



YEAR ZERO MONITORING

A Practical Guide for
Charter School Authorizers



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Charter School Authorizers**

<https://coauthorizers.org>



Colorado Year Zero Guide

Introduction

This guide, prepared by the Colorado Association of Charter School Authorizers (CACSA), provides Colorado authorizers and new charter school leaders with a practical checklist of essential activities, timelines, and compliance requirements to support a successful school launch.

The Year Zero guide offers district authorizers a detailed overview and set of checklists for the planning year of a new charter school—the period between charter approval and the school’s first day of school. It is designed to help both new and experienced authorizing sponsors navigate the key activities required by Colorado law and their charter contracts.



Year Zero is a critical phase in the life cycle of a charter school. In Colorado, the period between charter approval and a school’s first day of instruction establishes the foundation for academic success, financial stability, and legal compliance. During this planning year, the school must transition from an approved proposal to an operational public school that is ready to serve students in accordance with its charter contract and applicable law.

Under the Colorado Charter Schools Act ([C.R.S. 22-30.5](#)), authorizers are responsible for overseeing charter schools to ensure compliance with statute, contract terms, and performance expectations. Year Zero monitoring is a formal oversight function. While charter schools are responsible for implementation and operational execution, authorizers are responsible for verifying readiness and ensuring that statutory, financial, governance, and programmatic systems are in place prior to opening.

Effective Year Zero oversight reduces risk for students, families, governing boards, and authorizers. Clear expectations, structured monitoring, and documented verification processes help prevent avoidable compliance issues and ensure that schools open with the systems necessary to meet academic, financial, and organizational performance standards from day one.

This guide is aligned with Colorado statute and informed by national best practices, including the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) Principles & Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing. It is intended to support authorizers in implementing a transparent, consistent, and legally grounded readiness process that protects students and upholds the integrity of the authorizing function.

Principles of Effective Year Zero Monitoring

Year Zero monitoring should be grounded in the Colorado Principles and Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing and the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) Principles & Standards. Effective monitoring balances school autonomy with authorizer accountability, ensuring schools are prepared to open while preserving the flexibility necessary to fulfill their approved mission and educational program.

Uphold School Autonomy: Authorizers should monitor readiness without directing school operations. Schools remain responsible for implementing their approved educational program, staffing model, and operational systems.

Focus on Readiness and Performance: Year Zero monitoring should emphasize evidence that critical systems, resources, and personnel are in place to support successful school opening and future performance, rather than focusing solely on completion of compliance tasks.

Apply Clear and Transparent Expectations: Authorizers should communicate readiness requirements, timelines, and expectations consistently and transparently so schools understand how opening decisions will be made.

Use Objective Evidence: Opening readiness determinations should be based on documented evidence, demonstrated capacity, and established criteria rather than subjective judgments or informal assurances.

Prioritize Student Health, Safety, and Access: Authorizers have a responsibility to ensure schools are prepared to provide safe facilities, required student services, equitable access, and legally compliant operations before serving students.

Monitor Proportionately: Monitoring should be tailored to school circumstances, identified risks, and conditions of approval while avoiding unnecessary burdens that do not contribute to readiness or student outcomes.

Maintain Ongoing Communication: Regular communication between schools and authorizers supports transparency, identifies challenges early, and promotes timely resolution of issues that may affect opening readiness.

Support Continuous Improvement: Year Zero monitoring is not solely a compliance exercise. Effective monitoring helps schools establish strong systems and practices that contribute to long-term organizational and academic success.



“ The purpose of Year Zero monitoring is to ensure that a charter school demonstrates the capacity to **open safely, operate legally, manage public funds responsibly**, and provide students with a **high-quality educational program** consistent with its approved charter and performance expectations. ”



PRE-OPENING ESSENTIALS

Foundational approvals, governance documents, and operational systems required before opening.

This phase focuses on securing foundational approvals, completing required authorizer checklists, and ensuring operational systems are in place before opening.

