
Administrator's Guide for Leading a Colorado Charter School



The Colorado Department of Education

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Overview of the Administrator's Guide

The role of a charter school administrator is exceptionally demanding and much more encompassing than that of a traditional principal; it is close to that of a superintendent. Because they are both instructional and business leaders, charter school administrators bear more responsibility than their traditional public school counterparts, particularly when the school is new or experiencing significant growth.¹ They must manage the facility and finances, oversee instructional and operational staff, engage with students, elevate school culture and morale, represent the school to parents and the community, manage conflict, promote the school, ensure the school meets all local, state, and federal laws, encourage academic and professional excellence, and guide the school toward meeting its goals.² One chief administrator recalls his early years at a rapidly growing charter school during which he felt like a “pilot who was trying to fly the plane as it was being built.” Fortunately, his plane did not crash and the school is highly successful today, but, needless to say, this scenario does not promote sustainable success for the school or job satisfaction (not to mention a healthy lifestyle) for the administrator.

As a remedy, the idea for this guide was conceived by experienced charter school administrators and people who work for the Schools of Choice Unit at CDE, all of whom have an extensive knowledge of charter school administration and who have started schools themselves. It is designed to provide guidance and practical help for the administrator to successfully fulfill the enormous responsibilities and avoid many operational challenges. This guide summarizes what a charter school administrator needs to be aware of and offers links to resources where more detailed information in a specific area can be found.

An impressive array of practical help is also available through CDE, the Colorado League of Charter Schools, and by consulting with experienced administrators at older charter schools. CDE offers formal trainings that range in style from “boot camp” workshops, to regularly scheduled networking meetings, to one-on-one mentoring relationships. The Schools of Choice office at CDE initiates an atmosphere of support for developing charters by providing an introductory three-day “boot camp” for any individuals interested in writing a charter school application and opening a new school.

With a continued commitment to creating and increasing capacity in charter school leadership, the Schools of Choice unit also offers training for charter school governing board members, business managers, authorizers, and administrators. Administrators’ mentoring networks meet monthly, one in the north metro area and one in the Colorado Springs area, and provide a venue for book studies, roundtable discussions, and troubleshooting sessions particularly of interest to charter school administrators. Administrators are also welcome to attend a full day Finance Seminar at the beginning of the school year, and the Business Manager Network meetings which are held approximately four times a year. These latter gatherings focus on the business aspects of charter schools and include training topics designed or requested by the participants. New charter schools receiving the federal start-up grant which is administered through the Schools of Choice office, may also be provided with one-on-one administrator mentoring opportunities. All of the CDE trainings provide an invaluable opportunity to network with other charter schools in the state and to acquire knowledge about operational best practices.

To achieve the goal for the administrator’s guide being a practical tool, we have identified four primary resources in Colorado charter schools already provided by the Colorado Department of Education on its Web site. Links to these documents are provided in the appendices and in several places within the document where they are cited specifically.

- [Windows on Leadership](#)

¹ *Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook – Chapter 12 Pitfalls to Avoid (Overextending Administrators)*

² *Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook: Chapter 10 Selecting, Reviewing and Supporting the Administrator (The Hiring Process)*

- Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook (hereinafter referred to as the Board Handbook)
- Charter School Support Initiative (CSSI)
- Charter Schools Guidebook

Windows on Leadership is a manual for developing leaders in charter schools. Research-based and thoughtfully written, it provides high-level information about leadership generally as well as practical applications for administrators in Colorado charter schools specifically.

Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook is a “how-to” manual for developing effective governing boards. It covers topics ranging from board structure and responsibilities, to holding productive meetings, developing sound policies and pitfalls to avoid. This is an extremely practical guide for governing boards that is heavily referenced in this document.

The Charter School Support Initiative (CSSI) offers schools the opportunity to go through a comprehensive school review by a team of CDE-trained professionals with the goal of improving the school and increasing sustainability within charter schools generally, particularly with administrators and governing boards developed in collaboration with the Charter School Institute (CSI) and the Colorado League of Charter Schools (CLCS). Using nine Standards and Indicators for Continuous School Improvement as well as two additional standards developed for charter schools specifically, the CDE team conducts a thorough site visit that includes the following:

- Reviewing and analyzing all facets of the school’s operation.
- Assisting the school in developing recommendations for improving student performance.
- Making recommendations for additional assistance that may be needed by the school.
- Providing a written report of the findings to the school, which includes priorities for the school to address.

References to specific CSSI standards and indicators are placed within the text to which they are related. Administrators can refer to the *CSSI Resource Handbook*³ for a detailed description of each standard and indicator, as well as supportive research and a step-by-step process for addressing each indicator. This linkage is designed to help the school establish sound practices, improve performance, and to prepare for the CSSI site visit.

The Charter Schools Guidebook is a practical guide to starting and operating a charter school in Colorado. It covers startup issues such as putting together the charter application, negotiating the contract, and managing relations with the authorizer, and operational issues such as developing an effective governing board, establishing business operations, maintaining accountability for student performance, and offering professional development for teachers.

The format of this guide is simple. There is a brief narrative about topics that apply to all aspects of administrative leadership in charter schools. For each topic, there are links or references to more information. The reference is often to the CDE Web site. In some cases, more information means examples attached as appendices. Best practices, links to specific resources, areas needing compliance to legal or legislative rules, and relevant CSSI Standards and Indicators are placed in colored frames as shown below:

Best Practices
Resources
Compliance
Relevant CSSI

³ *Charter School Support Initiative Resource Handbook*, prepared by the Southwest Comprehensive Center

Within the narrative, specific sections provide quick reference information, such as a glossary of terms, a list of resources for detailed information, and some examples of documents used in schools. Due to the continuing evolution of charter schools, regulations change and new resources become available frequently. In addition to the resources listed in this guide, individual charter schools with similar educational philosophies are the best source for information and specific examples.

On a stylistic note, the language in this guide is intended to be gender neutral. The authors have avoided pronoun usage whenever possible, and, where appropriate, have used second person to eliminate gender references and make the text more personal and engaging. In situations where using gender neutral language would create unclear, awkward or grammatically incorrect sentences, masculine pronouns are used to refer to people generally.

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Charter School Laws and Contracts

Federal Laws Governing Charter Schools

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (an update of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act) has a section in Title V which provides for a federal Charter School Grant Program for startup and implementation costs for new charter schools. There is also a facilities credit enhancement section of the law that affects charter schools. Other federal laws that pertain to charter schools include the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Federal labor laws, and civil rights laws.

Resource: More information on federal NCLB programs is available at: www.cde.state.co.us/FedPrograms

Resource: The Charter Schools Grant Program information is located at: www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/cchgrn00.htm; and www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/cspguidance03.pdf

Resource: Information about facilities credit enhancement part of NCLB can be found at: <http://www.nochildleftbehind.com/nclb-law/Subpart-2.-Credit-Enhancement-Initiatives-To-Assist-Charter-School-Facility-Acquisition-Construction-and-Renovation>

Resource: Information about the ADA can be found at: <http://www.ada.gov/>

Resource: Information about civil rights can be found at: www.uscharterschools.org/pdf/fr/civil_rights.pdf

Resource: Information about IDEA can be found at: www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/sped/index.htm

Colorado Charter School Law

The Charter Schools Act [C.R.S. 22-30.5-101 et. seq.] was adopted by the General Assembly in 1993. Since then it has been amended almost every year. In 2004 the Legislature added the Charter School Institute Act, which created a new statewide chartering authority in a patchwork of districts without exclusive chartering authority across the state. A school district can be granted exclusive chartering authority by the State Board of Education after demonstrating the district meets certain “good authorizer” criteria listed in the statute.

The Charter Schools Act explains the charter application procedure, review process, appeals process, contract requirements, funding, and reporting requirements. In addition, the State Board of Education has adopted administrative procedures to further explain the appeals process, exclusive chartering authority and how to file a request for waiver from state law or rule.

Charter schools are required to comply with all state laws unless specifically waived. There are certain statutes that cannot be waived, including:

- Public School Finance Act
- Exceptional Children’s Educational Act
- Data required for School Accountability Reports
- Fingerprinting and criminal background checks on school employees
- Internet Protection Act

In addition, charter schools, as governmental entities, are subject to competitive bid, open meetings, open records and related laws in other sections of Colorado’s Revised Statutes.

Resource: Public School Finance Act: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdefinance/generalinfo.htm>

Resource: Exceptional Children’s Educational Act: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/early/downloads/ECEARules.pdf>

Resource: Colorado Children’s Internet Protection Act: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdelib/technology/cipa.htm
Resource: A current summary of school districts with and without exclusive chartering authority is at: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/download/ECA.pdf
Resource: More information on the Colorado Charter Schools Act is available at: www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/csact.htm
Resource: Information about employment issues can be found at: www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/download/HREmploymentManual.pdf
Resource: More detail about capital construction is located at: www.cde.state.co.us/cdefinance/CapConstMain.htm
Resource: Financing information is available at: www.uscharterschools.org/gb/dev_fin/intro.htm

Tracking Legislative Changes

Board members and school administrators need to be aware of and prepared to accommodate new legislative requirements. Additionally, schools may need to participate in the legislative process to block harmful bills or encourage the passing of beneficial legislation. Every school should have a committee or designate one person to track legislative bills. The Colorado League of Charter Schools follows and responds to charter school legislation at the state level. The Center for Education Reform and the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools monitor and respond to legislation at the federal level.⁴

Resource: More information about the Colorado Charter Advocacy Network (Colorado CAN), a League service to provide news, legislative updates and alerts about political issues impacting charter schools can be found at: http://www.coloradoleague.org/take-action/index.php
Resource: The Library of Congress (http://thomas.loc.gov/) and the Colorado General Assembly (http://www.leg.state.co.us/) provide a listing of the history, status and content of all introduced bills.

