
Technical Assistance & Contracting

- Authorizer Resource Banks
- Consultancies & Troubleshooting
- Customized Contracted Support

Mentorship Programs

- Formal Mentorship Programs
- Peer Shadowing
- Learning Cohorts





Our Vision



The vision of CACSA is that all charter school authorizers will have the tools needed to implement best practices to ensure the charter schools they oversee are of high-quality; effectively serve all students; operate with appropriate autonomy, governance and oversight; and are accountable for academic results, finances, and operations.

Our Mission



This mission of the Colorado Association of Charter School Authorizers (CACSA) is to promote and support best practices in charter school authorizing and to help all Colorado charter school authorizers develop, adopt, and implement practices that improve results for all students.



CACSA Resources & Supports for Authorizers in Colorado

Resource Bank

- Best Practice Resources
- Customizable Templates
- Articles & Research
- National Examples
- Fact Sheets
- Model Materials
- Authorizer Bootcamp

Peer Learning, Professional Development, & Networking

- Content-Specific Working Groups
- Peer Learning Events
- Networking Events
- Online Webinars
- Consultancy Practices
- Membership Meetings

Technical Assistance & Contracted Services

- 1:1 Authorizer Support On-Demand
- Individualized Technical Assistance
- Customized Fee for Service Contracting

Authorizer Welcome Kit

An onboarding tool designed to equip new charter school authorizers in Colorado with the foundational knowledge, tools, and connections needed to confidently carry out their responsibilities. The Welcome Kit provides essential guidance on legal frameworks, authorizing practices, and state-specific context, and is accompanied by a live training series and field-testing process to ensure its relevance and usability in real-world authorizing work.

Authorizer Self-Evaluation Tool

An interactive resource that enables Colorado charter school authorizers to evaluate their current practices against national quality standards and identify priority areas for growth. Aligned with NACSA's Essential Practices, the tool is designed to be user-friendly, adaptable to varying levels of experience and capacity, and to promote continuous improvement across the authorizing lifecycle.

CACSA's Newest Resources



Thank you!

Resources & Contact Info

Mackenzie Khan

mackenzie.khan@coauthorizers.org

Vanessa Glenn

Vanessa.Glenn@coauthorizers.org



cacsa

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Charter School Authorizers

coauthorizers.org





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