



nacsa
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZERS

CORE RESOURCE: CHARTER SCHOOL APPLICATION EVALUATION CRITERIA

NACSA KNOWLEDGE



Empowering Excellence | Advancing Practice

National Association of Charter School Authorizers
105 W. Adams Street, Suite 3500
Chicago, IL 60603-6253
www.qualitycharters.org

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About NACSA

The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) is dedicated to improving the quality of public education by improving the performance of charter school authorizers. NACSA is the oldest national organization devoted exclusively to strengthening charter schools by developing outstanding authorizers and is the trusted resource and innovative leader working with public officials and education leaders to increase the number of high-quality charter schools in cities and states across the nation. NACSA provides training, consulting, and policy guidance to authorizers and education leaders interested in increasing the number of high-quality schools and improving student outcomes.

About NACSA's Knowledge Core

NACSA's Knowledge Core is a new interactive web-based knowledge and learning portal designed to serve the professional needs of both novice and experienced charter school authorizers in carrying out their complex work. From the basics of authorizing to advanced topics, NACSA's Knowledge Core provides a rich array of core authorizing resources, training, guidance, practical tools, and professional networking opportunities to deepen NACSA members' knowledge and help them meet NACSA's *Principles & Standards for Quality Charter Authorizing*. NACSA's Knowledge Core includes short interactive courses and self-paced, multimedia learning modules; easy-to-customize templates, protocols, and policies; a dashboard to track individual learning progress; and a discussion forum and searchable peer network to facilitate knowledge sharing among members.



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Ratings and Criteria Overview

Evaluators will use the following criteria to rate applicant responses to the Request for Qualifications. Within each section, specific criteria define the expectations for a strong response that “Meets the Standard.” Evaluators will rate responses by applying the following guidance:

Rating	Characteristics
Meets or Exceeds the Standard:	The response reflects a thorough understanding of key issues. It addresses the topic with specific and accurate information that shows thorough preparation; presents a clear, realistic picture of how the school expects to operate; and inspires confidence in the applicant’s capacity to carry out the plan effectively.
Partially Meets the Standard:	The response meets the criteria in some respects, but lacks detail and/or requires additional information in one or more areas.
Does Not Meet the Standard:	The response is wholly undeveloped or significantly incomplete; demonstrates lack of preparation; is unsuited to the mission of the authorizer or otherwise raises substantial concerns about the viability of the plan or the applicant’s ability to carry it out.

Recommendations from the Evaluation Team will be based on evaluation of the written application (narrative and attachments), independent due diligence, and the applicant interview. **In addition to meeting the criteria that are specific to that section, each part of the proposal should align with the overall mission and vision, educational program, and operations and financial plans**

School Overview

This section is not rated separately by the evaluators. It provides the evaluators with a reference for each of the other sections of the application, which will be assessed, in part, for the quality of alignment with the School Overview.

NOTE: If the applicant is proposing to replicate an existing school or school model, operate multiple schools under a single board of directors, or intends to contract with a third-party education service provider (ESP), the applicant must complete the **Replication Application Addendum**. An ESP is any third-party entity, whether nonprofit or for-profit, that provides comprehensive education management services to a school via contract with the school's governing board.

Section 1: Educational Program Design & Capacity

A strong Educational Program Design is coherent overall and aligned internally with the school's mission and vision, Operations Plan, and Financial Plan.

Education Program

A strong description of the Education Program will have the following characteristics:

Program Overview

This section is not "rated" by the evaluators; however, all other sections of the Education Program will be evaluated for alignment with the overview.

Curriculum and Instructional Design

- Framework for a rigorous, quality instructional design that reflects the needs of the school's target population and will ensure all students meet or exceed the expectations of the [INSERT STATE] Curriculum Standards aligned with the Common Core State Standards.
- Comprehensive, quality curriculum overview that includes a sample course scope and sequence for one subject for one grade for each division (elementary, middle, high school) the school would serve, and demonstrated alignment of course outcomes with applicable standards. Sound curricular choices, by subject, including reasonable evidence the curriculum will be appropriate and effective for the targeted students.
- Sound instructional strategies and explanation of why they are well suited for the targeted student population, including effective methods and systems for providing differentiated instruction to meet the needs of all students.
- Evidence that the proposed educational program has a sound base in research, theory, and/or experience, and has been or is likely to be rigorous, engaging, and effective for the anticipated student population.

Pupil Performance Standards

- Clear, rigorous learning standards (provided for one grade for each division the school would serve) and exit standards aligned with applicable standards.
- Thoughtful identification of and plan for development and adoption of any additional academic standards beyond state and authorizer that the school would adopt or develop, including explanation and evidence of how those standards would exceed the state standards.
- Clear, rigorous promotion and exit policies and standards.