Legal Counsel

Running a school requires understanding and managing a multitude of legal issues such as special education law, employee matters, contract negotiations, facility development, student discipline matters, governance issues, open meetings issues, etc. Also, issues sometimes arise that might end up being reported in the media. Therefore, it is important to have legal counsel to help the school negotiate these sometimes difficult hurdles. Ideally, choose an attorney who has expertise in charter school law and at-will employment.

As quasi-governmental units, charters schools have sufficient financial stability that an attorney should not ask for a retainer payment in advance of performing legal work. Instead, the school’s attorney should bill at his hourly rate after the work is performed. An exception to this rule is when the attorney agrees to perform a discrete task (e.g., incorporating the school’s foundation) for a flat fee instead of on an hourly basis. Agreed flat fees are usually paid in advance. The school benefits from a flat fee by obtaining a cap on its cost for the project, and the attorney benefits by receiving the fee prior to performing the work. Whatever billing method is selected, the administrator should know it in advance and budget accordingly.

Charter schools are legal entities, and the rules of professional conduct governing attorneys require them to establish from which person or persons have authority to communicate with the attorney on the school’s behalf. This is usually the board president and/or the chief administrator of the school. Schools should avoid the situation where, for example, individual board members other than the president call the school’s attorney and solicit legal advice. This is not only a bad organizational practice, but also it places the attorney in the awkward position of having to decline to speak with the person.

⁴ *Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook: Chapter 6 Providing Guidance on Legislative and Legal Issues (Tracking Legislative Changes)*

Most school districts can afford to have legal counsel attend all of their board of education meetings. This is not a cost-effective approach for most charter schools. Instead, the school's attorney should not usually attend governing board meetings. If, however, decisions with important legal consequences will be made at a meeting (e.g., a controversial personnel decision or going over bond finance issues), the school's attorney should be invited to attend.

"An effective board identifies legal and regulatory changes that impact the school and communicates these changes to school personnel as applicable. Charter schools function under the authority of local, state and federal laws and regulations. These laws govern contracts, employment, building safety, finances, discrimination, and other educational and operational aspects of schooling. The board, administration, and school personnel should know legal requirements and remain in compliance with them."⁵

Best Practice: Consult legal counsel prior to negotiating a charter contract.

Charter Application

The Charter Schools statute explains what should be included in a charter school application; however, most school districts have a policy that includes additional information. An applicant should first obtain the school district policy. Applicants to the state Charter School Institute should download the Request for Applications at the link provided in the resource box below. The list of components in the statute is the minimum of required information. Most authorizers request additional information, such as if a management company is being used.

Resource: The Colorado Charter School Institute application can be downloaded at:
<http://www.csi.state.co.us/apps.htm>

Every year the Schools of Choice Office at CDE conducts a boot camp seminar on how to write charter school applications. Topics covered include educational programs, plans for evaluating pupil performance, performance management, budgets and financial issues.

Resource: More information on the boot camp seminar is available at:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/chartecalendar.htm>

The Common Application is a standard application for Colorado charter schools and includes a check list and review rubric. Developed for founding groups and authorizers, it will provide guidance in the writing, review and evaluation of charter school applications as well as defining a minimum standard of completeness.

Resource: More information about the Common Application is available at:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/dev/newdev.htm>

Every administrator should review the original charter school application, preferably prior to accepting the position as administrator. The application is the original charter school founder's vision for the school. Most charter schools have their applications on their Web site to make it readily available to parents inquiring about the school's philosophy.

According to statute, the charter application serves as the basis for the contract (charter). The application could be several hundred pages and the contract is typically less than fifty pages. Legally, the two documents are considered complementary to each other.

⁵ *Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook: Chapter 6 Providing Guidance on Legislative and Legal Issues*

Best Practice: All new charter school governing board members should read the original charter application prior to serving on the board. The board’s primary responsibility is to promote the vision and mission of the charter school and that philosophy is embedded in the application.

Resource: Charter School Applications: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/dev/newdev.htm>

Resource: Charter School Institute sample applications: <http://www.csi.state.co.us/apps.htm>

Compliance: Read the original charter application to ensure the school is still adhering to the founder’s vision. If it’s not, in any area, consult with the governing board to find out if it was changed for a particular reason and by board action.

Charter Contract

The contract is negotiated when the charter school application has been approved by the authorizer. Initial contracts are typically for a term of three to five years. After that many charter schools have moved to long-term (30 or more years) in order to secure better financing rates. Even with a long-term contract the charter school still must undergo an academic review at least every five years. This academic review may also be combined with the annual accreditation process.

The complexity of charter school contracts and the difficulty of contract negotiations vary widely depending upon the authorizer. Some authorizers are happy with a “bare bones” agreement that gives a very broad outline of the parties’ agreement. Other authorizers insist on lengthy, highly-detailed contracts that can take several weeks to negotiate.

The first decision to make in any contract negotiation is the membership of your negotiation team. It is highly inadvisable to have the whole governing board participate in this process. Instead, the board should appoint a contract negotiation committee with two (or no more than four) members. The committee and the school’s attorney will then be the school’s contract negotiating team. It is highly recommended that the school involve its attorney at an early stage in contract negotiations. Charter contracts can be very complex legal documents, and the advice of an attorney with experience negotiating these types of contracts is essential.

The next step in the process is writing the first draft of the contract. This task is almost invariably performed by the authorizer or its lawyer. The school should watch the calendar closely, because busy school district attorneys often let this slip. If the contract completion deadline is approaching and the district has still not distributed a draft of the contract, the school should ask its attorney to press on this issue.

When the initial contract draft is distributed, the school’s negotiating team should review it carefully. After the team has reviewed the contract, it should sit down and discuss its comments/concerns with the school’s attorney, who will then collect all of the feedback and communicate with the authorizer’s attorney. Thereafter, a process of give and take will ensue that could last from a few days to up to several weeks, depending on how far apart the school and the district are.

At the end of the negotiation, two or three issues of disagreement may exist. At this point, the school will have to decide whether to take these issues to the State Board of Education on appeal or give in and move on with an acceptable but less than perfect contract. This is a decision for the whole board in consultation with the school’s attorney.

Due to the Taxpayer Bill of Rights (TABOR), governmental entities may not enter into multi-year financial obligations. Therefore, the financial portions of the contract may be renegotiated each year, but the rest of the contract is for the term cited. The administrator, business manager and board president should be very familiar with conditions of the charter contract.

It is becoming increasingly common for charter contracts to contain specific academic benchmarks for the school to meet in order to ensure continued operation. These may include School Accountability Report ratings or improvement ratings, making Adequate Yearly Progress, or accreditation status.

Charter school representatives should never sign, or agree to, a contract without it having been reviewed by experienced legal counsel. Since the contract contains funding provisions and requirements for academic performance, this is the most important document affecting the school's operation.

Best Practice: Documents available at the Schools of Choice Unit or online at <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/DistAuthInfo.htm>

Resource: Sample contracts: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/DistAuthInfo.htm>

Compliance: The administrator, board president and business manager should be familiar with the provisions in the charter contract, especially as they pertain to finances and academic requirements.

Other Legal Agreements

As indicated in the *Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook: Chapter 6 Providing Guidance on Legislative and Legal Issues (Other Legal Agreements)*, the following is a checklist for establishing a charter school's legal standing:

- File Articles of Incorporation and bylaws with the Secretary of State's office.
- File SS-4 with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) in order to obtain an Employer Identification Number (EIN).
- Apply for a sales tax exempt certificate from the Colorado Department of Revenue.
- Purchase Directors and Officers (D and O) insurance.
- File form 1023 with the IRS if applying for formal recognition as a tax exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3).
- Register as a business with the Colorado Department of Revenue.
- Develop an at-will employment agreement; this is perhaps the single most important agreement the school will use.

Resources: Additional resources are available at the Colorado League of Charter Schools at: www.coloradoleague.org, the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools at: www.publiccharters.org, the Center for Education Reform at: www.edreform.com, and the National Charter Schools Institute at: www.nationalcharterschools.org

Compliance: Renew registration of non-profit corporation and registered agent (your attorney) every two years.

Waivers from District and State Policy

The Charter Schools Act permits charter schools to waive certain state laws, state rules and district policies. State waivers are granted via the authorizer (local district or CSI). Charter school applications should contain an addendum with all the waivers (state and district) that the charter school will be requesting. Waivers are an attachment to the charter contract and the waiver request must be submitted to CDE within 10 days of signing the contract.

There are two types of waivers. Delegatory waivers are those where the authority is delegated by the district Board of Education to the charter school governing board. For example, a waiver of calendar means the charter school board can set its own calendar, different than the district's calendar. Charter schools are still required to meet the minimum number of instructional hours, however. The other type of waiver is substantive. This means the charter school governing board has the authority to do something different than what the statute prescribes, but still within the general intent of the statute. For example, charter schools may be granted a waiver from teacher licensure laws, but should still hire teachers with a bachelor's degree. Some charter school teachers come from other states or private education and do not hold a valid Colorado teaching license, which is still acceptable if the charter school has a waiver from licensure laws. Waiver

requests typically explain the replacement plan if the charter school intends to do something substantively different than the statute that was waived.

The State Board of Education has granted the automatic approval of thirteen waivers, upon request. Charter schools may also apply for waivers in addition to the thirteen that are automatically approved. If additional waivers are requested, they will be added to the next State Board of Education meeting agenda for consideration. Waivers need to be renewed during charter renewal. The renewal process is the same.

