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Strategic Plan

Colorado Association for Charter School Authorizers



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CACSA is a Colorado non-profit organization

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# History

# In 2015, CACSA was formed as an informal network of authorizers interested in supporting each other in their work and advancing discussions about what it means to be a “quality charter school authorizer”. The network was supported by a series of investments from the Donnell Kay Foundation and CSI. These partners provided funding for a part-time facilitator and help with data and analysis. In 2018, CSI helped CACSA and similar state associations in California and Florida win a grant from the U.S. Department of Education’s Charter School Program (CSP). CSI received the grant, which allowed them to launch the Tri-State Alliance to Improve District-Led Charter Authorizing, which supports a three-year, $2.6 million project that will support CACSA’s programs through 2021. This project provides about $250,000 to support work by CACSA in each year of the grant. CSI was incorporated as a Colorado non-profit in 2018.

# Context/Landscape

Colorado has more than 260 charter schools that serve about 14 percent of the state’s public school students. In Colorado, 44 school districts and the Charter School Institute (CSI) currently authorize an operating charter school. Potentially, every district in the state is a charter school authorizer. Decisions by authorizers to deny charter applications, to non-renew or revoke existing charter schools, and to insert unilateral conditions in charter contracts are all subject to appeal before the State Board of Education. CACSA began as an informal community of professionals, meeting together to discuss best practices. The state has a set of standards for quality charter school authorizing that are codified in rules established by the State Board of Education.

**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.

**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.

**Values:** CACSA supports authorizers through various strategies, including networking meetings, model materials, personalized support, peer-to-peer connections, and serving as a voice for quality authorizing. With CACSA support, authorizers are better able to:

* Determine the quality and viability of charter applicants;
* Create effective performance management systems that allow them to track the quality, performance, and appropriate operation of charter schools;
* Support equitable access and appropriate services for all students; and
* Make sustainable high-stakes decisions about the charter schools they oversee that are in the best interest of students and their community

**Organizing Principles**

1. Community working to improve: All authorizers are invited to join the professional community dedicated to the continual improvement of authorizing practice and charter school performance. The professional community accepts the shared challenge to improve in the practice of authorizing.
2. Support quality authorizing: Members of the association seek to increase capacity for quality authorizing. Support will be provided to continuously improve the charter school sector by sharing lessons, model materials, strong practices, and by defining roles and responsibilities of those involved in authorizing.
3. Support state-adopted authorizing standards: Members will develop, articulate, and document what it means to conduct quality authorizing. These practices are reflected in Colorado Principles and Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing as adopted by the State Board of Education.
4. Invites all Colorado authorizers: The effort welcomes all professionals. The Association recognizes people have different attitudes toward charters and come from districts that have different histories and approaches to chartering.
5. Merit-based decisions that serve student interests: It is the belief of the Association that professional authorizing should lead to merit-based decisions that uphold the best interests of students. Ideally, when quality authorizers make such decisions, their actions should prevail during appeals or other challenges.
6. Oriented toward larger school systems and community interests: The Association believes in improving results for all of public education. This includes charter and traditional public schools, as well as students of all backgrounds and characteristics. Authorizing, like the charter sector, should reflect community and student needs.
7. Charters require autonomy and accountability: The Association believes charter schools require both autonomy and accountability – to include outcomes in student performance, operations, governance, and finance.
8. CACSA serves as a voice for quality authorizing: The Association will provide a voice for authorizing professionals to communicate on behalf of these goals.
9. CACSA works to promote equity: Equity means that every person has access to resources and opportunities to be successful. Equity in education means that a child’s educational experiences or outcomes are not predictable because of their race, ethnicity, disability, or any other socio-political identity marker. Working towards equity requires the practice of acknowledging that people have different access to resources and opportunities due to structural and/or systemic injustices. Advancing equity requires the elimination of policies, practices, attitudes, and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes.

**CACSA’s Four Strategic Pillars**

1. Advancing Student Equity
2. Technical Assistance and Best Practices
3. Outreach, Communication and Partnerships
4. Organizational Sustainability

# Advancing Student Equity

## Goal 1: Charters and authorizers will work to share the responsibility to ensure equity through a collaborative process.

# **Objectives**:

# Articulate the roles and responsibilities of authorizers to oversee their schools in a way that promotes student equity

# Encourage authorizers to prioritize their pursuit of equity in a way that leverages and supports local energy and assets

# **Metrics:**

# By 2024, CACSA’s resource library will include examples of district materials that support shared responsibility for equity and collaboration

## Goal 2: Improve equitable access for students for quality public choice options.

# **Objectives**:

# Support authorizers in fostering equitable access throughout the lifecycle of a charter

# Assist districts in improving their own systems to improve access

# Create or modify existing resources addressing a variety of barriers to access (i.e. transportation, location, discipline policy and practices, facilities, food service, student fees, requirements from parental involvement, enrollment, marketing, etc.)

