

AUTHORIZER FIELD BRIEF | PRACTICE PROFILE

Support Before Escalation

How the Colorado Charter School Institute Matches Support and Oversight to Each Area of Need

THE CENTRAL IDEA CSI applies common expectations across its portfolio while varying support and monitoring by program area. Universal tools help prevent routine problems, targeted supports respond to emerging needs, and intensive interventions address significant or persistent concerns. A school can receive more help in one area without losing autonomy in other areas.

Why this practice matters

Tiered accountability is often understood as a way to increase support after a school falls short. CSI starts earlier. Its framework uses strong universal resources to prevent avoidable problems, detects emerging risk before it becomes systemic, and increases both support and oversight when concerns persist. The standard does not change; the response intensity does.

CSI’s structure is distinct from a district authorizer’s. It is Colorado’s only statewide charter public school authorizer, and its portfolio consists entirely of charter schools in diverse communities. CSI also carries local education agency responsibilities for its schools. Its staff therefore coordinates authorizing and school-facing work across functions such as data submissions, finance, grants, nutrition, policy and compliance, governance, special education, and other school programs. District authorizers may organize these functions differently, but the underlying practice is transferable: connect charter schools to existing expertise and match staff time to demonstrated need.

CSI at a glance

Authorizer context	CSI serves as both the authorizer and the local education agency (LEA) for schools across its statewide portfolio. As Colorado’s only statewide authorizer, CSI assumes district-level responsibilities for serving schools located in communities throughout the state.
Tier structure	Tier I universal supports, Tier II targeted supports, and Tier III intensive interventions
How tiers apply	A program area or operational function, rather than across the school
Decision approach	Objective indicators combined with school context, professional judgment, and cross-team review

The model in five practices

1. Build strong universal supports first

What CSI does. Most of CSI's support begins at Tier I. All schools receive annual handbooks, calendars, templates, guides, training modules, video tutorials, dashboards, scheduled reminders, and access to technical assistance. Teams use school feedback and recurring errors to revise these resources so requirements are easier to find and use.

Why it matters. Clear universal supports reduce preventable mistakes and leave more staff time for issues that require individual attention.

Adapt it. Start with one annual calendar, one concise expectations guide, a predictable reminder cadence, and a named contact for questions. Review which errors still recur and improve the Tier I tools before adding more interventions.

2. Tier the area of need rather than the whole school

What CSI does. Each program team defines criteria and responses for its own area. A school may need intensive help with data collection while remaining at Tier I in finance or governance. New schools, transfer schools, and new staff contacts generally receive targeted onboarding across program teams because they have not yet worked through CSI's systems.

Why it matters. Area-specific tiering preserves autonomy where systems are strong and directs time and expertise to the function that needs attention.

Adapt it. Assess a small set of functions separately, such as academics, finance, governance, special education, and data reporting. Do not allow one weak area to become a global judgment about the school.

3. Interpret early signals with the school

What CSI does. Teams monitor indicators such as missed deadlines, file-error history, enrollment changes, grant spenddown, compliance submissions, and student outcomes. Before escalating, staff contacts the school to determine whether the signal reflects meaningful risk, a temporary circumstance, or a capacity issue. In governance, CSI added a board-observation rubric and at least one observed meeting to strengthen decisions that had previously relied heavily on professional judgment.

Why it matters. An early-warning system is useful only when its signals lead to a proportionate response. Context helps staff avoid unnecessary escalation while acting sooner when risk is real.

Adapt it. Choose a few indicators that staff can monitor reliably. Require a brief pre-tiering conversation, then document the trigger, the school's context, the response, and the conditions for reducing or increasing support.

4. Increase support and oversight together

What CSI does. Tier II responses may include proactive check-ins, structured support calls, early submission review, progress checkpoints, targeted cohorts, or advanced workshops. Tier III responses are individualized and may include an improvement plan, required one-on-one meetings, on-site coaching, earlier deadlines, frequent monitoring, and leadership or governing-board engagement. Continued noncompliance can move onto CSI's formal compliance ladder.

Why it matters. The school receives a practical path to correct the problem, while the authorizer gains better evidence about whether the response is working.

Adapt it. For each trigger, define both the added help and the added monitoring. State who is responsible, how often progress will be checked, what resolution looks like, and when formal escalation may occur.

