



Renewal Without Surprises

How Adams 12 Five Star Schools Builds Transparency, Context, and Shared Responsibility Into Charter Renewal

THE CENTRAL IDEA Adams 12 treats renewal as the culmination of year-round oversight, not a one-time test. Schools see the indicators, know the concerns, help shape the evidence-gathering schedule, and can respond to findings before the board acts.

Why this practice matters

Charter renewal is a high-stakes decision. When an authorizer relies heavily on a single application or site visit—and raises concerns late—the process can feel punitive, while one-day anomalies, missing context, or unresolved history can distort the evidence. **Collaboration does not mean lowering standards.** It means designing a process in which the school understands the expectations, knows the concerns, and has a fair opportunity to clarify the record.

Adams 12 Five Star Schools treats renewal as the culmination of year-round oversight rather than a one-time test. The Office of Charter Partnerships begins planning before the renewal year, annual visits and reports build a shared record, schools help schedule evidence-gathering activities, trained district and community reviewers use visible indicators, and a debrief-and-response loop occurs before the board acts. A school leader described the result as “high expectations with high support.”

Adams 12 at a glance

Focus	Collaborative charter renewal and ongoing accountability
Core practices	Annual monitoring, early planning, visible indicators, shared scheduling, cross-functional review, and school response
Operating stance	“High expectations with high support”
Key mechanism	Year-round evidence plus a transparent debrief-and-response loop

The model: five reinforcing practices

1. Begin renewal before the renewal year

What Adams 12 does. The charter office opens the conversation in the spring before renewal. School leaders reflect on the current contract term, identify strengths, discuss known questions, and receive early access to application and review materials. Additional summer and fall touchpoints keep the work moving before the formal submission window.

Why it matters. Early notice gives the school time to gather evidence, address known concerns, and solve technical or access issues before they become compliance problems.

Adapt it. Launch renewal planning six to nine months before the application is due. Use a one-page pre-renewal brief to document strengths, known concerns, evidence needs, key dates, and points of contact.

2. Make expectations and evidence visible

What Adams 12 does. Schools and reviewers can see the application sections and review indicators in advance through a shared digital platform. The district's School-Wide Trends and Accountability Review (STAR) framework organizes indicators around the governing requirement, what compliant practice looks like, and where evidence can be observed. Concerns identified through annual monitoring are named before the renewal recommendation is drafted.

Why it matters. A visible evidence framework reduces surprises, focuses reviewers on the same questions, and helps schools respond with information that is relevant to the decision.

Adapt it. Publish a renewal rubric, evidence guide, and calendar. Distinguish documented deficiencies from questions that still require investigation, and communicate both in writing.

3. Let the school help shape how evidence is gathered

What Adams 12 does. The charter office and school co-plan the evidence-gathering schedule. Activities may include a school tour, classroom observation, board interview or meeting observation, parent coffee talk, and conversations with students, teachers, and families. Required evidence remains consistent, while the school helps identify authentic settings in which reviewers can understand its model.

Why it matters. Multiple evidence sources reduce dependence on one visit or data point. They also help reviewers understand mission-specific context—especially for alternative or specialized schools—without changing the standard.

Adapt it. Define a small set of required evidence sources, then offer schools additional ways to demonstrate practice and explain context. Schedule activities collaboratively within a published window.

4. Separate process leadership from the decision

What Adams 12 does. The Office of Charter Partnerships runs the process but serves in a non-determining role. A cross-functional district team and District Accountability Committee members review assigned sections after training and conflict-of-interest checks, bringing academic, financial, legal, special-populations, and community expertise. An outside expert reviewer is engaged, such as through CACSA, when useful.

Why it matters. Clear roles strengthen objectivity and protect the charter liaison's ability to support the process without writing the school's answers or predetermining the outcome.

Adapt it. Use a process lead, a subject-matter expert, and a community reviewer. Add a neutral reviewer when relationships are strained.

5. Share findings and create a response loop

What Adams 12 does. After evidence gathering, the review team debriefs and the charter office shares anonymous trends and follow-up questions with the school. The school can clarify, correct, or submit additional information before materials advance to the board. Within STAR, a documented concern prompts a school-developed action plan and targeted support; unresolved issues may later appear in public annual or monitoring reports.

Why it matters. A response loop improves the accuracy of the record and turns monitoring into an opportunity for improvement without concealing unresolved noncompliance.

Adapt it. Use a standard debrief summary and give the school a defined response window. Document corrections, retain the final evidence record, and track action-plan commitments to completion.

What makes the model work

The visible practices above depend on three enabling conditions.

- **Continuous contact:** Monthly school-level leadership meetings, recurring cross-school sessions, annual visits, and routine reports create a shared record before renewal begins.
- **Context without exceptions:** Reviewers learn the school's mission, students, and operating model while continuing to apply transparent academic, organizational, financial, and legal standards.
- **Candor with boundaries:** A trusted liaison can surface difficult issues early, explain the process, and connect the school to resources while declining to write answers or compromise an objective review.

FIELD INSIGHT: Transparency is not leniency. Sharing concerns early and giving schools a chance to respond makes the evidence stronger—and makes difficult accountability conversations more credible.

A practical starting point for authorizers with limited dedicated staff or resources

Adams 12 can draw on a cross-functional district team and has established monitoring routines. Smaller and rural authorizers can still reproduce the core architecture with a clear process map, a few well-chosen reviewers, multiple evidence sources, and a reliable response loop.

Start here	Minimum viable practice	Evidence to look for
Step 1 — Designate a lead	Assign one person to own the calendar, questions, and handoffs.	The school knows where to go; messages remain consistent.
Step 2 — Publish the process	Share the calendar, rubric, roles, evidence guide, and decision points.	Dates are met; the school and reviewers use the same criteria.
Step 3 — Add a pre-renewal check-in	Review strengths, known concerns, and evidence needs six to nine months before submission.	The application responds to issues already on the record.
Step 4 — Triangulate evidence	Combine record review, observation, stakeholder input, and prior monitoring.	Material findings are supported by more than one source.
Step 5 — Close the loop	Share trends and questions, allow a written response, and track action steps.	Corrections are documented and unresolved concerns remain visible.

Questions for authorizer teams

- What in a renewal recommendation would surprise the school if it appeared today?
- Do the school and every reviewer see the same indicators and evidence expectations before the application is submitted?
- Which evidence sources would reduce dependence on a single site visit or isolated data point?
- How will reviewers account for the school's mission and student context without changing the standards?
- When can the school clarify or correct the record before the board receives a recommendation?

Evidence of practice

The STAR framework is designed to reduce reliance on a single renewal-year site visit by collecting defined evidence in renewal and non-renewal years. The current SY26-27 New America School renewal plan pairs advance meetings, reviewer and District Accountability Committee training, optional early application review, stakeholder engagement, a site visit and debrief, written follow-up, and a public board presentation—creating a record that accumulates before the decision point.

Key takeaway

FOR AUTHORIZERS Collaborative renewal is not softer renewal. It is a process in which standards, evidence, known concerns, roles, and response opportunities are visible early enough for the school to show its best work and for the authorizer to make a better-supported decision.

About this field brief

The Colorado Association of Charter School Authorizers (CACSA) gratefully acknowledges the Colorado League of Charter Schools for its partnership and support in developing the Authorizer Field Brief Series. Created through a grant-funded initiative to strengthen authorizing practices statewide, the series highlights practical approaches used by Colorado authorizers and translates them into adaptable strategies for other districts and authorizing teams.

Adams 12 contributors

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