

**Colorado**

**Charter School Institute**

**Expansion Application**

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# Introduction

The Colorado Charter School Institute (CSI) is committed to fostering high-quality charter schools. We understand charter schools and advocate for their success. We offer support, flexibility, and transparent accountability to ensure our schools are in the best position possible to serve their students. This vision is reflected in our approach to requests for charter school expansions.

# Expansion Application Overview

The fundamental difference between an application to open a new charter school and an application to expand an existing school is that the Expansion Application is not an evaluation of an applicant team’s capacity to create a new charter school; rather, it is an evaluation of an existing charter school’s success, capacity of the existing school leadership to expand the scope of the current program, and strong student and family demand for the addition of high quality seats. Expansion applications are submitted by existing CSI charter schools. If approved, they are typically treated as an amendment to a charter school’s existing charter contract and do not change the school’s existing charter term.

When considering an expansion application, Applicants should evaluate their readiness for expansion in order to ensure that the expansion is likely to result in the addition of high-quality education options for students and families. The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) has compiled a list of readiness indicators for authorizers and schools when considering expansion and is presented below[[1]](#footnote-1).

|  |
| --- |
| Readiness for Expansion |
| In alignment with national best practice, readiness if defined as an application who provides: |
| * A clear and compelling mission; |
| * A strong educational program with demonstrated effectiveness; |
| * Evidence of community need and support; |
| * A solid business and financial plan; |
| * Effective governance and management structures and systems; |
| * Strong and stable leadership demonstrating diverse and necessary capabilities; and |
| * Clear evidence of the applicant’s capacity to execute its plan successfully.   NACSA |

## Request for Charter School Expansions Overview

This application outlines the standards and criteria used by CSI Staff and Board to evaluate a charter school expansion application. CSI will accept and evaluate requests for charter school expansion and recommend to the CSI Board of Directors those requests that are likely to provide additional high-quality educational opportunities to students in Colorado. In accordance with the CSI Expansion Policy, the Board of Directors has the final authority to approve requests for expansion.

In alignment with our mission and vision, CSI will prioritize requests for expansions that focus on increasing the number of high-quality education options for educationally disadvantaged students (economically-disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, minority students, English learners, and/or students who otherwise qualify as “high-risk” as defined by the Colorado Department of Education).

Throughout this document, links and notes are provided to assist charter schools requesting an expansion. Additional guidance documents can be found on the CSI website. These materials neither attempt nor profess to provide guidance on every federal, state, and local law or regulation that is applicable to charter schools. The charter school is responsible for ensuring its existing and expanded school operations are in compliance with all appropriate laws and regulations. As schools work to complete expansion requests, please feel free to reach out to CSI Staff with questions.

## Customized Expansion Application

CSI strives to ensure appropriate and transparent oversight through our accountability system and authorization processes. We tier our supports and interventions according to each school’s unique needs, and higher performing schools are held to standard requirements and receive greater autonomy while lower performing schools receive additional supports and interventions to guide their path toward improved outcomes. Similarly, we develop customized applications for CSI schools seeking to expand the scope of their programs in order to effectively evaluate the proposed expansions while minimizing the requirements for schools.

This document seeks to provide clear expectations for schools requesting an expansion. This document includes the standard application questions that are generally considered as a part of the expansion evaluation; however each expansion application will be customized based on the proposed expansion, the school’s existing body of evidence (academic, financial, and organization performance over time), the time since the school’s most recent charter renewal, and any other relevant circumstances. Additionally, the depth of response for each section will vary significantly based on the scale of the proposed expansion. For example, adding enrollment to existing grades may require substantially less change from the charter’s current educational program when compared to expanding into new grade levels.

Any school requesting an expansion must first submit a Letter of Intent to Expand by the deadline established by CSI and discuss the proposed expansion with CSI Staff. Following receipt of the Letter of Intent, CSI Staff will provide the school with a customized expansion application. The [Letter of Intent](http://www.csi.state.co.us/UserFiles/Servers/Server_2345071/File/Charter%20Applicants/Applications/Letter%20of%20Intent.Expansion.docx) is posted on the CSI website.