5. Coordinate across teams and clarify accountability thresholds

What CSI does. CSI's leadership team meets monthly to share new information, insights into whether the response is working, and identify patterns across departments. Multiple Tier II or III concerns may point to a broader leadership or governance issue and prompt senior-level engagement with the school leader or board. Communications focus on the missed expectation, the reason for added support or oversight, and the next step; most teams do not present the tier as a school label. Formal notices of concern appear in annual and renewal reports, while lower-level reminders and routine problem-solving generally remain part of the working relationship.

Why it matters. A cross-functional view can reveal root causes that no single department sees. A clear boundary between routine correction and formal public action gives schools room to improve without obscuring unresolved noncompliance.

Adapt it. Hold a short monthly cross-functional review and designate one person to coordinate next steps. Define in advance which interactions are coaching, which are formal reminders, and which require a public notice or other escalation.

What makes the model work

The tier structure depends on three operating conditions.

- **Support and accountability together.** Staff share the view that explaining requirements, removing avoidable barriers, and holding schools accountable are connected responsibilities.
- **Distributed ownership with coordination.** Teams use common structures but retain authority to respond to evidence in their program area. Leadership coordination connects concerns that cross departments.
- **Continuous improvement.** CSI reviews outcomes and school feedback, then adjusts indicators, handbooks, training, communication, and pacing when a strategy is not solving the intended problem.

FIELD INSIGHT CSI treats tiering as a resource-allocation and risk-management system, not a schoolwide rating. Expectations remain clear, support becomes more specific, and formal accountability escalates only when the evidence warrants it.

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

A district does not need CSI's staffing structure to use this approach. Begin with one recurring problem, draw on the departments that already support district schools, and give the charter liaison responsibility for coordinating expectations and follow-through.

Start here	Minimum viable practice	Evidence to look for
Step 1 Choose one problem	Use a recurring issue such as late data submissions as the first test case.	A clear baseline for deadlines, errors, staff time, or unresolved findings.
Step 2 Strengthen Tier I	Publish a concise guide, calendar, reminders, training, and one point of contact.	Schools know the requirement and have enough time and support to meet it.
Step 3 Define triggers	Select two or three observable reasons for targeted or intensive support.	Similar evidence leads to similar initial responses, with context documented.
Step 4 Match the response	Pair each trigger with added assistance, monitoring frequency, exit conditions, and an escalation point.	The issue resolves, or the record supports a proportionate next step.
Step 5 Review and improve	Use a monthly cross-team check and a quarterly review of results and school feedback.	Patterns across functions are visible and weak tools are revised.

Questions for authorizer teams

- Which recurring issue consumes the most last-minute staff time?
- What universal resource or communication could prevent that issue?
- Which early indicators are actionable, and what context could explain them?
- Can a school receive added help in one area without losing autonomy elsewhere?
- What separates routine coaching, a formal reminder, and public noncompliance?

Key takeaway

FOR AUTHORIZERS Uniform expectations do not require uniform support. Strong universal tools prevent routine problems; actionable early signals prompt targeted help; and significant or persistent concerns receive individualized intervention, closer monitoring, and formal escalation when necessary.

Evidence of practice

In its 2026 Theory of Action for Tiered Supports and Interventions, CSI reports results tied to the operational problems the model was designed to address:

- 100 percent deadline compliance in key data collections after a structured reminder cadence and individualized outreach.
- Unrecoverable grant funding declined from more than \$550,000 to less than \$125,000 after milestone pacing and tiered financial monitoring.
- Gifted student identification increased after targeted support for schools with historically low identification rates, and renewal submissions improved as more schools used optional check-ins and coaching.

CSI does not attribute academic achievement changes directly to the tiering model. It measures whether each intervention solves its stated problem, such as improving data accuracy, meeting deadlines, spending awarded funds, or correcting noncompliance. CSI links those operational gains to more accurate funding and services, fewer unresolved risks, and more school time available for instruction.

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. This initial draft draws from a September 2026 practice-focused conversation with leaders from the Colorado Charter School Institute (CSI), along with a review of CSI's *Theory of Action for Tiered Supports and Interventions*. This draft has not yet been reviewed by CSI for factual accuracy.

Related CSI Resource [Theory of Action for Tiered Supports and Interventions](#)

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