# Support authorizers in implementing defined best practices to removing barriers to access

# **Metrics:**

# There is an annual increase in the percentage of respondents to the CACSA survey of authorizers that Colorado charter schools are serving student populations whose demographics more closely align with the communities or the target population identified by the school.

# By July 2023, authorizers report via surveys or reporting that they have implemented tools that promote charter school enrollment that support demographics that reflect the communities in which they are located.

## Goal 3: Improve equitable services and programs for students for quality public choice options.

# **Objectives**:

# Support authorizers in fostering equitable services throughout the lifecycle of a charter

# Assist districts in improving their own systems to improve equitable services and programs

# Create or modify existing resources addressing a variety of barriers to access (i.e. transportation, location, discipline policy and practices, facilities, food service, student fees, requirements from parental involvement, enrollment, marketing, etc.)

# Support authorizers in implementing defined best practices to removing barriers to access

# **Metrics:**

# By July 2023, documents have been created that are aligned to equitable access, programs, and services.

# By July 2024, 50 percent of authorizers responding to an annual survey will report that they have made changes at the district level to improve services and programs received by charter school students.

## Goal 4: Support authorizers in the development of monitoring and accountability practices that ensure equity and access.

## **Objectives**:

# Support professional communities that share strategies and tactics for addressing common challenges around equity

# Develop resources and tools that district authorizers can use that guide monitoring and accountability practices

# **Metrics**:

# Annually, in surveys of authorizers, 70 percent of survey respondents will report that they are supported by CACSA in development of monitoring and accountability practices that ensure equity and access.

# By July 2023, documents have been created that are aligned to equitable access, programs, and services**.**

# Technical Assistance and Best Practices

## Goal 1: Provide tools and resources that support authorizers in the development, innovation, and implementation of best practices.

**Objectives:**

1. Create and disseminate tools for the full lifecycle of authorizing
2. Curate “hot topic” information and share it
3. Market/brand CACSA as the best “one stop shopping” for authorizer resources
4. Broker/reference other materials from across the country
5. Participate in national communities to share and learn from other states

**Metrics:**

* Annually, “hot topic” information has been curated and disseminated
* Annually, create at least two new tools
* By Sept. 30, 2021 produce at least 2 more highest-needs materials
* By Sept. 30, 2021 hold at least 24 hours of PD convenings
* By March 2022, tools for best practices around EMO/CMOs have been created
* By Sept. 2022, tools for the lifecycle of a charter have been created and shared

## Goal 2: Support and engage rural districts.

**Objectives:**

1. Diversify CACSA board to include rural practitioners.
2. Develop a tailored toolkit that could be used by all members new to authorizing or with a small number of schools
3. Consider developing a mentor/mentee structure where an experienced authorizer could come in along the side of a small district for support
4. Create opportunities for rural authorizers to network and learn from other authorizers.
5. Provide one-on-one technical assistance to rural district authorizer.

**Metrics:**

* Annually, increase rural/small members by at least 2
* Annually, maintain at least a minimum of two rural/small board members
* By December 2021, and then annually, 80% of rural/small district member respondents feel supported as measured by annual survey

## Goal 3: Support candid communication and networking amongst authorizers, including potentially complex challenges.

**Objectives:**

1. Create a safe, professional community for authorizers only to engage in to learn, share, and troubleshoot
2. Establish norms of collaboration and communication in order to build and maintain a trusting and functional community
3. Continue in-person, online and other new and innovative ways to connect and work together

**Metrics:**

* By June 2023, a mutually agreed set of norms that all members adhere to have been established
* By December 2023, 90% of board members state that they are able to have confidential conversations about complex issues with their fellow board members as measured by annual survey

# Outreach, Communication and Partnerships

## Goal 1: Be the influential statewide organization that is recognized as the primary voice for quality district charter school authorizing in Colorado.