## Expansion Evaluation

The primary method for evaluation of a school wishing to expand with the Institute is through the CSI Annual Review of Schools (CARS) system. This system was developed in order to build upon the evaluation lens utilized by the State and to provide a more comprehensive and robust evaluation that includes strong indicators of charter viability and sustainability. At the foundation of this evaluation are the CSI Performance Frameworks (available at [www.csi.state.co.us/accountability](http://www.csi.state.co.us/accountability)). These documents were developed in conjunction with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) to evaluate school performance in the areas of academics, finance, and organization.

It is generally assumed that all schools requesting an expansion of their current programs have met the NACSA readiness indicators. Additionally, the table below outlines the standards and criteria used to evaluate a charter school expansion application and the source of the material used for the review. Material is either currently on file at CSI or is provided to CSI through the Expansion Application process.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Review Area** | **Standard** | **Existing Material** | **Application Material** |
| **School Quality** | | | |
| Academic Performance | School has a track record of success and is currently accredited with a Performance rating or higher | X |  |
| Financial Performance | School currently meets key near-term and sustainability indicators | X |  |
| Organizational Performance | School does not have unresolved notices of noncompliance and has not recently received a Notice of Breach of contract | X |  |
| Colorado Shines Rating | For preschool expansion, current rating on the Colorado Shines rating system, if applicable | X |  |
| **Organizational Capacity** | | | |
| Leadership and Governance | School has strong and stable school leadership and the school governing board demonstrates the capacity to expand the current program with fidelity, implement the mission, and replicate and perpetuate success for all students | X | X |
| **Facility Capacity & Viability** | | | |
| Existing Certificate of Occupancy | Current facility occupancy capacity is sufficient to support the expansion without major renovations or changes |  | X |
| Preschool Licensing Requirements | Current facility meets the minimum licensing requirements for the State or an adequate plan is submitted that will satisfy the minimum licensing requirements |  | X |
| Facilities Plan | Adequate plan is submitted with the application that will satisfy the facility requirements |  | X |
| **Financial Viability** | | | |
| Financial Plan | School operates in a fiscally responsible manner and has a plan to ensure financial solvency during expansion |  | X |
| **Community Need & Support** | | | |
| Evidence of Need and Support | School provides evidence of strong student and family demand for the addition of high quality seats and provides evidence that the community will benefit from the expansion |  | X |
| Student Enrollment | School has a history of meeting enrollment projections | X |  |
| Evidence of Planning | School has a comprehensive plan for the expansion and provides an explanation of how the requested expansion will enable the school to better serve educationally disadvantaged students | X |  |
| Rationale | School has a clear rationale and defensible reason for expanding that does not focus solely on increasing revenue |  | X |
| **Other** | | | |
| Length of Operation | School has been in operation for at least three years | X |  |
| Colorado Preschool Program | School that intends to seek additional funding through the Colorado Preschool Program responds to the Request for Proposal |  | X |
| School Network Performance | School network has successfully expanded its program previously and has adequate central office staff to support the continued expansion | X |  |
| Educational Plan | School provides an educational plan that details how the school will meet the needs of all students, sustain the core academic program through the expansion, and demonstrate high levels of success |  | X |

### Expansion Review Areas and Criteria

# Expansion Application Process

Expansion applications should focus on providing evidence of the effectiveness of currently operating schools. The application should be as concise as possible. All requested documentation should be provided as attachments to the narrative. This includes any specific, documented evidence, tables, statistics, and other information which may require elaboration beyond the scope of the narrative.

## Expansion Application Timeline

Schools should submit expansion application materials in accordance with the timelines established annually by the CSI Board and Staff, unless waived. The standard expansion application timeline includes application submission in October and CSI board action on the expansion application in January.

## Applicant Eligibility

An application may be submitted by an existing Colorado Charter School Institute charter school. Private schools and current non-charter public schools may not apply to CSI through this process.