High School Graduation Requirements and Post-secondary Readiness (*High Schools Only*)

- Sound plan for meeting state and authorizer graduation requirements (including credits, GPA calculation, transcripts, electives) and compelling explanation of any additional requirements beyond the state’s and authorizer’s requirements.
- Clear, persuasive explanation of how the school’s graduation requirements will ensure student readiness for college or other post-secondary opportunities (trade school, military service, or entering the workforce).
- Effective systems and structures for students at risk of dropping out or not meeting graduation requirements.

School Calendar and Schedule

- School calendar and sample daily and weekly schedules that meet minimum [INSERT STATE] requirements (at least the equivalent of 180 days of 6.5 hours of instruction), align with the educational program, and are conducive to significantly improving student learning.

School Culture

- Vision for school culture or ethos that will promote high expectations, a positive academic environment and intellectual and social development for all students, including those with special needs, English Language Learners, and students at risk of academic failure.
- Coherent plan for establishing and maintaining the intended culture for students, teachers, administrators, and parents from the first day of school, and for enculturating students who enter the school mid-year.
- Articulate, compelling descriptions of the typical daily experiences of a student and a teacher in grades served in year one. Descriptions demonstrate a well thought-out school design that reflects the vision and will support student intellectual and social development.

Supplemental Programming

- (*If applicable*) Sound plan, design, schedule, and funding for summer school that will meet anticipated student needs.
- Well-designed plans and funding for extracurricular and co-curricular activities, programs, and services that will meet anticipated student needs and provide enrichment experiences.
- Thoughtful, well-supported description of programs or strategies to address student mental, emotional, and social development and health, and any other student-focused activities and programs that are integral to the school’s educational and student-development plans.

Special Populations and At-Risk Students

- Demonstrated understanding of – and capacity to fulfill – state and federal obligations and requirements pertaining to students with disabilities, students identified as intellectually gifted, and English Language Learners (ELLs) including appropriate discipline procedures for students with disabilities.
- Sound explanation of evidence from which the projection of anticipated special populations was derived.
- Comprehensive and compelling plan for appropriate identification of students who are performing below grade level or at risk of academic failure or dropping out and a detailed plan for providing services to such students.
- Comprehensive and compelling plan for appropriate identification of students with special needs and to ensure they are served in the least restrictive environment possible, have appropriate access to the general education curriculum and schoolwide educational, extra-curricular, and culture-building activities in ways that support their development, receive required and appropriate support services as outlined in their Individual Education Plans and 504 plans, and participate in standardized testing.
- Comprehensive and compelling plan for providing services to ELLs, including methods for appropriate identification of ELLs, specific instructional programs, practices, and strategies the school will employ to ensure academic success and equitable access to the general education curriculum and core academic program for these students, plans for monitoring and evaluating student progress and success of ELLs and for exiting them from services, and plan for including ELLs in standardized testing and schoolwide educational, extra-curricular, and culture-building activities.
- Plans describe evidence-based instructional programs and practices; effective design or adaptation of the educational program; qualified staffing; and support strategies and resources.

Student Recruitment and Enrollment

- Enrollment Policy complies with state law and that ensures the school will be open to all eligible students.
- **For New-Start Models:**
 - Sound and thoughtful student recruitment and marketing plan, timeline, and Enrollment Policy that will provide equal access to all interested students and families, including those in poverty, academically low-achieving students, students with disabilities, and other youth at risk of academic failure.
- **For Phase-In or Takeover Models:**
 - Plans for engagement of students, families and the community that are realistic and likely to foster student retention and community support.

Student Discipline

- Student discipline policy that provides for appropriate and effective strategies to support a safe, orderly school climate and fulfillment of educational goals, promoting a strong school culture while respecting student rights. Legally sound policies for student discipline, suspension and expulsion, as well as appeals, including proper processes for students with disabilities.

- Appropriate plan for disseminating the discipline policy to teachers, parents and students.

Parent & Community Involvement

- Effective strategies for informing parents and the community about the school's development.
- Sound pre- and post- opening parent engagement plan, including family-school partnerships, that is welcoming and accessible to all parents.
- Community resources and partnerships that will benefit students and parents and that include a) description of the nature, purposes, terms, and scope of services of any such partnerships; and b) evidence of commitment from identified community partners.