**Objectives**:

1. Proactively inject quality authorizing perspectives into policy discussions and be responsive to opportunities
2. Ensure CACSA and members participate in appropriate initiatives and partnerships and are included in policy discussions of charter school issues
3. Insert CACSA’s recommended best practices into discussions of charter quality authorizing practices and see they are adopted
4. Create and innovate to strengthen authorizing

**Metrics**:

* Annually, CACSA and/or CACSA principles are mentioned 75% of the time during appeals or challenges of ECA
* Annually, members report via annual member survey that they feel CACSA and quality authorizing is well represented during relevant policy discussions
* By 2023, and annually thereafter, 80% of CACSA respondents report in an annual survey that they agree CACSA is regularly referenced by influential leaders and groups when discussions of charter schools and authorizing take place
* By 2023, and annually thereafter, 80% of CACSA respondents report in an annual survey that CACSA is proactively injecting perspectives on practices and policy

## Goal 2: All Colorado authorizers, including small and rural, and interested stakeholders are informed about CACSA and engaged with quality authorizing and developments related authorizing.

**Objectives**:

1. Ensure responsive communication to CACSA members and interested stakeholders.
2. Build a professional networking community with strong collegial relationships where people engage and support each other
3. Establish partnerships with external groups who will serve as thought partners and/or support organizations (ie, CASE, CASB, CLCS, etc.) to meet the mission and vision of CACSA without compromising authorizer best practices
4. Expand membership of authorizers to broaden and diversify best authorizing practices.
5. Regularly assess the priority needs of district authorizers
6. Engage and educate thought partners regarding authorizing through topical convenings and/or conference presentations (i.e. CASE, CASB, CLCS, CASBO, NACSA, the Rural Alliance, CDE, etc.)
7. Provide targeted, one-on-one technical assistance to small and rural districts with implementing quality authorizing

**Metrics**:

* Annually, bi-monthly updates and email blasts are received and valued by members and stakeholders
* Annually, increase the number of external partners who support the CACSA mission and vision by two formal partnerships as measured by either a memo or financial commitment
* Annually, four topical convenings and/or conference presentations have occurred
* Annually, there is a 5% increase in CACSA members who state via annual member survey that they feel informed about issues relevant to their work over 2021 baseline year
* By December 2021, ensure a participation rate of 33% of charter authorizers at quarterly CACSA/CDE meetings
* By 2022, and then annually, increase charter authorizer participation at CACSA/CDE meetings by 5% over 2021 baseline per year
* By 2022, and then annually, 75% of CACSA members respond via survey that they feel their colleagues respond to their requests for support and materials

# Organizational Sustainability

## Goal 1: Establish a large, diverse, and engaged membership to ensure Colorado authorizers implement best practices.

**Objectives:**

1. Finalize and implement a tiered membership and dues structure
2. Clarify basic membership benefits
3. Actively recruit members
4. Ensure best practices reflect the needs of all authorizers (large/small, urban/rural)

**Metrics**:

* By 2024, 90% of authorizers with four or more charter schools in their portfolio join CACSA
* By 2024, 50% of small authorizers (with three or fewer charter schools in their portfolio) join CACSA

## Goal 2: Ensure CACSA is financially sustainable, independent, and autonomous organization.

**Objectives:**

1. Establish a fee-for-service model that offers a range of services and benefits that appeal to a diverse set of authorizers and builds their capacity, including: direct support around charter application reviews, authorizer evaluations (i.e. audits of special education services and funding), support using authorizer tools (i.e. Epicenter), facilitating charter and district relationships, DAC and school board trainings, etc.
2. Build direct relationships with numerous national, state, and local foundations
3. Participate in collaboratives and partnerships in order to support CACSA’s pursuit of its agenda with federal, national, and state philanthropic resources
4. Ensure CACSA can strategically enter into partnerships and collaborations that advance our agenda while protecting our independence and autonomy

**Metrics:**

* Annually, 90% of CACSA’s members have paid their annual membership dues
* By 2022, 25% of CACSA’s annual budget comes from fee-for-service
* By 2024, 35% of CACSA’s annual budget comes from fee-for-service
* By 2021, 30% of CACSA’s annual budget comes from foundation funding
* By 2023, 40% of CACSA’s annual budget comes from foundation funding from at least two foundations

## Goal 3: CACSA is governed by a strong, diverse board that is able to represent and pursue the interest of district authorizers.

**Objectives:**

1. The CACSA Board includes representatives of small, rural and non-front-range authorizers
2. Conduct annual board assessment to determine needed skill sets and determine priority position recruitment
3. Diversify the board to include positions that ensure legal, communications, and financial skillsets are met, even if these roles are filled by non-district authorizers
4. Ensure CACSA’s governing board is free from conflict of interest regarding district authorizing.

**Metrics:**

* By 2022, and then annually, at least two board members represent small, rural or non-front-range authorizers
* By 2023, and then annually, annual board survey reports that at least 85% of the board believe the board has an appropriate mix of needed skillsets