

Overview of the Performance Framework

The CSI Performance Framework provides the basis for the CSI Annual Review of Schools (CARS). The Performance Framework explicitly defines the measures by which CSI holds schools accountable with regards to academic, financial, and organizational performance.

Charter school authorizers are responsible for maintaining high standards for school performance, upholding school autonomy, and protecting student and public interests. Using a performance contract as both a guide and a tool, a quality authorizer maintains high standards and manages charter school performance—not by dictating inputs or controlling processes—but by setting expectations and holding schools accountable for results. A quality authorizer engages in responsible and effective performance management by ensuring that schools have the autonomy to which they are entitled and the public accountability for which they are responsible.

Charter school authorizing begins with a bargain for performance. Authorizers agree to entrust a charter school's governing board with public dollars and public school students and to give it broad autonomy over how it achieves agreed-upon goals. In return, the school's board commits to achieving specified results, managing public funds responsibly, complying with its legal obligations, and providing a quality education to the students in its care.

In order for this bargain of autonomy in exchange for accountability to work, it is essential that authorizers establish, maintain, and enforce high performance standards for all schools in their portfolios. This includes not only holding schools accountable for the academic performance of all of their students, which should always be the primary measure of quality, but also holding schools accountable for financial and organizational performance. The critical first step in effective performance management is to set and communicate clear and rigorous expectations for performance. Schools need clearly defined standards so that they know what is expected of them, and authorizers need them to manage performance effectively by holding schools accountable for outcomes without attempting to control inputs.

The National Association of Charter School Authorizers' (NACSA's) Principles & Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing (2015) emphasizes that a quality authorizer establishes standards for school performance that are clear, quantifiable, rigorous, and attainable. NACSA also recommends that authorizers develop and formally adopt a Performance Framework that includes academic, financial, and organizational performance measures for use by schools and authorizers to establish expectations, guide practice, assess progress, and inform decision making over the course of the charter term and at renewal or revocation. In addition, many states have enacted policies that mandate that authorizers develop and use Performance Frameworks, and additional states are considering similar policies.

The three areas of performance covered by the framework—academic, financial, and organizational— correspond directly with the three components of a strong charter school application, the three key areas of responsibility outlined in strong state charter laws and strong charter school contracts, and are the three areas on which a charter school's performance should be evaluated.

In each of these three areas, the frameworks ask a fundamental question: how did the school perform last year?

The answers to each of these three questions are essential to a comprehensive evaluation of charter school performance.

Academic Performance Framework

The Academic Performance Framework includes measures that help to answer the question, “How did the school perform academically last year?”

The Academic Performance Framework includes three primary indicators: Academic Achievement, Academic Growth, and Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness, which align with the state’s accountability system. CSI utilizes the same measures included in the state’s accountability system along with additional measures within these indicators to evaluate charter school viability and sustainability.

1. Academic Achievement
a. How are students achieving on state assessments?
b. How are students achieving on state assessments over time?
c. How are students achieving on state assessments in comparison to other schools in their geographic home district or schools that students might otherwise attend?
d. Have students demonstrated readiness for the next grade level/course, and, ultimately, are they on track for college and careers?
e. How are students achieving in comparison to similar schools statewide?
2. Academic Growth
a. Are students making sufficient growth on state assessments?
b. Are students making sufficient growth on state assessments over time?
c. How are students growing on state assessments in comparison to other schools in their geographic home district or schools that students might otherwise attend?
d. How is student growth distributed across growth levels?
e. How are students growing in comparison to similar schools statewide?
3. Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness
a. How are students achieving on state assessments for postsecondary readiness?
b. Are students graduating high school?
c. Are students dropping out of high school?
d. Are high school graduates adequately prepared for post-secondary academic success?
e. What is the school’s post-completion success rate?

Financial Performance Framework

The Financial Performance Framework includes a set of measures that help to answer the question, “How did the school perform financially last year?”

Whereas the state accountability system is based on academic performance alone, CSI aligns with best practice in charter school authorizing and evaluates financial performance as well.

The Financial Performance Framework includes two primary indicators: Near-Term and Sustainability. These are the same indicators included in sample framework developed by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA). The majority of the measures included within these indicators are included in NACSA’s sample financial framework or the financial framework of one or more charter school authorizers in the nation.

1. Near Term
a. Has the school met the statutory TABOR emergency reserve requirement?
b. What is the school's current ratio?
c. What is the school's days of cash on hand?
d. Is the school in default with any financial covenants they have with loan agreements?
e. What is the school's funded pupil count variance?
2. Sustainability
a. What is the school’s aggregate 3-year total margin?
b. What is the school’s net asset position?
c. What is the school’s debt?
d. What is the school’s cash flow?

Organizational Performance Framework

The Organizational Performance Framework includes a set of measures that help to answer the question, “How did the school perform organizationally last year?”

Whereas the state accountability system is based on academic performance alone, CSI aligns with best practice in charter school authorizing and evaluates organizational performance as well.

The Organizational Performance Framework is designed to evaluate schools against existing requirements in law, rules, regulations, policies, and charter contracts, not to create new requirements for schools. While schools would be accountable for compliance with most existing requirements even without the Organizational Framework, the framework allows the authorizer to transparently communicate the primary areas for compliance through one document. It is designed to treat all charter schools as though they are the same only in terms of meeting minimum legal and ethical requirements. This enables charter schools to retain the flexibility and autonomy to be different in the ways that matter most for a school’s mission, vision, and educational program.

Of the three frameworks, the Organizational Framework abuts most closely against school autonomy. The central premise of charter school autonomy is that the authorizer will articulate the expected outcomes, and the school will have maximum flexibility to determine the best way to achieve those outcomes. In other words, the authorizer articulates the ends and the school decides the means of getting there. Whereas the Academic and Financial Frameworks focus almost exclusively on results, the Organizational Framework inevitably mandates process. Whether it is meeting requirements for minimum instructional days and minutes or ensuring that the facility meets applicable health and safety codes, the Organizational Framework is the place where the school becomes externally accountable for how it operates.

The Organization Performance Framework includes the following indicators: Education Program; Diversity, Equity of Access, and Inclusion; Governance and Financial Management; School Operations and Environment; Additional Obligations. Additionally, in alignment with the CSI mission to serve at-risk students, the Organizational Framework includes an indicator that specifically focuses on how schools serve students classified as at-risk.

The majority of the measures included within these buckets are the same measures included in NACSA’s sample organizational framework or the organizational framework of one or more charter school authorizers in the nation.

1. Education Program
a. Is the school complying with applicable education requirements?
2. Diversity, Equity of Access, and Inclusion
a. Is the school protecting the rights of all students?
3. Governance and Financial Management
a. Is the school complying with governance requirements?
b. Is the school satisfying financial reporting and compliance requirements?
4. School Operations and Environment
a. Is the school complying with health and safety requirements?
b. Is the school complying with facilities and transportation requirements?
c. Is the school complying with employee credentialing and background check requirements?
5. Additional Obligations
a. Is the school complying with all other obligations?