A charter school may request waivers from school district policies. A list of district policies from which the charter school intends to seek waivers should have been included in the charter school application. If not, the waivers were agreed to as part of the contract negotiation. The Charter School Institute has only minimal policies and thus the bulk of policies will have to be written and adopted by the charter school board.

To request waivers from district policy, first obtain a copy of the school district's policies. The policies are probably organized in either of two formats: 1) a letter code with policies written in the affirmative; or 2) Means and Ends policies written in the negative. Either way, for some sections, the school can waive the entire section. For example, the school can waive a section on employment that doesn't pertain to charter school employees who are at-will and not employees of the school district. In other sections, the charter school should waive specific policies, such as graduation requirements if the charter school will require additional credits for graduation. It is realistic for the authorizer to want to see replacement policies in lieu of policies that have been waived.

Resource: Detailed information on submitting a waiver request is available at:

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/waivers.htm>

Resource: A list of all the waivers granted to charter schools is at:

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/datamgmt.htm>

Resource: Sample waiver replacement rationale:

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/gov/index.htm>

Resource: Automatic approval waivers: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/waivers.htm>

Compliance: The administrator should know which waivers the school has been granted and ensure that policies and procedures comply with the replacement plan.

Charter Renewal

During the year prior to the end of the contract, the charter school must submit a renewal application to the school district. The process and type of documentation required for this varies greatly among school districts. Consult your district for information on their process. Many authorizers have combined accreditation with renewal to simplify matters for both parties.

A handful of districts have their own site visit process using district or district-selected team members. The site visit includes a list of operations and financial items examined by the team. A report is given to the school and the Board of Education. The board considers the site visit report in its renewal decision.

Although the administrator continues to be the primary person to communicate with the district's charter school liaison, the governing board should take the lead in the renewal application and negotiating a new contract.

Resource: Sample contracts: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/DistAuthInfo.htm>

Compliance: Know when the charter contract term expires and know what is required to renew the contract.

Charter school governing boards are responsible for negotiating the charter renewal and preparing the district-required School Accreditation Plan. Many districts have combined their charter renewal and accreditation processes.

The Governing Board

The key to school success is effective leadership, which requires both the entire governing board and the administrator to work well together as a team. “Effective leadership is the most important determinant of success of any enterprise. This is especially true for charter schools, the success of which hinges on the daily leadership capabilities of the administrator and the “big picture” direction of the governing board.”⁶

Many of the charter school resources cited throughout this guide focus time on the relationship between the board and the administrator as a key element to the success of the organization, and to the lack of a good relationship as a key factor in a dysfunctional school. The *Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook* states that “confusion over roles leads to frustration, loss of trust, and poor governance.”⁷ From the administrator’s perspective, then, it is critical to work closely with the president of the board to develop an effective leadership model that is founded on trust. *Windows on Leadership* has many references to trust as a foundational attribute required of any effective leader, and identifies trust as a “key element that distinguishes excellent schools that are committed to moving ever upward.”⁸ This foundation of trust, therefore, should be a high priority for any new administrator when establishing a leadership model and relationship with the board.

Best Practice: Work closely with the president of the board to develop an effective leadership model that is founded on trust.

Resource: Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook is located at:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/charterhbk.htm>

Resource: Windows on Leadership can be read at:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/adm/pdf/winonldr.pdf>

Leadership Models

Charter schools must strive for a leadership model that clearly delineates the responsibilities of each leadership role. Boards should provide guidance to administrators through clear documentation and clear avenues for communication. It is the responsibility of both the board and the administrator to operate within these boundaries for effective school leadership. By documenting a leadership model that outlines expectations for both parties, trust is further reinforced for a strong, healthy working relationship between the board and administrator.

Leadership models vary from school to school. Regardless of the leadership model, both the board and the administrator must take responsibility for the academic and financial success and integrity of the school. The leadership model must require that both parties commit to flawless execution of best practices. Some charter school boards have the administrator on the board “ex officio,” or as a non-voting board member. Other boards consider the administrator to be a staff member. Either way, the administrator should be included in all board meetings, workshops, and executive sessions, unless there is a specific reason for the administrator to be excluded.

Some leadership models advocate that the administrator’s primary conduit for communicating with the board is the board president. If this is the case, the relationship between the administrator and the board president is extremely important. The administrator should communicate regularly with the board president regarding any information that may be pertinent to board oversight. The board president will evaluate which

⁶ *Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook: Introduction*

⁷ *Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook: Chapter 7 Training for Excellence (Role of a Charter School Governing Board)*

⁸ *Windows on Leadership*

information should be presented to the entire board and whether the information should be presented formally (at a board meeting) or informally. Together, the administrator and president develop the board meeting agenda. Communication between the board and administrator is discussed in further detail in the section titled “Communication Plan with the Board.”

Developing a Governance Structure

As published on the U.S. Charter Schools Web site in *Creating an Effective Charter School Governing Board*⁹, according to the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NREL), the first priority in developing a functioning governance structure should be to review your charter contract for governance requirements. While taking these requirements into account, the governance structure should be tailored to your school's vision, mission, and goals. Every board has the responsibility to develop its own structure, policies, and procedures consistent with applicable laws, requirements of the charter authorizing body, as well as the governance philosophy of the charter school leaders. At the same time, charter school experience to date suggests some characteristics of effective governance structures.

The Center for School Change at the University of Minnesota conducted a national review of charter school governance that is a good starting point for thinking about the details of the governance structure for your charter school. The sample consisted of 30 charter schools from nine states that were interviewed to uncover key elements of successful structures that were common among schools demonstrating improved achievement as measured by standardized tests and other forms of assessment.¹⁰ These schools:

- Adopted a structure that reflects the school's mission, goals, and objectives
- Designed a structure that reflects the state charter law
- Used some form of shared decision making
- Created at least one committee/council to address specific issues such as curriculum, finance, and staff development
- Produced a document that explains which decisions are made by whom (i.e., governing board, administrator, committee, council)
- Involved a variety of people in the governing board or in committees/councils
- Employed board training seminars, conferences, and/or retreats
- Selected board directors who shared the school's mission
- Focused on generating a vision and plan for school improvement
- Had relatively simple organization, without multiple levels of bureaucracy
- Were flexible and able to adapt to changing situations
- Stayed true to the mission, vision, or purpose
- Considered the clients' (students') needs at all times

Dominant Models of Charter School Board Governance

Gary R. Gruber, Ph.D., a consultant with Carney Sandoe & Associates in Santa Fe and a moderator of the USCS governance discussion group¹¹, offers a description of the three dominant models of governance that prevail in the majority of charter schools in operation today. According to Gruber, there are advantages and benefits in each as well as issues that can arise because of disagreements, lack of clear policies and procedures, faulty communication, inadequate planning and forecasting, different or unclear expectations, and lack of agreement regarding operations. These models exist on a continuum and are not mutually exclusive. Some schools combine elements from each model. Additionally, various models use differing structures on which board members have voting authority. For example, in some charter schools, all board members vote while in others the administrator(s) is an ex-officio board member without voting authority.

⁹ *Creating an Effective Charter School Governing Board*, http://www.uscharterschools.org/pub/uscs_docs/index.htm

¹⁰ Cheung, S. & Nathan, Joe, *What Works? Governing Structures of Effective Charter Schools*. The Center for School Change at the University of Minnesota

¹¹ Go to: http://www.uscharterschools.org/cs/uscsforum/cs_disc/16

School committee or council composed of parents, teachers, administrators and others: This model draws inspiration from school shared decision-making structures and site based management councils that have operated in various forms in traditional district public schools. According to Gruber, this model may be among the most democratic and representative as it is inclusive, fully representational and delegates management and oversight to one or more of its members. Those in charge have a clear understanding of procedural matters, and full inclusion in the decision-making process is essential for this model's effectiveness. Shared leadership with a division of labor according to talent and expertise is seen as the best way to serve the needs of students, families and the community as a whole. The committee or council meetings are usually open to the community and anyone is welcome to attend. This spirit of openness and inclusion are guiding principles in this form of governance and in many cases decisions are reached through consensus rather than taking a formal vote. Members may be elected and/or appointed by various groups (teachers, parents, administrators, school district officials, and others) and serve at the pleasure of those constituents. They may have defined or rotating terms of service so that others may participate in the governing process. Among the criteria for membership is the desire to implement the mission of the school and the commitment to be actively involved in the decision making process that bears responsibility for the success of the program.

A board of directors with a structure of officers, bylaws, and delegation of management to a principal, chief administrator/director or head of school: This model draws inspiration from the approach to board governance traditionally found in non-profit organizations. In this model, there is a clear distinction made between the governance work of the board of directors and the administrative and management work of the paid staff.

In this model, the charter school is a legally incorporated entity governed by state statutes and IRS regulations governing non-profit, tax-exempt organizations. The board of directors is responsible for governing the school. The Trustees each have a personal fiduciary duty to look out for the long-term well being of the school. The Board is responsible for addressing major matters including: setting the school's general policies and overall curriculum policies; approving and monitoring the annual budget and financial procedures; fundraising; hiring and evaluating the school's principal; approving personnel policies and monitoring their implementation by the principal; assuring that the charter school fulfills its charter contract; and, strategic planning.

The board is composed of a broad cross-section of the school community and community-at-large in addition to professionals and community leaders. In some charter schools, the board will include the principal, representatives of teaching staff, students and parents. The board generally meets as a whole on a monthly basis. It operates through various committees, including an executive committee consisting of officers elected to manage the board and help monitor school policies.