Educational Program Capacity

A strong description of the capacity to implement the Educational Program will have the following characteristics:

- Evidence that the school leadership and management team have the collective qualifications (documented by resumes and bios for all members) to implement the school design successfully, including capacities in areas such as school leadership, administration, and governance; curriculum, instruction, and assessment; performance management; and parent and community engagement.
- Sound plans for sourcing and training potential leaders for future campuses and for developing a pipeline of potential leaders for the network. *(If applicable)* Existing leadership pipeline is adequate to meet growth projections and includes strong candidates for future schools.
- Evidence that organizations, agencies, or consultants that are essential to successful implementation of the plan are committed to having an ongoing role with the school.
- *(If School Leader candidate(s) is identified)* Evidence of the leader's experience in/ability to design, launch, and lead a school that effectively serves the target population, as well as evidence that the proposed leader is well qualified to implement the specific educational program being proposed. Any identified leadership training is appropriate for and aligned with the educational program.
- *(If School Leader candidate(s) is not yet identified)* Evidence of the Board and/or network's preparation and plan to recruit and retain a leader with the ability to lead a school that effectively serves the target population.
- Appropriate responsibilities and qualifications of the school's leadership/management team (beyond the school leader).
- *(If members of the leadership team are identified)* Individuals who demonstrate the qualifications, capacities, and commitment to carry out the designated leadership roles to ensure the success of the proposed school.
- *(If leadership team is not yet identified)* Sound timeline, criteria, and process for recruiting and hiring the leadership team.
- Sound plan for leading the development of the school from post-approval to opening, including identification of a capable individual or team to lead the planning and start-up, as well as a viable plan for compensating this individual or team that is aligned with the budget.

Phase-In/Takeover Planning (If Applicable)

A strong description of Phase-In/Takeover Planning will have the following characteristics:

- Effective strategies, programming, and support services – and demonstrated capacity (including prior takeover/turnaround experience) – to transform a failing school culture into a positive, inclusive, high-performing culture and to significantly raise student achievement among at-risk populations currently attending a low-performing school.
- Solid understanding of and ability to establish strong partnerships with the targeted community, including a robust community engagement plan for the pre-opening year.
- *(For Phase-In applications)* Sound understanding of the challenges and plan for working effectively with the existing school(s) and community during the transition or co-location period.
- *(For Takeover applications)* Sound plan – including specific parent and community engagement strategies – to successfully recruit, transition, and retain students who would be assigned to the school being replaced.

Section 2. Operations Plan & Capacity

A strong Operations Plan is coherent overall and aligned internally with the school’s mission and vision, Educational Program, and Financial Plan.

Governance

A strong description of the plan and capacity for Governance will have the following characteristics:

Legal Status and Governing Documents

- Proposed school’s legal status and structure are in compliance with state law.
- Governing bylaws, policies, and procedures are comprehensive and sound.

Governing Board

- Effective governance structure for network and school governance, whether each school will have an independent board or there will be one or more boards overseeing multiple schools. Well-planned board(s) size, powers, duties, and current and desired composition (including diverse expertise and effective representation) that will foster school(s)/network success.
- *(If applicable)* Clear division of duties if there will be multiple boards serving multiple schools.
- Clear, appropriate plans for the board(s) to evaluate the success of the school(s) and school leader(s).
- Proposed board members who demonstrate *(as documented by resumes, bios, and Board Information sheets for all currently-identified proposed members)*: (a) will, capacity and commitment to govern the school(s)/network effectively; and (b) shared vision, purposes and expectations for the school(s)/network.
- Evidence that the proposed governing board members will contribute the wide range of knowledge, skills, and commitment needed to oversee a successful charter school including educational, financial, legal, and community experience and expertise.
- *(If applicable)* Sound, timely plan for creating or transitioning to the school governing board.
- *(If applicant is an existing not-for-it organization other than a charter school governing board)* Sound plan for transforming existing board to assume its new duties or forming a new board.

- Other effective governance procedures, including planned frequency of meetings and standing committees.
- Appropriate proposed Code of Ethics and Conflict of Interest policy/procedures that will minimize real or perceived conflicts.
- Sound plan and timeline for board recruitment, expansion, orientation of new members, and ongoing training for members. Plan should include a thoughtful identification of desired experience and capacities.
- *(If applicable) If there will be a network-level board, plan for clear identification and plan for addressing board development needs relative to growth.*

Advisory Bodies

- Clear roles, duties, and composition of any advisory bodies/councils, and effective relationship to the school governing board and leadership.

Grievance Process

- Fair, accessible grievance process for parents and students.

Human Capital

A strong description of the Human Capital plan will have the following characteristics:

Network-wide Staffing

- Sensible five-year network staffing that will support high-quality replication at the scale proposed, while continuing success in existing schools.

School Staff Structure

- Sensible staffing rollout plan for the school model(s) aligned with the educational program and conducive to school success.
- Effective structure and strategies for managing the administration-staff relationship.

Staffing Plans, Hiring, Management, and Evaluation

- Compensation packages, system, and strategy that are likely to attract and retain strong staff.
- Recruitment and hiring strategy, criteria, timeline, and procedures that are likely to result in a strong staff that meet ESEA requirements for being “Highly Qualified” and are well suited to the school.
- Plan for supporting, developing, and annually evaluating school leadership and teachers that is likely to produce and retain a successful staff.
- Sensible allocation of school vs. network responsibilities for staffing.
- Leadership and teacher evaluation tools that are likely to be effective.
- Effective planning for unsatisfactory leadership/teacher performance and turnover.