Key activities include executing the charter contract, establishing core operational systems, completing authorizer readiness requirements, and ensuring the school is prepared to transition from approval to implementation.

Activities

- ☐ School code obtained from the Colorado Department of Education (CDE)
- ☐ Complete authorizer pre-opening checklist submitted
- ☐ Charter contract fully executed in accordance with [C.R.S. 22-30.5-105](#)
- ☐ Performance framework (academic, financial, organizational) adopted and attached to the charter contract
- ☐ School leader/principal hired and responsible for Year Zero implementation
- ☐ Governing board has reviewed and acknowledged all Year Zero readiness requirements and opening conditions
- ☐ Enrollment and lottery conducted in accordance with [C.R.S. 22-30.5-104\(3\)](#)
- ☐ Student information system (SIS) implemented and compatible with district/CDE Data Pipeline requirements
- ☐ Governing board-approved foundational policies adopted
- ☐ Required liability and property insurance coverage obtained



GOVERNANCE & ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS

Governance structures, leadership capacity, board compliance, and organizational foundations necessary to support effective school operations.

This phase ensures the school’s governance structure and leadership are prepared to operate in compliance with state requirements.

Key activities include securing nonprofit status, establishing a compliant governing board, verifying background checks, providing essential board training, approving the initial budget, and fulfilling statutory transparency obligations.

Activities

- ☐ Nonprofit status obtained under IRS 501(c)(3)
- ☐ Governing board composition requirements met, including parent representation
- ☐ Fingerprinting and background checks completed for all board members and employees
- ☐ Governing board training completed in charter governance, finance, fiduciary responsibilities, and applicable law
- ☐ Governing board bylaws adopted and organizational meeting conducted
- ☐ Board officers elected and committee structure established, as applicable
- ☐ Conflict of interest policy adopted
- ☐ Governing board compliance established with Colorado Open Meetings Law ([C.R.S. 24-6-401 et seq.](#))
- ☐ Year 1 operating budget approved by the governing board
- ☐ Required transparency information posted on the school website in accordance with [C.R.S. 22-44-301 to 304](#)
- ☐ Board meeting calendar adopted for the first year of operation
- ☐ Legal counsel, independent auditor, and financial service providers identified or contracted
- ☐ Governance roles, responsibilities, and reporting relationships documented
- ☐ Authorizer conditions of approval reviewed and incorporated into Year Zero planning



FINANCIAL READINESS

Financial systems, budgeting processes, reporting structures, and fiscal controls required to ensure financial stability and compliance.

This phase focuses on establishing sound fiscal management systems and meeting state reporting requirements.

Activities include preparing for the October Count, setting up banking, payroll, and grant accounting systems, contracting with an independent auditor, and ensuring the authorizer receives timely financial statements and vendor information.

Activities

- ☐ October Count preparation completed in accordance with [C.R.S. 22-54-103](#)
- ☐ Year 1 operating budget adopted and aligned with projected enrollment
- ☐ Multi-year financial projections developed and reviewed by the governing board
- ☐ Cash flow projections completed for the first year of operation
- ☐ Bank account established and authorized signatories identified
- ☐ Payroll system implemented
- ☐ Accounting system established and chart of accounts configured
- ☐ Grant accounting and tracking processes established
- ☐ Internal controls and financial procedures adopted
- ☐ Independent auditor contracted
- ☐ Financial management provider, business manager, or CFO support identified, as applicable
- ☐ Required insurance coverage obtained
- ☐ ACH, vendor setup, and payment processing information submitted to the district, as applicable
- ☐ Monthly financial reporting process established
- ☐ Financial reporting schedule established for the governing board and authorizer
- ☐ Startup funding, grants, loans, or fundraising commitments secured, as applicable



OPERATIONS & STAFFING

Personnel, operational systems, policies, and administrative infrastructure necessary to support daily school operations.

This phase ensures the school is fully staffed, compliant with state personnel requirements, and operationally prepared for the academic year.

It includes completing all hiring and background verification processes, establishing required evaluation systems and compliance measures, finalizing key calendars, and securing necessary instructional resources.