The board is not involved in handling the day-to-day details of running the school, dealing with specific personnel issues, or addressing individual student needs. Consistent with the best practices of non-profit corporation management, the board delegates the responsibility for running the charter school and implementing the board's policies to a principal or charter school administrator. Where appropriate, the charter school administrator will delegate some responsibility to other administrators, teachers, and students.

Owner/Operator, non-profit or for-profit, with or without a board or committee: In some cases, in this model, an advisory committee functions to provide information and support or a board of directors of the corporation or foundation serves in that capacity. Often a larger holding group or company may operate several schools in different locations but still depend upon a local group for advice and guidance. However, decisions rest with the chief executive officer who is the one responsible for the operation of the school. This individual is hired with a job description that outlines areas and lines of responsibility and accountability. This model follows a more structured chain of command that is akin to a business/corporate model of organization. The flow of responsibility follows a chart in which responsibilities are assigned or delegated to

specific departments. The managers or directors of those divisions are accountable for what happens within their respective department or division.

Resource: Information on board structures is available at:
<http://www.uscharterschools.org/gb/governance/contents.htm>

Team Building and Developing Trust

The more team members get to know each other, the easier it is to develop respect and trust. Making deliberate efforts to develop mutual trust should translate into a successful working relationship with the board. One common practice of developing trust and an effective team is to hold a retreat, preferably offsite, with the whole board and the school administrator. Personality profiling exercises, such as Myers-Briggs, True Colors or Strengths Finder, may help to facilitate team building. As a professional educator, the administrator may help develop the agenda for the retreat, which will often include a strategic planning session. It is certainly important for the administrator to participate in strategic planning with the board in order to define the path for the school and to formulate a unified vision. Of equal importance, is the time spent simply building a rapport with the members of the board during these planning sessions.

Board members are not typically experts in education. The administrator usually has access to data, research, and training that will benefit the development of board members. Making such information available to board members will help bridge any gaps in understanding. Making an effort to participate in the education of the board and to communicate best practice in education will go a long way to bring the board and administrator to the same page. This effort will also pilot the development of the team and will additionally contribute to mutual trust.

Best Practice: The board and administrator should hold an annual retreat, preferably offsite, that includes strategic planning and team building exercises.

Resource: Style Instruments, Chapter 4 of *Windows on Leadership*, is dedicated to identifying your preferred styles for working, thinking and experiencing, and includes a list of nine related resources:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/adm/pdf/winonldr.pdf>

Roles and Responsibilities

Another recommended task (to cover in a retreat or otherwise in depth) is the delineation of roles, responsibilities and expectations of and between the board and the administration. The Introduction of *Creating an Effective Charter School Governing Board* identifies “clarity regarding distinct roles and responsibilities of the board and the charter school administrator” as one of three key ways for a charter school board to “build and maintain an effective, mutually supportive working relationship with the charter school administrator.”¹²

To facilitate the discussion of delineating roles and responsibilities, use a checklist provided on CDE’s Web site: *Governing Board and Administrator Roles Worksheet*. Include a review of the administrator’s job description, focusing on key words and phrases that indicate the level of responsibility (direct vs. support; implement vs. develop; hire vs. recommend; etc.). Concurrently, compare the criteria listed in the checklist with the job description and the tool used for the administrator’s evaluation. The activity of discussing the delineation of roles and responsibilities may result in an updated administrator’s job description and annual evaluation tool. Alignment of these documents leaves less room for misunderstandings or misinterpretation, and having this discussion up front will hopefully result in clear expectations for both the administrator and for all board members.

¹² *Creating an Effective Charter School Governing Board*: Chapter 7 - Board-Staff Relations
<http://www.uscharterschools.org/governance/contents.htm>

Not only should the administrator’s roles and responsibilities be defined, but the board’s roles and responsibilities also must be established and understood by all board members and the administrator. It is a best practice to define the separation of all leadership roles and responsibilities in writing. New board members may want to become more involved in day-to-day operations and a written reminder of roles should be referenced in discussions.

The Board Trustee Handbook published by the National Association of Independent Schools includes a very useful chart that lists differences in the three positions of full board, board chair and administrator. The chart, adapted for inclusion in this guidebook, is helpful in understanding the interplay between the board and administrator.

Full Board	Board Chair	Administrator
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate entity; can act only as a group • Continuous existence as the corporate board though individual membership changes • Part-time • Does not supervise the staff • Has ultimate responsibility -- with chair • Typically not expert in education • Volunteer • Focuses on governance, not administrative matters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cannot officially act alone • Changes annually in many schools • Part-time • Does not supervise the staff • Has ultimate responsibility— with full board • Typically not expert in education • Volunteer • Focuses on governance, not administrative matters • May discuss some major administrative issues if asked by administrator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An individual • Is temporary in the life of the school; often serves longer than individual board directors • Full-time • Supervises other staff directly or through designee • Has limited, immediate responsibility • Typically is expert in education • Salaried • Focuses on administrative matters; is involved in governance/policy matters • Advises board by offering recommendations and bringing issues to board’s attention

There is general agreement that it is the responsibility of the administrator to manage the day-to-day operations while the board focuses on the vision and long-term strategic plan. So, in every area of the school there is a distinct role for both the board and the administrator. (The exception is that the administrator should avoid being involved in the selection of new board members, election of board officers, and developing board policy related to board behavior.) Documentation is of great importance when defining these roles and certainly encompasses more than just job descriptions or a decision-making matrix. Documentation of roles and responsibilities may be further outlined in the strategic plan, board policies, administrative procedures, and other long-term growth plans and guiding documents. It is therefore important to frequently review all documentation for alignment with the intended leadership model for the school. Discussions about the delineation of responsibilities should occur with every new member of the leadership team, whether it is a new board member or a new administrator.

In defining the distinction between board policy and administrative procedures the *Board Handbook* clarifies the differing roles as, “[Board] policies indicate *what* should be done whereas [administrative] procedures indicate *how* something should be done.¹³” This distinction is consistent in almost every credible resource for charter schools providing advice and insights on the broader topic of the role of the board.

Organizational effectiveness of the school begins with comprehensive and effective planning. This includes planning a process for dealing with conflict, changes, and adjustments as the school program is implemented.

¹³ *Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook: Chapter 5 Developing Sound Policy (Types of Policies)*

Developing a decision matrix to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the school leaders will provide invaluable guidance as decisions are made. By communicating the roles and responsibilities not only for the board and administration, but also staff members and other stakeholders, unnecessary duplication of work is eliminated, each task will have a responsible party, and areas for necessary collaboration can be easily defined.

Decision Matrix

Another important tool to support charter school board decision-making is the decision matrix. The purpose of such a matrix is to clearly define the authority and decision-making roles and responsibilities of the board in relation to authority and decision-making roles and responsibilities of other groups and constituencies within the charter school. The final interpretation of such a matrix will rest with the board of directors. While such a written tool will not completely clear up occasional confusion and lack of agreement about who decides what, the decision matrix will prevent many problems that frequently plague charter schools from maturing. The matrix will save time, increase the impact of people’s efforts and help build stronger relationships among the board, staff, parents, students, and other key constituencies.” One of the finest examples of such a matrix has been developed by the Washington Core Knowledge School, located in Colorado. A link to the school’s decision-making matrix is included in the resource box below, and in the appendices of this document.

Best Practice: Prior to the first retreat, the administrator should complete as much of the administrator orientation as possible so that less retreat time is spent on providing background information. This also applies to new board members and board member orientation.
Best Practice: Define the separation of all leadership roles and responsibilities in writing.
Resource: Washington Core Knowledge School’s matrix example: http://www.uscharterschools.org/governance/contents.htm
Resource: See NY decision matrix example (several pages): http://nyccharterschools.org/
Resource: <i>Governing Board and Administrator Roles Worksheet (2008)</i> : http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/gov/pdf/Governing_Board_and_Administrator_Roles_Worksheet.pdf
Resource: <i>Board Trustee Handbook</i> published by the National Association of Independent Schools.
Resource: Creating Effective Charter School Governing Boards Chapter 4: http://www.uscharterschools.org/governance/contents.htm

Role of the Board

The primary responsibilities of the board are to uphold the vision and mission of the school, to provide effective financial and program oversight, and to hire and support a competent school administrator. There are numerous resources that address the responsibilities of the board in detail; therefore, for the purposes of this document, the topic of board roles and responsibilities is limited to a brief listing of quality resources.

The *Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook* is one of the recommended resources developed by the Colorado Department of Education, Schools of Choice Unit, in collaboration with the League and CSI. This 41-page resource is devoted solely to the roles and responsibilities of a charter school board in Colorado. Topics include board structure and responsibilities, strategic planning, legislative and legal issues, financial security and oversight, and administrator selection and evaluation. Companion to this document are newly developed *Online Board Training Modules* to guide new board members in their professional development and understanding. These modules can be found at www.boardtrainingmodules.org. Another resource that addresses the roles and responsibilities of the board includes BoardSource (formerly The National Center for Non-profit Boards), which lists ten basic responsibilities of the board (Web site link given in the Resource box below). Also recommended is the Charter Friends Network publication titled, *Creating Effective Charter School Governing Boards*, which covers a broad range of topics in detail that is appropriate for new and experienced board members.

The governing board of a charter school typically delegates some of its authority and responsibilities to the president of the board, the treasurer of the board, and, sometimes, to board committees. Generally, most bylaws and board policy indicate that individual board members and committees have no authority to make decisions or take action, which is reserved only for the board as a whole, unless specifically delegated by board action. The administrator should treat the officers and board committees the same as the board as a whole only in respect to those responsibilities and authority that the board has specifically allocated to them. For example, the president of the board usually has the authority to schedule meetings and set the agenda. And, the treasurer, and/or the finance committee, usually has been delegated some limited authority over financial assets, selecting auditors, and internal controls.