## Submission of Application Materials

All application materials must be submitted to CSI electronically. The Applicant must address all items within this Expansion Application Narrative. **Please limit your responses so that the completed version of this Expansion Application narrative does not exceed 25 pages.** If the Applicant would like to provide additional attachments to supplement information provided in the application narrative or to provide additional information that is not required as part of the Expansion application, the additional attachments should be clearly referenced within the Expansion Application Narrative by filename and/or document title/page number. The CSI Review Team is not required to review information that is not requested as part of the Expansion application process.

## Completeness Check

An application is considered filed when the Institute receives the application. Within 15 days of receiving an application, CSI shall determine whether the application satisfies the requirements listed in the Application Checklist and is therefore complete. If the application is not complete, CSI shall notify the applicant within the 15 day period and provide a list of the information required to complete the application.

The applicant has 15 days after the date it receives the notice to provide the required information to CSI for review. Upon submission of a complete application, the 90 day clock between application receipt and Board vote begins. CSI is not required to take action on the application if the applicant does not provide the required information within the 15 day period. CSI may request additional information during the review period and provide reasonable time for the applicant to respond.

## Applicant Geographic Meeting

Depending on the scope of the proposed expansion, Applicants may be required to host a geographic meeting in the community of the proposed school once the application has been deemed complete. The time and place of the geographic meeting would be determined by the Applicant and communicated with CSI as a CSI representative will be in attendance. Applicants will be asked to share information about the proposed expansion and address questions and concerns from the community.

## Applicant Discussion with the CSI Board

Depending on the scope of the proposed expansion, Applicants may be asked to engage in a discussion with the CSI Board’s Performance Management Committee and take questions from committee members. Additionally, Applicants may be asked to provide a summary of the proposed expansion, addressing any themes identified by the Performance Management Committee, to the CSI Board during a public hearing at a regularly schedule CSI board meeting.

## Expansion Application Report and Recommendation

CSI staff will publicly share the staff recommendation report with members of the CSI Board at a Performance Management Committee meeting in advance of the regular Board meeting where the application will be acted upon. Applicants are invited to attend and will receive a copy of the CSI staff recommendation report in advance of the meeting.

## CSI Board Action

The CSI Board, in a public hearing, will rule on the application during a regularly scheduled board meeting. The CSI Board can vote to approve, approve with conditions, or deny the application.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Summary of the Standard Expansion Application Process Components** | **Date/Deadline** |
| Letter of Intent Due | Prior to submission of application |
| Application Due | October |
| Applicant Geographic Meeting | November or December 2017, Date TBD by Applicant |
| Applicant Discussion with the CSI Board’s Performance Management Committee | December |
| Applicant Discussion with the CSI Board | December |
| CSI Board Discussion of the Report and Recommendation with the CSI Board’s Performance Management Committee | January |
| CSI Board Action | January |

# CSI Expansion Application

## Executive Summary

Please provide narrative that summarizes the elements of the application and provides an overview of the proposed expansion. The Executive Summary should be two to three pages long and include the following:

* Overview and rationale for the proposed expansion.
* The school’s name, grade levels served, proposed expansion date (month and year), and growth plan (if the school plans to grow enrollment or add additional grade levels).
* Student body to be served, such as key demographic data, targeted geographical area, etc.
* Evidence that an adequate number of stakeholders support the expansion.
* A brief description of how the school will adjust its organizational capacity to accommodate the expansion.
* A brief description of key financial implications for the school as a result of the expansion.
* A brief description of the school’s track record of academic performance.

## Section 1: Expansion Plan and Timeline

### Expansion Criteria

School has a comprehensive plan for the expansion and provides an explanation of how the requested expansion will enable the school to better serve educationally disadvantaged students.

### Expansion Application Narrative

The Expansion Application narrative should:

1. Describe an overview of and timeline for the school’s proposed expansion.
2. Describe the target student population for the proposed expansion. The description should include, but not be limited to, the percent of students with disabilities, gifted and talented students, English Learners, minority students, and students eligible for free or reduced price lunch that the school anticipates enrolling after the expansion.
3. If applicable, indicate whether the school plans to apply for the federal Charter Schools Program (CSP) grant for a one-time significant expansion and provide evidence of eligibility to apply for the CSP grant.