Activities

- ☐ School leader in place and responsible for school operations
- ☐ Educators meet licensure requirements pursuant to [C.R.S. 22-60.5](#) or documented alternative authorization requirements
- ☐ Background checks completed for all employees and volunteers
- ☐ Staffing plan finalized and key positions filled
- ☐ Employee handbook finalized and distributed
- ☐ Staff onboarding and orientation plan completed
- ☐ Educator evaluation system adopted in accordance with [C.R.S. 22-9-106](#)
- ☐ School calendar finalized and published
- ☐ School website launched and publicly accessible
- ☐ Student information system fully operational
- ☐ Staff technology accounts established
- ☐ Cybersecurity and data privacy procedures adopted
- ☐ Internal communication systems established
- ☐ Required operational vendors and service providers contracted
- ☐ Instructional materials, supplies, and technology equipment procured and ready for use
- ☐ Professional development completed for opening staff



ACCOUNTABILITY

Assessment planning, performance monitoring, and accountability systems that support academic oversight and continuous improvement.

This section ensures the school is prepared to meet state and district academic accountability requirements.

Key activities include establishing assessment systems, implementing statutory academic requirements, selecting performance measures, preparing for state and local reporting obligations, and ensuring the school has systems to monitor student outcomes and organizational performance.

Activities

- ☐ Assessment calendar finalized
- ☐ [READ Act](#) requirements implemented
- ☐ Student Data Transparency and Security Act requirements implemented
- ☐ State assessment administration procedures established
- ☐ State-approved assessment materials secured, as applicable
- ☐ Performance framework measures reviewed and incorporated into school planning
- ☐ Academic data collection and reporting systems established
- ☐ Interim assessment plan adopted
- ☐ Student progress monitoring processes established
- ☐ School-wide data review and continuous improvement processes established
- ☐ Required accountability reporting procedures established
- ☐ Curriculum information submitted to the authorizer, as applicable
- ☐ Graduation, promotion, and retention policies adopted, as applicable
- ☐ Processes established to monitor academic, organizational, and financial performance indicators



STUDENT SERVICES

Programs, staffing, and compliance systems that ensure all students receive required supports and equitable access to educational opportunities.

This phase ensures that all required student support programs and compliance measures are in place before opening. It covers planning and coordination for special education, 504 accommodations, English language learner instruction, gifted education, literacy interventions, health services, and behavior expectations.

Activities

- ☐ Special education service delivery plan established in coordination with the district or BOCES
- ☐ Special education staffing and service provider agreements finalized
- ☐ Section 504 policies, procedures, and accommodation processes established
- ☐ English language learner (ELL) identification, service delivery, and monitoring procedures established in accordance with [C.R.S. 22-24-105](#)
- ☐ Gifted education program and identification procedures established, as applicable
- ☐ Student intervention and multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) established
- ☐ [READ Act](#) intervention and support processes established
- ☐ Health services plan developed and required health personnel identified, as applicable
- ☐ Medication administration and student health procedures established
- ☐ Student records, enrollment, and cumulative file procedures established
- ☐ Student code of conduct adopted and communicated to families
- ☐ Attendance policies and truancy intervention procedures established
- ☐ Behavior support and discipline procedures established
- ☐ Family complaint and grievance procedures established
- ☐ Required student services staffing and contracted providers identified and trained



SAFETY & SECURITY

Emergency preparedness, safety planning, security procedures, and compliance measures designed to protect students and staff.

This phase ensures the school is prepared to maintain a safe and secure environment for students and staff.

Key activities include developing emergency response procedures, establishing school safety systems, coordinating with emergency response partners, training staff, and ensuring the school is prepared to respond effectively to a variety of safety and security situations.