Boards can increase their effectiveness by using subcommittees. Normally, a board member or two serves on each subcommittee. Sometimes the board designates certain positions to a subcommittee member (i.e. parent representative) while other times the board asks the administrator to fill committees. The *Board Handbook* identifies and defines the types of committees as standing and ad hoc. “Standing committees are part of the permanent structure of the school. Their function is described in board policy and generally related to the governance of the school. Committees on finance, board development, and accountability are of this type. [Committees that focus on curriculum and hiring could also be added to this group.] Ad hoc committees focus on specific, timely issues and are dissolved upon their resolution.¹⁴”

Best Practice: Become familiar with the training resources used by their board.
Best Practice: Train alongside board members to further support aligned philosophies and the development of a common vocabulary.
Best Practice: Each board should have a designated person to be the Parliamentarian, which is someone who becomes the expert on procedures for board meetings and hearings, and makes a recommendation to the board chairman on how to proceed when an issue or challenge is raised about the process.
Best Practice: Roberts Rules of Order is widely accepted as the best reference for meeting protocols when bylaws are silent on a process (note: this is not responsibility of administration).
Resource: <i>Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook:</i> http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/download/Bd_Trng_HBk_051007.pdf
Resource: Online Board Training Modules: http://www.boardtrainingmodules.org/
Resource: BoardSource main Web site is located at: http://www.boardsource.org/
Resource: BoardSource’s list of ten basic responsibilities of non-profit boards can be found at: http://www.boardsource.org/Knowledge.asp?ID=3.368
Resource: More information about board function can be found in <i>Creating Effective Charter School Governing Boards</i> at: http://www.uscharterschools.org/governance/contents.htm
Resource: More information on committee formation is available in Chapter 10 of the Charter Starter Handbook at www.uscharterschools.org/gb/governance/contents.htm .

Role of the Administrator

Since this guide covers the role of the administrator throughout, for this section the following quote provides an overview: “Given the independence of charter schools, the administrator must be both an instructional and a business leader. They must manage the facility and finances, oversee instructional and operational staff, engage with students, elevate school culture and morale, represent the school to parents and the community, manage conflict, promote the school, ensure the school meets all local, state, and federal laws, encourage academic and professional excellence, and guide the school toward meeting its goals. In short, the administrator guides the school on the path to its vision and mission.¹⁵”

¹⁴ *Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook: Chapter 1 Board Structure and Responsibilities (Board Committees)*

¹⁵ *Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook: Chapter 10 Selecting, Reviewing and Supporting the Administrator (The Hiring Process)*

While there is general agreement that the board should focus on the “big picture” and not micromanage, the distinction between the two is often unique to each organization. Also, during the start-up phase and initial year of operation, a board is necessarily more hands-on due to the extensive number of tasks needing to be completed in order to accomplish a successful opening.

While ensuring the original vision of the charter school founders is being fulfilled, and the direction of the current governing board is being implemented, the administrator assumes leadership for daily operations. There is a balance between the administrator assuming leadership without consulting the board and the board releasing authority to the administrator. The trusting relationship between the two is critical to this balance working effectively. Over time, the balance will become more comfortable, but usually the relationship begins with certain foundational agreements in writing, such as written board/administrator roles and responsibilities, and the administrator’s evaluation instrument.

Most bylaws give the president of the board the ability to schedule board meetings and set the agenda (refer to administrator orientation steps, which includes reviewing bylaws). The administrator may have a role in developing the board agenda, either in a secretarial role of merely compiling the agenda and transmitting it in a timely manner, or in drafting the agenda and action items with the board president.

The administrator must participate on the School Advisory Council (SAC), which may exist under a different name such as the Accountability Committee or the School Improvement Team. The role of the SAC is discussed in more detail in the section titled “School Accountability.” In addition, the board may expect the administrator to participate on the Finance or Budget Committee and perhaps other board subcommittees where the expertise and participation of the administrator is important. It is not uncommon for administrators to become overwhelmed with the number of meetings and amount of committee work required of them. It is imperative that the administrator communicate with the board to clarify and set realistic expectations for the level of participation on committees.

Best Practice: Meet with the president or other knowledgeable person to review key requirements in your bylaws and articles of incorporation, if applicable, and prepare a checklist if one doesn’t already exist.

Best Practice: *Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook: Chapter 2 Holding Productive Board Meetings (Regular Board Meetings):* “The board president sets the agenda and assembles appropriate materials for board packets. The president should distribute these well ahead of the meeting so that board members have ample time to review the documents under consideration.”

Resource: The following page on the CDE Web site contains a wealth of information about board governance and leadership: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/gov/index.htm>

Resource: The official Robert’s Rules of Order Web site is located at: <http://www.robertsrules.com/>

Policy versus Procedure

The primary purpose of the charter school governing board is to give further definition to the school’s vision and mission through written policies. It does not decide operational issues nor make every important decision. Boards state their values through written policies and provide further definition to the school vision and mission statements. The board writes policies and the administrator creates procedures. Policies indicate *what* should be done whereas procedures indicate *how* something should be done. The governing board has little role in developing administrative procedures, other than the option to negate them if they choose.

“The board’s first priority is to adopt those policies that are required by the articles of incorporation, charter school application, charter contract, and Colorado law. The second priority is to establish policies that will further the vision and mission of the school.¹⁶” Written policies have two purposes: they provide direction to

¹⁶ *Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook: Chapter 5 Developing Sound Policy (Types of Policies)*

the board and staff in implementing the school’s goals; and they ensure the school meets legal requirements. “There are four types of policies a charter school governing board should consider:

- Policies required by law (e.g. nondiscrimination, sexual harassment).
- Policies required by the contract or charter application (e.g. lottery/enrollment, uniforms).
- Policies that give broader definition to the vision/mission (e.g. educational program philosophy, administrative structure, dress code).
- Policies that communicate board decisions (e.g. facility use, withholding diplomas/transcripts/grades)¹⁷”.

The school’s documents and publications that the administrator prepares will correspond with board policies. “Governing board policies are the foundation for the employee and parent/student handbooks.¹⁸” Information throughout these publications should align with board policy and be reviewed annually by the board.

Many board policies also have corresponding administrative procedures. The board policy should clearly delineate the administration’s role in implementing the policy, possibly referencing the administrative procedure pertaining to the policy. The administrator should have a separate collection of administrative procedures. Whenever a procedure references a board policy, it should be cited.

An example of complementary policies and procedures is: the board policy on field trips may explain their value for having an academic purpose, while the administrative procedure will provide a field trip form and explain the process for receiving and accounting for money from students, arranging for transportation and getting permission slips signed.

For new schools, it is common practice for authorizers to request certain policies or procedures, prior to the school’s opening. If a draft of the employee handbook is not included in the charter school application, as an addendum, the authorizer may want to see it prior to school opening. Additionally, replacement policies for waived state laws, rules or district policies should be provided to the authorizer either in the charter school application or after charter approval, but prior to opening. “In the startup phase, the board may become so occupied with trying to get the doors of the school open that it fails to put in place the policy infrastructure. The new administrator cannot make effective decisions and develop procedures without a policy foundation, which may lead to mistakes and possible legal infractions.¹⁹” It is good practice in new charter schools for the board to task one member with policy development. This board member should meet regularly with the administrator to jointly develop draft board policies and administrative procedures so that both parties are clear where roles are separate or may overlap.

Best Practice: Startup Alert: The board’s first priority is to adopt those policies that are required by the articles of incorporation, charter school application, charter contract, and Colorado law. The second priority is to establish policies that will further the vision and mission of the school.

Best Practice: The board member tasked with policy development should meet regularly with the administrator to jointly develop draft board policies and administrative procedures so that both parties are clear where roles are separate or may overlap.

Resource: More information on board policies is available at:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/gov/index.htm>

Resource: More information about developing policies can be found in the *Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook: Chapter 5. Developing Sound Policy: Establishing a Policy:*
http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/download/Bd_Trng_HBk_051007.pdf

¹⁷ *Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook: Chapter 5 Developing Sound Policy (Types of Policies)*

¹⁸ *Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook: Chapter 5 Developing Sound Policy (Types of Policies)*

¹⁹ *Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook – Chapter 12 Pitfalls to Avoid (Lack of Policy Infrastructure)*

Compliance: Student Privacy: consider privacy practices as they relate to material contained on the school Web site(s), especially where student photos and projects are concerned, emails, honor rolls, and special education.

Compliance: Check with your authorizer and/or attorney about rules surrounding records retention and public access to information that relates to students.

Communication Plan with the Board

A written communication plan that outlines realistic expectations, responsibilities, and time frames is necessary so that both administrators and board members perform well. Revisit and update the communication plan at least once a year to ensure that it reflects the actual needs and realities of school operation as the school develops and matures.

Access to the administrator is often important for board members, particularly those who may be new to the charter board. While it is important for the administrator to be available for meetings and to attend training sessions with the board, availability may be appropriately limited during the school day. Some administrators effectively establish weekly or biweekly email updates using a template for information content that can include items such as personnel, student achievements, financials, curriculum, red flags/problems and other time sensitive topics. Additionally, it is important to establish communication protocols for students, teachers and parents in the event of an emergency situation.

For regular board business meetings, administrators commonly provide a written report to the board in the board packet. This report should generally be less than two pages and address items relevant to board vision and policy; items of interest such as academic awards received by the school or the significant illness of a staff member; and items that the board needs to know. The “need to know” items include potential threats (i.e. major nearby road closure that would affect carpooling), potential political landmines (i.e. a staff member becoming a candidate for elected office), potential phone calls from parents (i.e. a student revolt regarding too many homework assignments due at the same time), or potential financial impacts (i.e. unexpected significant increase in substitute pay due to a major illness with more than one staff member).