Professional Development

- Sensible allocation of school vs. network responsibilities for professional development, including demonstrated understanding of and preparation for professional development needs that are common to all schools in the network.
- Professional development standards, opportunities, leadership, and calendar/scheduling that effectively support the education program and are likely to maximize success in improving student achievement, including an induction program that will prepare teachers to deliver any unique or particularly challenging aspects of the educational program.

Performance Management

A strong description of the Performance Management plan will have the following characteristics:

- *(Optional; may be network-level or school-level)* Meaningful mission-specific educational and/or organizational goals and targets, which are measurable or demonstrable by externally credible measures or assessments.
- Quality interim assessments that are aligned with (each) school’s curriculum, performance goals, and state standards.
- Effective plan (including qualified personnel) and system for measuring and evaluating academic progress – of individual students, student cohorts, each school, and the network as a whole – throughout the school year, at the end of each academic year, and for the charter term.
- Comprehensive, effective plan (including qualified personnel) and system for collecting and analyzing student academic achievement data, using the data to refine and improve instruction – including providing training and support to school leadership and teachers – and reporting the data to the school community. This should include identification of the student data system to be used, as well as qualified personnel who will be responsible for managing and interpreting the data for teachers and leading or coordinating data-driven professional development.
- Thoughtful, appropriate corrective actions the school and network will take if either falls short of the [INSERT AUTHORIZER]’s (or the operator’s) goals at any level, including explanation of what would trigger such actions and who would implement them.
- Sound plan for monitoring performance of the portfolio as a whole and thoughtfully considering portfolio performance in decisions regarding continued growth and replication.

Facilities

A strong description of the Facilities plan will have the following characteristics:

Part A. Public Facilities

(For operators proposing to locate in facilities over which the authorizer or other public authority has jurisdiction)

- Complete and compelling response to the facilities needs assessment (Facilities, Part A.) aligned with the educational program and anticipated student population.

Part B. Independent Facilities

(For all operators)

- Sound plan and timeline for identifying, financing, renovating, and ensuring code compliance for a facility that will meet the requirements of the educational program and anticipated student population.

Start-Up & Ongoing Operations

A strong description of the plan for Start-Up & Ongoing Operations plan will have the following characteristics:

- Detailed start-up plan specifying tasks, timelines, and responsible individuals, which is aligned with sound Start-Up Budget.
- *(If the school will provide transportation)* Sound plan for student transportation, including both daily and special-event transportation.
- Sound plans for school and student safety and security, including security personnel, technology, equipment, and policies.
- Plan to secure comprehensive and adequate insurance coverage, including workers' compensation, liability, property, indemnity, directors and officers, automobile, and other.

Operations Capacity

A strong description of the capacity to implement the Operations Plan will have the following characteristics:

- Individual and collective qualifications for implementing the Operations Plan successfully, including capacity in areas such as staffing, professional development, performance management, school start-up, general operations, and facilities management.
- *(If proposing an independent facility)* Demonstrated experience in facilities acquisition and management, including managing build-out and/or renovations.

Section 3. Financial Plan & Capacity

A strong Financial Plan is coherent overall and aligned internally with the school's mission and vision, Educational Program, and Organization Plan.

Financial Plan

A strong description of the Financial Plan will have the following characteristics:

- Draft financial procedures policy or other reasonable assurance that the operator will have sound systems, policies and processes for financial planning, accounting, purchasing, and payroll, including a description of how it will establish and maintain strong internal controls, ensure compliance with all financial reporting requirements, and conduct independent annual financial and administrative audits.

- Evidence that the school’s leadership has a strong understanding of the appropriate delineation of roles and responsibilities among the administration and governing board regarding school finance.
- Evidence that the school will ensure financial transparency, including plans for public adoption of the school’s budget and public dissemination of its annual audit and an annual report.
- Sound criteria and procedures for selecting contractors for any administrative services and the acquisition of liability insurance.
- Complete, realistic, and viable start-up and five-year operating budgets.
- Detailed budget narrative that clearly explains reasonable, well-supported revenue and cost assumptions, including grant/fundraising assumptions, including identifying the amount and sources of all anticipated funds, property, or other resources (noting which are secured vs. anticipated, and including evidence of firm commitments where applicable).
- Sound contingency plan to meet financial needs if anticipated revenues are not received or are lower than estimated.

Financial Capacity

A strong description of the capacity to implement the Financial Plan will have the following characteristics:

- Individual and collective qualifications for implementing the Financial Plan successfully, including capacity in areas such as financial management, fundraising and development, accounting, and internal controls.