Activities

- ☐ [Safe2Tell](#) information posted and incorporated into school communication materials
- ☐ Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) developed and aligned with local emergency response requirements
- ☐ Emergency Operations Plan reviewed with local law enforcement, fire, and emergency response agencies, as applicable
- ☐ [School Safety Resource Center](#) resources reviewed and incorporated into planning
- ☐ Required safety drills scheduled and procedures established in accordance with Colorado law
- ☐ Crisis response team identified and trained
- ☐ Visitor management and building access procedures established
- ☐ Staff safety training completed prior to opening
- ☐ Emergency communication procedures established for families and staff
- ☐ Threat assessment and reporting procedures established
- ☐ Required safety signage, emergency maps, and evacuation routes posted throughout the facility
- ☐ Medication, health emergency, and student supervision procedures established
- ☐ Incident reporting and documentation procedures established
- ☐ School safety policies adopted and communicated to staff and families



FACILITIES READINESS

Facility approvals, inspections, accessibility requirements, and building preparations necessary for safe occupancy.

This phase confirms that the school's facility meets all regulatory, safety, and accessibility requirements before opening.

Key activities include securing facility approvals, completing required inspections, preparing learning environments, establishing operational systems, and ensuring the facility is safe, accessible, and ready to support students and staff on the first day of school.

Activities

- ☐ Facility location secured through an executed lease, purchase agreement, or facility use agreement
- ☐ Certificate of Occupancy obtained
- ☐ Required fire, building, health, and local inspections completed
- ☐ Facility complies with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements
- ☐ Required notices, emergency maps, and evacuation routes posted throughout the facility
- ☐ Furniture, fixtures, equipment, and instructional materials installed and ready for use
- ☐ Technology infrastructure, internet connectivity, and communication systems operational
- ☐ Security systems, access controls, and building monitoring systems operational, as applicable
- ☐ Classrooms, offices, and common spaces prepared for occupancy
- ☐ Facility maintenance, custodial, and operational service agreements established
- ☐ Playgrounds, athletic spaces, and specialized instructional areas inspected and ready for use, as applicable
- ☐ Utility services activated and operational
- ☐ Facility emergency procedures coordinated with local emergency responders, as applicable



TRANSPORTATION & FOOD SERVICE

Transportation planning, nutrition services, and operational supports that promote student access and well-being.

This phase focuses on establishing systems to support student access and nutrition.

Key activities include establishing transportation and nutrition service systems, securing required contracts and approvals, communicating access options to families, and ensuring compliance with applicable state and federal requirements.

Activities

- ☐ Transportation plan established to support student access, as applicable
- ☐ Transportation providers, contracts, and service agreements finalized, as applicable
- ☐ Drivers, vehicles, and transportation operations comply with applicable state and federal requirements
- ☐ Transportation procedures established for students with disabilities, as applicable
- ☐ Family transportation information and procedures communicated prior to opening
- ☐ Nutrition services plan established
- ☐ Meal service provider contracted or National School Lunch Program (NSLP) participation established, as applicable
- ☐ Required food service permits, inspections, and compliance requirements completed
- ☐ Free and Reduced-Price Meal application and eligibility procedures established, as applicable
- ☐ Food service staffing, training, and operational procedures established, as applicable
- ☐ Meal service communication and enrollment materials distributed to families prior to opening

Colorado Charter School Year Zero Roadmap

How to Use This Roadmap

The roadmap on the next page provides a suggested sequence of activities during the planning year. Actual timelines may vary based on approval date, facility development, and school model. Authorizers may adapt timelines to meet local requirements and charter contract provisions.

Key Colorado Resources

Resource	Website
Colorado Association of Charter School Authorizers	https://coauthorizers.org/
Colorado Department of Education Charter Schools	https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart
Colorado League of Charter Schools	https://coloradoleague.org/
Colorado Revised Statutes Section 22-30.5-106	Colorado Revised Statutes Section 22-30.5-106 (2024) - Charter application - contents :: 2024 Colorado Revised Statutes :: U.S. Codes and Statutes :: U.S. Law :: Justia
Colorado School Safety Resource Center	https://cdpsdocs.state.co.us/safeschools
READ Act Guidance	https://www.cde.state.co.us/coloradoliteracy
Safe2Tell	https://safe2tell.org/

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