Most of the administrator’s interaction with the board will be with the board as a whole during regularly scheduled meetings and only occasionally with individual board members. But communication with the board between monthly meetings is essential. In general, it is important to avoid discussion of policy that leads to a decision outside of a properly noticed public board meeting. When communicating with the board via email, the administrator should maintain copies of these communications as a potential public record. Here is a list of examples of appropriate between-meeting communication with the board:

- Copies of any relevant news articles, school newsletters, announcements of upcoming school events, etc.
- Notification of emergencies (phone or email depending on the nature of the emergency)
- Email updates (short and concise)
 - Updating information for board matters, not operations
 - Forwarding communication from the authorizer or association
 - Providing advance warning of any negative publicity, protests, etc.

Best Practice: Provide a written report to the board in the board packet.

Best Practice: Develop a written communication plan that outlines realistic expectations, responsibilities, and time frames.

Best Practice: The administrator must balance the quality and quantity of information provided to the board to allow effective oversight without inviting micromanagement.

Resource: *Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook:*
http://www.csi.state.co.us/downloads/bd_trng_hbk.pdf

Resource: <i>Windows on Leadership (2000):</i> http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/adm/pdf/winonldr.pdf
Resource: The Colorado League of Charter Schools also offers workshops, trainings and resources for individual charter schools and their boards: http://www.coloradoleague.org
Resource: <i>Creating Effective Charter School Governing Boards:</i> http://www.uscharterschools.org/governance/
Resource: <i>BoardSource</i> is an informational site for non-profit boards: http://www.boardsource.org/
Compliance: Remember to comply with the Open Records Act by not having email discussions among three or more board members. See: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/gov/index.htm

Board Professional Development

The governing board of a charter school must set an example for the entire school community by committing to a standard of continuous improvement through professional development and training. The board should establish training expectations up front and in writing as a part of the annual board member agreement. Professional development plans should be built into the board’s annual calendar and resources should be allocated to support training. Individuals on the board are responsible for identifying and arranging professional development for the board. At a minimum, ongoing professional development for the board should include training in fiscal management, fundraising, legal issues, accountability and strategic oversight of the school. In addition, new board members should participate in an orientation program designed to help new members become effective as quickly as possible.

The administrator may attend training sessions with the board. This practice will help the administrator build a relationship with the board as each party learns about their duties, roles, and responsibilities in the charter school. To help board members focus on long-term planning and resist the tendency to micromanage, members can receive training to distinguish their role from that of the administration. Whether the board is comprised of parents, educators, and community volunteers, or individuals from an education management organization (EMO), proper delineation of roles is essential. Confusion over roles and inappropriate intervention leads to frustration, loss of trust, and poor governance. This training may also clarify the role of individual board members.

Best Practice: Participate in training available through CDE and the Colorado League of Charter Schools throughout the year.
Resource: <i>Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook: Chapter 7:</i> http://www.csi.state.co.us/downloads/bd_trng_hbk.pdf
Resource: Online board training modules: www.boardtrainingmodules.org

New Board Member Orientation

The board is responsible for preparing new board members to be effective and appropriate in the leadership role at the school. Every board member should participate in an orientation program that provides information about the vision and mission of the school, board oversight, proper board behavior, best practices, and current issues facing the board. It is the board’s responsibility to bring new members up to speed. As a part of orientation, new board members should sign a board member agreement, which sets the expectations for meeting preparedness and attendance, professional behavior, and confidentiality. The goal of orientation is to ensure the board maintains strong, well-informed and well-trained members. Through orientation, new members will become effective as quickly as possible.

The administrator may participate in the board orientation program alongside new board members in order to build strong relationships. The administrator and the board must work as a team. By establishing rapport and training together, the administrator and the board can build the level of trust and respect which are vital to effective leadership.

Ongoing Board Training

Boards should engage in ongoing professional development and model continuous improvement for the entire school community. Training should cover a variety of topics that are based on a formal needs assessment and support the goals, vision and mission of the school. The administrator should make an effort to train alongside the board whenever possible because the board and administrator must work as a team in order to effectively lead the school. By training together, the board and administrator can build a common vocabulary, an understanding of one another's roles and responsibilities, and a unified focus. Building strong relationships with board members will further establish the administrator as a member of the school's leadership team.

Each year, as a part of the board self-evaluation (see the section titled "Evaluating Board Performance"), the board should conduct a formal needs assessment. A formal needs assessment will identify areas where the board needs additional training or expertise from individual board members. The professional development plans for the board should be driven by the formal needs assessment and should align with the board-specific goals in the strategic plan. For example, if the strategic plan outlines a board goal to develop or review the school policy handbook, then the board should plan for training in policy development and legal requirements.

The board should make resources available for ongoing professional development of the administrator as well. Here again, communication with the board is key. Expectations, goals, and identified weaknesses can be supported through training of the board and administrator alike. Each party should seek training and professional development activities that align with the strategic goals and school improvement plans. Training activities should support individuals in their respective roles, without confusing responsibilities or encouraging any party to overstep boundaries.

Best Practice: If you are new to an existing organization, you should follow the training of new board members, including reviewing the board minutes for the past year.
Resource: An explanation of Colorado Open Meetings and Open Records Laws affecting charter schools can be found at: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/gov/index.htm
Resource: <i>Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook: Chapter 2. Holding Productive Board Meetings:</i> http://www.csi.state.co.us/downloads/bd_trng_hbk.pdf
Resource: More information on Colorado's Sunshine Law is available at: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/gov/pdf/OpenMeetings--LegCouncildef.pdf
Compliance: (Board, not administration) Open Meetings Law; Executive Session requirements; Open Records Law; public posting location.
Compliance: Advance Posting— Be aware of the requirements for advance posting of agendas in public locations; identify the location at the first meeting in each new calendar year.

Organizational Structure

The organizational structure of a school influences how leaders carry out their jobs, as well as how the school's staff members respond to its leaders and tap into their own leadership potential. Whether you talk to scholars of organizational development or to school leaders, you'll quickly find a vigorous debate about the best way to structure an organization. Among high performing schools, however, there tends to be an understanding of the importance of maintaining a school vision that is shared by all stakeholders. A common vision is the foundation for strong leadership, as it enables school leaders to create a school culture that is focused on continuous learning, increased student achievement and an ongoing drive toward excellence.

Although schools may design very different organizational structures based on the size and complexity of their organization, in order to be effective, all models must contain clear reporting lines and a delineation of responsibilities for each role. This includes positions that report directly to the board as well as those that report to an administrator or other staff person. Whenever possible, avoid having more than one person report to the board or an individual report to two different supervisors.

Organizational Charts

According to the *Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook*, "the most recent survey of Colorado charter schools shows that one-quarter of schools had a "shared" governing board comprised of parents, school staff, and community members; a third had a board comprised of parents and community members; 16 percent had a board comprised of parents only; and the remainder had other combinations of parents, community members, and school personnel. The most common model for school governance in Colorado charter schools is the shared board model. In these schools, parent representation on the board is substantial. Frequently, administrators serve on the board as ex officio (non-voting) members. This model gives parents, teachers, and administrators a sense of ownership in the school. Some schools have boards that are largely composed of professionals who are not parents of students in the school. This model is frequently used by educational management organizations."

Schools should choose an organizational structure that reflects their vision, mission, goals and governance philosophy, as well as one that allows the governing board to respond appropriately to the school community. Additionally, the organizational structure should allow the school to develop policies and procedures that comply with applicable laws and regulations governing charter schools. Whatever model is chosen, be sure to consider how the model reflects the composition of the school community as well as the school's ability to address actual student needs.

Resource: For an excellent discussion about designing effective charter school governance structures, please consult Chapter 1 in the U.S. Charter School's publication entitled, *Creating an Effective Charter School Governing Board*. <http://www.uscharterschools.org/gb/governance/contents.htm>

Resource: BoardSource's Web site contains resources and links to articles about effective board structure and function: http://www.boardsource.org/Search.asp?query=&searchln=all&search_category_id=%2C25%2C

Instructional Leader/Chief Administrator

The chief administrator in charter schools may have a myriad of titles: Executive Director, Principal, Head of School, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), or Headmaster. In this publication we've chosen to use the generic term "administrator." The administrator is typically the individual ultimately responsible for everything related to the school's operation. Administrative job structures vary according to the size and needs of the school, and the capabilities of the individuals. If an administrator has a strong business background, but weaker experience with the academic side of a school, the board may choose to hire a Curriculum Director to compensate. This doesn't alleviate the administrator's need to understand the academic aspects of the school;

it simply provides greater expertise to the staff. Conversely, a school may hire an administrator who has strong instructional skills, but little business experience. In this case, a school may need to hire a separate person to serve in the lead business and finance role. Both areas must be managed effectively in order for the school to be successful.

Relevant CSSI Standards:

CSSI Standard 9: Organizational Effectiveness – Comprehensive and Effective Planning

CSSI 9.1a A collaborative process is used to develop and communicate the school’s vision, mission, and goals and guide decision making for improvement.

CSSI 9.1i The school evaluates the degree to which it achieves the goals and objectives for student learning set by the school improvement plan.

CSSI 9.1j The school sustains a commitment to continuous improvement.

CSSI 8.2b Resource allocations are based on analysis of appropriate data and are aligned with school improvement priorities.