## Section 2: Community Need and Support

### Expansion Criteria

School demonstrates strong student and family demand for the addition of high quality seats and provides evidence that the community will benefit from the expansion

### Expansion Application Narrative

The Expansion Application narrative should:

1. Describe the rationale for why the school is requesting the expansion. This rationale should include, but is not limited to:
   1. Why the school is requesting this particular school size/configuration;
   2. Why the school is requesting the expansion at this specific moment in time; and
   3. How the proposed expansion will enhance or expand opportunities within this community. Strong responses will go beyond an analysis of state test scores or a general argument for school choice.
2. Include an enrollment table that reflects the proposed expansion. The enrollment table should:
   1. Include as many years as necessary for the school to reach its maximum proposed enrollment; and
   2. Include enrollment by grade and total enrollment.
3. Provide specific evidence (e.g., current school enrollment waiting lists, application interest lists, letters of support from community stakeholders, official written support, etc.) that that student/family demand actually exists for the proposed expansion and is aligned to the enrollment projections.
4. Describe how the proposed expansion will support the community. This description should include how the proposed expansion will enable the school to adequately serve educationally disadvantaged students.
5. Discuss the degree to which the charter school has engaged community members regarding the proposed expansion. This description should include the nature and extent of any ongoing community involvement in the governance and/or operations of the school.
6. Describe the school’s student recruitment and enrollment process and discuss how these processes provide opportunities for educationally disadvantaged students to access the program.
7. Address changes to the school’s enrollment process, including, but not limited to, the school lottery weights and special design considerations. A clear rationale for each proposed change should be provided and all changes should be in accordance with charter school statutes and regulations.

## Section 3: Organizational Capacity

### Expansion Criteria

School has strong and stable school leadership and the school governing board demonstrates the capacity to expand the current program with fidelity, implement the original mission, and replicate and perpetuate success for all students.

### Expansion Application Narrative

The Expansion Application narrative should:

1. Describe the school’s current governance and administrative structures and discuss anticipated changes resulting from the proposed expansion. The description should include the key staff involved in the planning and implementation of the proposed expansion and their ability to provide sound oversight of the expansion.
2. Describe how the expansion plan will be implemented, outlining critical elements to complete, team members involved, and timelines for completion.
3. Describe any other significant operational adjustments that will be required to fulfill the proposed expansion (i.e., food services, transportation, etc.).
4. Include evidence that the school’s board has approved the expansion (i.e., board resolution).
5. Describe key personnel changes as a result of the expansion and identify those changes in the attached organizational charts. Key changes should include, at minimum: the identification of the charter school’s leadership team; and, if applicable, how the network-level staff will evolve over time.
6. Include copies of:
   1. The school/board strategic plan
   2. The results of a recent board self-evaluation.
   3. The results of the most recently completed school leader evaluation.
   4. The school enrollment policy, if revised.
   5. The governing board bylaws, if revised.

## Section 4: Facility Capacity & Viability

### Expansion Criteria

Current facility occupancy capacity is sufficient to support the expansion or an adequate plan is submitted with the application that will satisfy the facility requirements.

### Expansion Application Narrative

The Expansion Application narrative should:

1. Describe how facility needs will be impacted by the school’s requested expansion (that is, how enrolling more students in subsequent years will impact use of space). If applicable, discuss the timeline by which the school would make significant capital investments, add space, or move from one space to another.
   1. For any changes in facilities that would need to occur by the next school year, describe the current plan and progress towards realizing the necessary changes. If applicable, describe the potential challenges that might be faced, and strategies to overcome those challenges.
   2. For any changes in facilities that would occur beyond the next school year, describe the school’s strategic approach to realizing those changes. If applicable, describe the potential challenges and strategies to overcome those challenges.
   3. For any changes requiring significant renovations, describe how those renovations will be financed in line with the school’s budget.
2. If changing locations, please provide the following in alignment with the CSI Location Modification Policy:
   1. Resolution from the school’s governing board ([sample format linked here](https://www.boarddocs.com/co/csi/Board.nsf/files/ASVRZS707657/$file/Sample%20Location%20Modification%20Resolution%20for%20School.docx));
   2. Lease or purchase terms of the facility including term sheet from lender, if financing, and lease terms from landlord, if renting;
   3. Financial statements, including tenant improvement costs, current and projected year budgets demonstrating that total occupancy costs fall reasonably within the school’s budget and that total occupancy costs are within an acceptable range;
   4. Verification from the school’s attorney that no other financial, legal, or other liabilities exist (and that this assurance is included in school board’s resolution); and
   5. Contingency plan in the event the school is unable to move to the proposed new or additional facility due to financial or other circumstances.

## Section 5: Financial Viability

### Expansion Criteria

School operates in a fiscally responsible manner and has a plan to ensure financial solvency during expansion.

### Expansion Application Narrative

The Expansion Application narrative should:

1. Provide a complete and realistic three‐year budget projection (current year + two additional years) that appropriately reflects the expenses and revenue related to the school, taking into account the requested expansion, and detailed by the CDE Chart of Accounts program and object codes. The CSI Budget Template may be used ([linked here](http://www.csi.state.co.us/UserFiles/Servers/Server_2345071/File/Charter%20Applicants/New%20School/Spring%202018/CSI%20Budget%20Template%20Oct%202017%20-%20FINAL.xlsx) and available on the CSI website).
2. Provide a budget narrative that thoroughly justifies the revenue and cost assumptions made in the budget projection. The narrative should provide detail on any specific changes to the budget that will occur as a result of the requested expansion.
3. Discuss the school’s ability to secure and manage the funding necessary for expansion. This should include:
   1. Procedures to regularly review budget to actual activity and expenditures against the school’s mission and vision over time; and
   2. A contingency plan to mitigate the impacts of decreased funding or increased expenditures.
4. Financial metrics and targets, including any debt covenants, the board and school leadership will track during expansion to ensure financial solvency during the growth period.
5. Discuss any audit findings from the previous fiscal year. Provide evidence that the school has appropriately corrected past findings and/or has corrective actions in place to address findings for the future.
6. Provide an analysis and discussion of the school’s three-year financial history including variances in funded pupil count, revenue, expenditures, debt, and fund balance.

## Section 6: Educational Program

### Expansion Criteria

School provides an educational plan that details how the school will meet the needs of all students and sustain the core academic and curricular program through the expansion and will demonstrate high levels of success.

### Expansion Application Narrative

The Expansion Application narrative should:

1. Describe the specific practices of the school that have enabled it to sustain high academic achievement and growth. This description should include how the charter school will ensure that key elements of the program are kept intact and/or strengthened for all students as it expands. The application should include:
   1. A detailed examination of the school’s mission and vision, pedagogy, and other practices to date, and a compelling rationale for why the school believes these practices have yielded strong student outcomes.
   2. A detailed description of how the school will continue to implement and build upon these practices with all new and existing students.
   3. Updated school mission and vision statements, if applicable
2. [Only Required for Expansion Applications that that do not propose new grade levels]
   1. Identify and describe any substantial changes to the school’s educational approach as a result of the requested expansion.
   2. For each substantial change, provide a rationale for why the school is making the substantial change and the expected results.
3. [Only Required for Expansion Applications that propose new grade levels]
   1. Describe substantial changes that will take place as a result of the requested expansion, addressing each of the following categories. (*If decisions have not yet been made in certain areas listed below, please explain how and when decisions will be made)*:
      1. Curriculum and Coursework
         1. In a table organized by each new grade level, outline the course of study/ course offerings at the school. Include core academic subjects as well as special, elective, alternative, and other coursework.
         2. Provide a narrative that further explains the course of study and curriculum at the school. Include sufficient detail in areas of study that are specific to the mission of the school (for example, engineering, arts, etc.).
         3. Describe how the school will manage the development, evaluation, and refinement of curriculum over time.
      2. Learning Environment and Pedagogy
         1. Describe how any changes to the charter school’s learning environment and pedagogy for the new proposed grades will ensure that your academic program is accessible and appropriate for all students at all levels. Changes may include, but are not limited to, classroom environment/structure and instructional methods/techniques.
      3. Special Populations
         1. Describe how the school will accommodate different learning styles and the meet the needs of all students for the new proposed grade levels. Include the comprehensive whole school plan for a Multi-Tiered System of Support or child study process that includes a data driven pre-referral prevention-based framework process that meets legal requirements including identification of special needs students.
         2. Review and revise existing Program Plans (Special Education, English Learner, and Gifted) to include any changes required as a result of the proposed expansion.
         3. Detail plans to provide adequate numbers of qualified, in-field staff to meet the needs of exceptional students in alignment with state requirements. Include information about the proposed contract model to employ staff, any secured agreements or MOUs, and describe the onboarding process for any contract staff.
         4. Detail how the budget will align with required resources to support special populations. The narrative should address the student plan management system to house student plans, curricula and instructional materials, and necessary staffing and training needed to serve special populations.
      4. Assessment System
         1. Describe any changes to the school’s comprehensive assessment system for the new proposed grade levels. This description should include the type of assessments that will be used by the school for the new grade levels, organized by content area, and frequency of administration. These selections must meet state and federal requirements.
         2. Develop a plan to evaluate the effectiveness of the new expansion components (e.g. readiness benchmarking), including a plan to monitor progress towards meeting academic goals and a plan for taking corrective action in the event pupil performance falls below goals and objectives. Include the school’s baseline targets for the new grade levels using the CSI baseline targets template.
      5. Promotion and Graduation Policy
         1. Describe any changes to the school’s promotion and graduation policy for the new proposed grade levels. For schools expanding into high schools for the first time, include any school-specific graduation requirements and a draft graduation policy.
      6. School Culture
         1. Describe any changes to the school’s strategies to foster and maintain a healthy school culture. These changes may include, but are not limited to, behavior management and discipline procedures. For each change, provide a description of the strategy that will be used to establish the desired school culture and/or climate, including the research, experiences, and other evidence that informs these decisions.

## Section 7: Preschool Expansion

### Expansion Criteria

School provides a plan that details how the school will develop and implement a preschool program that meets Colorado legal requirements, addresses a community need, is financially viable, and aligns with the mission and vision of the school.

### Expansion Application Narrative

The Expansion Application narrative should:

1. Provide a response to Section 1: Expansion Plan and Timeline and Section 2: Community Need and Support.
2. Provide a plan to obtain a childcare license through the Office of Early Childhood at the Colorado Department of Human Services. The plan must incorporate communication with county licensing staff and an appropriate timeline for submission and review by CDHS.
3. Demonstrate that the current facility occupancy capacity is sufficient to support the addition of the preschool without major renovations or changes or submit an adequate plan that will satisfy the facility requirements.
4. Describe how the school will ensure that the preschool staff (including the director) have the necessary qualifications and appropriate knowledge in early childhood curriculum content, assessment, and instruction.
5. Provide a response to Section 5: Financial Viability with a focus on demonstrating that the preschool program will be financially solvent.
6. Include an explanation of the school’s plans to coordinate referrals to community programs based on child needs, such as local public health, social services, mental health services, early childhood special education programs, or other early learning or child care programs. Include a brief description of how the program intends to generally coordinate/collaborate with community organizations.
7. Describe how the enrollment process and the tuition structure for preschool students will help to ensure that the school is able to serve families in alignment with the school’s target demographics.
8. Describe the existing and/or proposed staffing plan and teacher:student ratios for the preschool.
9. Describe whether the school plans to seek additional funding for preschool students through CPP. If so, the school would be required to submit a Request for Proposal for the Colorado Preschool Program (CPP) no later than December 15th.

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