Business/Finance Leader

Many schools do, in fact, choose to hire a person with a strong business background to manage the non-instructional aspects of the school’s operation. Having a separate person whose exclusive focus is on the operational issues of the school allows the instructional leader to concentrate on academic concerns. Many schools find this to be an ideal way to divide responsibilities so that administrators do not become overwhelmed, particularly when a new school is working on developing its operational systems and processes. With this structure, it is vitally important to establish clear job descriptions, reporting lines, and communication practices between administrators and between the administration and the board.

Charter schools have numerous operational factors that must be considered. The most important thing the business or finance leader should focus on when making any operational decision is how that decision will impact students and academics. While some aspects of a school’s operations may not directly impact academics, others will. Whenever time, money, or other resources are spent on an operational issue, the business or finance leader should determine whether the issue will impact academics. If it does not, this person should determine whether the issue is necessary for other reasons, such as safety, legal requirements, etc. If the issue neither positively impacts academics nor addresses another necessary function of the school, it may be best to not spend time, money, or other resources addressing the issue.

Many types of operational issues have an impact on academics, such as decisions about the facility and what is necessary to carry out the school’s academic mission. Some issues, such as pick-up and drop-off procedures at the school, have little or no impact on the school’s academic mission, but they must be dealt with for other reasons. When it comes to staffing decisions, most roles are relatively clearly defined as academic or operational roles. Administrative roles are most often a combination of both.

Teachers

The heart and backbone of any school organization are its teachers. Administrators typically have a significant amount of influence in designing the organizational structure within which teachers operate. Whether teachers are organized into subject-based department groups, grade level teams, heterogeneous learning communities, or work in isolation, the chosen structure will have a tremendous impact on the overall school atmosphere and culture. While there is no right or wrong approach to staff organization, administrators should take care to consider both the teachers’ professional needs and the overall goals related to school culture when designing organizational structures.

Resource: A database collection of educational research studies and articles compiled by the U.S. Department of Education can be found at: <http://www.eric.ed.gov/>

Paraprofessionals

The use of paraprofessionals varies widely from school to school. Some schools use paraprofessionals in every classroom to work directly with an individual teacher. Some schools use them to support a grade level or a group of teachers. Some schools use them to support administration, other support staff or non-instructional areas of the school's operation. Regardless, this is one of the few staffing areas that allows for a great deal of flexibility in how the school carries out its mission even after the initial staffing structure is established. As with all paid staff at the school, it is important to establish clear reporting lines and job descriptions for paraprofessionals, so that there is no confusion about the expectations of any particular job.

Classroom paraprofessionals can add a great deal of value to a school. They can alleviate a lot of tasks for a classroom teacher which, in turn, frees that teacher up to spend more time developing and providing differentiated instruction for students. Depending on the school's culture and mission, paraprofessionals can also work one-on-one or in small group settings with students to help focus strategies on individual student's needs. The paraprofessional positions can also provide training and grooming opportunities for future teachers at the school. It's a great way for aspiring teachers and the school to get to know each other and evaluate if the school's culture is a good fit for that person.

Volunteers

Volunteers provide an invaluable resource to charter schools. As with traditional public schools, volunteers can add a great deal to the school community. Charter schools, however, often establish a culture that expects and relies on volunteers to accomplish many things that would otherwise take school resources to accomplish. Depending on the school, there is sometimes a written agreement that parents will volunteer a certain number of hours for the school. Keep in mind that although volunteer hours can be encouraged and communicated as a strong expectation, no student or family can be penalized in any way for not accruing the expected number of hours.

The school needs to have policies and procedures in place to manage volunteer activities. At a minimum, the school needs to provide for the safety of students, staff, and volunteers. Background checks are not required by law on all volunteers in all situations, but the school should have a process for regular volunteers to go through a background check and screening process. There can be a very delicate balance between encouraging more volunteers and requiring those volunteers to go through paperwork and background checks. If a volunteer is working regularly in the building with children, especially when unsupervised, then they need to go through a background check.

Depending on the school culture and the amount of reliance on volunteers, the school may want to either hire a volunteer coordinator, make that part of another staff member's existing duties, or have a volunteer act as the coordinator. Regardless, the administrator will need to be involved in some way in the planning and use of volunteers. Sometimes those decisions will involve determining if volunteers are the best approach to accomplishing a task. Generally, when looking for professional services such as legal, architectural, engineering, or financial services, it's better to pay a professional than to use a volunteer. In such cases, the accountability factor is the main reason to use a professional.

Strategic Planning

For a charter school governing board, the strategic plan is the primary means of implementing and communicating the school's vision. The board updates the strategic plan yearly and communicates its progress regularly with the school's stakeholders. The strategic plan is the key document for the board.

The strategic planning process begins with reviewing the vision and mission statements and then conducting an environmental scan of the school's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (often referred to as a SWOT analysis). Long-term and short-term goals are established and annual strategies identified. An effective strategic plan also has specific dates for completion and an individual board member assigned to each strategy to ensure progress. A strategic plan is typically developed during a board retreat or workshop. One board member reports quarterly to the board on the plan's progress.²⁰

The team should be small and manageable, and include individuals with a variety of backgrounds, personalities and thinking styles. At a minimum, the team should include the board, administrator, and other key people such as a lead teacher or founder.²¹ It's vital that the administrator participate in strategic planning along with the board. It's a good time for the board to hear details about the administrator's vision and, in turn, it's good for the administrator to hear ideas and values from board members.

While it is the responsibility of the administrator to manage the day-to-day operations, the board establishes the school's direction in its long-range strategic plan.²² It is considered a best practice to align the strategic plan with the administrator's evaluation. Yearly administrator goals should be established based on the strategic plan. Further, any performance pay incentive plan used by the school should be tied to the strategic plan. When designing the action steps in the strategic plan, a balance of work between the board and the administrator should be considered, in addition to the appropriate assignment of tasks.

According to *Creating an Effective Charter School Governing Board*, published on the U.S. Charter Schools Web site, the main steps of the strategic planning process can be summarized as follows:

- Gathering and analyzing information: Strengths and weaknesses of the charter school; needs and service expectations of parents and students and other constituent groups; external changes and trends that will impact the charter school in the future.
- Determining the most critical strategic issues, choices, and challenges facing the charter school over the next three to five years.
- Developing a shared vision for the charter school's future: "If we could have the charter school of our dreams and have the impact we most desire, what would we want it to look like in the Year 20XX?" The strategic vision statement provides direction and inspiration for organizational goal setting.
- Affirming the mission or fundamental purpose of the charter school: "Why do we exist?" "What are our core values and educational philosophy?"
- Developing goals: "What are the major results we want to achieve over the next three to five years?" Goals focus on outcomes or results and are qualitative in nature.
- Developing strategies: "What are the methods and approaches the school will use to achieve goals and resolve critical issues?"
- Formulating objectives: The description of projects and activities carried out on an annual basis to implement selected strategies, thereby achieving the goals. Objectives are specific, concrete, measurable statements of what will be done generally within a one-year timeframe.

²⁰ *Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook: Chapter 4 Engaging in Strategic Planning (Process of Strategic Planning)*

²¹ *Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook: Chapter 4 Engaging in Strategic Planning (The Strategic Planning Team)*

²² *Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook: Chapter 4 Engaging in Strategic Planning*

Best Practice: Boards new to the strategic planning process should consider using a facilitator or expert to guide the process. This will increase the likelihood of a successful outcome in a timely manner.
Resource: Information on strategic planning is in the <i>Colorado Charter School Handbook</i> at: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/charterhbkm.htm
Resource: Information on board training modules is at: http://www.boardtrainingmodules.org
Resource: Information on strategic planning is in the <i>Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook</i> at: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/download/Bd_Trng_HBk_051007.pdf
Resource: A PowerPoint presentation on strategic planning is in the <i>Colorado Charter School Handbook</i> at: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/gov/ppt/StrategicPlanning.ppt
Resource: Samples of charter school strategic plans are available at: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/gov/index.htm
Resource: Information and tools on the strategic planning process: http://www.uscharterschools.org/gb/governance/contents.htm

The Colorado League of Charter Schools and the Colorado Department of Education offer resources and training on specific aspects of strategic planning. Please contact either organization for more information. Additionally, charter schools would benefit from examining strategic planning models outside the school realm. Links to additional resources are included below.

Resource: Information on various strategic planning models: http://managementhelp.org/plan_dec/str_plan/models.htm
Resource: Information on the Balanced Scorecard methodology: http://www.balancedscorecard.org/BSCResources/AbouttheBalancedScorecard/tabid/55/Default.aspx
Resource: Information on strategic planning in higher education: http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ERB0410.pdf

Business and Finance

Charter schools are defined and distinguished by their academic programs and accomplishments; ultimately, however, a school's fiscal viability will determine whether it is successful or not. The reality is that the vast majority of charter schools that close their doors do so for financial reasons rather than for problems with the academic program. All 12 charter school closures since charters came into existence have been for financial reasons except for one that was closed for academic reasons.²³

As semi-autonomous entities, charter schools must develop financial management systems that serve the needs of the school and that comply with rules and regulations that apply to publicly funded organizations. The fact that most charter schools are non-profit organizations in addition to being public entities creates some unique challenges for financial management functions. Administrators must have an understanding of funding methods available to charter schools; how to develop a budget and project cash flow; purchasing, accounts payable and payroll processes; and the effect that specific contract provisions and long-range planning (including facility planning) have on the financial health of the school.

Budgeting and Accounting

The board's role is to provide oversight of the school, including finances. This responsibility requires knowledge of business plans, grants, budgeting, accounting, fundraising, financial reporting, safeguarding of assets, and annual audits. Financial stability and security depend on a number of factors for which the board must be proactively involved, including student enrollment, staff retention, and the acquisition of additional funds.

The board should have a finance committee or, at a minimum, a treasurer who is responsible for understanding the school's finances. Depending on the school's situation, the finance committee or treasurer works with the administrator and/or business leader or manager to fulfill his role in understanding the school's finances and making sure that financial activity is properly reported to the board.

While the board is responsible for oversight, the administrator is responsible for executing the school's plan financially. In order to accomplish this, there are four main areas that must be understood: budgeting, financial reporting, accounting system development and management, and the audit process.

Budgeting

The budgeting cycle is continuous and deadlines vary by district, but, generally, a charter school develops its budget for the next fiscal year from February through April or May. The resulting budget begins on July 1 and runs through June 30 of the following year. According to the *Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook*, "the budget plan includes reasonable estimates of revenues and expenditures and a plan for compliance with state and federal accounting and reporting requirements. Figures should reflect those used in the business plan. The charter school also needs to establish proper accounting procedures to safeguard assets and ensure accurate financial reporting."²⁴

Once a budget is approved, the school has spending authority for the total amount of that budget. If revenues are higher than anticipated, due to higher than expected enrollment or other reasons, and the school needs to spend more than it was originally approved to spend, the school must officially amend its budget. The most common time that this is done is after the October 1 count is official.

The key to developing a sound budget is understanding where the school's sources of revenue come from and where the school spends its money. It's just as important to understand the factors that impact the school's

²³ Colorado Charter School blog <http://coloradocharters.blogspot.com/2007/07/charter-school-closures.html>

²⁴ *Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook*, Chapter 9

revenue and expenditures. There is more detail available elsewhere, including the link below, but, in general, the most important revenue factors are enrollment and per pupil revenue (PPR). The most important expenditure items are salaries/benefits and building costs. There are, of course, many other expenditure items, but salaries/benefits and building costs usually make up over 80 percent of the school's expenditures and there is a distinct relationship between the amount a school chooses to spend on its facilities and the amount that it can afford to spend on salaries. Facilities (purchase and maintenance) typically constitute 15 to 25 percent of a charter school budget.

Best Practice: Much more detail on budgeting, as well as best practices, can be found at the Schools of Choice Unit or online at http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/fin/index.htm
Resource: CDE Web site: Colorado Charter School Financial Management Guide: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/fin/pdf/FinanceGuide.pdf
Resource: CDE Public Schools Finance Unit Financial Policies and Procedures Manual: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdefinance/sfFPP.htm
Compliance: Budgets must be amended if a school is going to spend more than originally approved in its budget.
Compliance: Administration cannot spend \$1 more than appropriated by board, even if funds are available and designated.

Financial Reporting

Through their boards, charter schools are responsible for providing timely and accurate financial reporting to various entities. The three main entities that should receive regular financial reports are the charter school's board, the charter school authorizer, and CDE. The charter school board should review financial reports on a monthly basis. The charter school authorizer must receive financial reports as outlined in the charter contract. Typically the authorizer receives monthly or quarterly financial reports. Finally, CDE receives annual audited financial information from each charter school. Again, the process for meeting that requirement should be spelled out in the charter contract.

There are two ways in which financial information is reported. Financial reports for CDE, the school's authorizer, and often other entities that provide financial resources to the school, are regulatory in nature. They are typically in a prescribed format that allows the entity collecting the information to more easily compare a broad range of reporting entities. The information that should be provided to the charter school's board is managerial in nature. It should be timely, accurate, and in a format that allows for the best decisions regarding how the school uses its resources.

Best Practice: Much more detail on financial reporting can be found, as well as best practices, at the Schools of Choice Unit or online at http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/fin/index.htm
Resource: CDE Web site: <i>Colorado Charter School Financial Management Guide</i> : http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/fin/pdf/FinanceGuide.pdf
Resource: CDE Public Schools Finance Unit Financial Policies and Procedures Manual: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdefinance/sfFPP.htm
Compliance: Each charter school must be able to present financial information in the CDE chart of accounts format that is prescribed by the Public Schools Finance Unit at CDE.
Compliance: Each charter contract should outline the financial reporting requirements for the school.

Accounting System Development and Management

To meet its budgeting and financial reporting requirements, a school must have a sound accounting system in place. There is much debate about what type of software system is best for charter schools, though we won't address that here. Each school is in its own, unique position, and charter schools have done well with a variety of different software products. The software must be able to meet the needs of the school and its reporting requirements.

More important than software is the rest of the accounting system. Simply, an accounting system includes a set of policies and procedures that outline how the school will conduct business transactions. A system must handle the following five broad areas, in addition to budgeting and financial reporting (1) cash management; (2) purchasing/accounts payable; (3) accounts receivable; (4) payroll; and (5) fixed assets.

Within each of the five areas above, procedures should be established that allow for no less than three individuals to be involved at some point in a given transaction. This segregation of duties is fundamental to protecting the school from internal theft and/or misdirection of funding priorities. Much more information is available in the links below.

Best Practice: Much more detail on accounting system development can be found, as well as best practices,
Resource: CDE Web site: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/fin/pdf/FinanceGuide.pdf
Resource: CDE Public Schools Finance Unit Financial Policies and Procedures Manual: www.cde.state.co.us/cdefinance/sfFPP.htm
Compliance: Each charter school must be able to present financial information in the CDE chart of accounts format that is prescribed by the Public Schools Finance Unit at CDE.
Compliance: Segregation of duties means that one person cannot be in a position to carry out a transaction from beginning to end.

Audit Process

A charter school is required to have an independent, governmental financial audit, annually. The charter contract outlines how the audit is to be contracted. It may be contracted independently by the charter school or it may be part of the school district audit. Audits will generally involve a review of a school’s financial policies, receipts and purchase orders, among other things. A school’s charter contract will typically specify the type of audit that is required. Regardless, at the end of each fiscal year an audit of the school must be performed and reported to the Public School Finance Unit at CDE.

In addition to being a requirement, an annual audit is necessary to protect the school and to ensure that the financial information the school is using is reliable. An audit also provides an opportunity to learn of areas of weakness in the school’s accounting system and make necessary changes before there is a major problem.

Best Practice: Select an audit firm that has experience with charter schools.
Resource: A sample audit checklist can be found at www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/fin/pdf/FinanceGuide.pdf . Charter school business managers and charter school authorizer finance departments are also good resources.
Resource: Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook: Chapter 9 Providing Financial Security and Oversight (Budget Management): www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/download/Bd_Trng_HBk_051007.pdf
Resource: More information on CDE requirements for financial management and reporting are available at www.cde.state.co.us/cdefinance/sfFPP.htm
Resource: General information on financial management is available at: www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/fin/pdf/FinanceGuide.pdf and www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/fin/pdf/HelpfulSites.pdf
Compliance: Charter schools are responsible for compliance to CDE, but charter schools meet their compliance requirements through their authorizer. The charter contract should specify who contracts for the audit and what timelines need to be met. CDE requirements for school audits are available at www.cde.state.co.us/cdefinance/sfFPP.htm

Relevant CSSI Standards:

CSSI 3.1e Instructional resources (textbooks, supplemental reading, library resources and technology) are sufficient to support the effective delivery of the curriculum.

CSSI 7.1c Leadership ensures that all instructional staff has access to resources related to the content standards for Colorado public schools.

CSSI 7.1e Leadership allocates resources based on identified needs and monitors the use of resources.

CSSI Standard 8: Organizational Effectiveness – Organizational Structure and Resources

CSSI 8.1 Organizational Structure

CSSI 8.1a The school is organized to maximize use of all available resources to support high student and staff performance.

CSSI 8.1b The master class schedule reflects that all students have access to the entire curriculum.

CSSI 8.1c Instructional and non-instructional staff are allocated and organized based upon the learning needs of all students.

CSSI 8.1d The Staff makes efficient use of instructional time to maximize student learning.

CSSI 8.1e Procedures promote vertical and horizontal team planning that is focused on the goals, objectives and strategies in the improvement plan.

CSSI 8.1f The schedule is designed to ensure that all teaching staff can provide quality instructional time.

CSSI 8.2 Organizational Resources

CSSI 8.2a The school has a clearly defined process to provide equitable and consistent use of fiscal resources.

CSSI 8.2b Resource allocations are based on analysis of appropriate data and are aligned with school improvement priorities.

CSSI 8.2c State and federal program resources are allocated and integrated to address student needs identified by the school and/or district.

Finance Committee (or Board Treasurer)

The finance committee or board treasurer is the individual designated by the board to oversee financial and business operations for the charter school. Depending on the size of the charter school, oversight may include conducting quarterly or monthly audits, preparing grant applications, chairing the finance committee, or signing checks. Additionally, the finance committee or board treasurer is typically responsible for selecting and contracting with the auditors as well as reviewing monthly financial reports and making recommendations to accept these reports at board meetings.

Resource: More information on CDE requirements for financial management and reporting are available at www.cde.state.co.us/cdefinance/sfFPP.htm. General information on financial management is available at: www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/fin/pdf/FinanceGuide.pdf, and www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/fin/pdf/HelpfulFinanceSites.pdf

Compliance: Publication of budgets, or amendments to budgets, may not be amended after the year is closed.

Compliance: Administration cannot spend \$1 more than appropriated by board, even if funds are available and designated.

Relevant CSSI Standards:

CSSI 3.1e Instructional resources (textbooks, supplemental reading, library resources and technology) are sufficient to support the effective delivery of the curriculum.

CSSI 7.1c Leadership ensures that all instructional staff has access to resources related to the content standards for Colorado public schools.

CSSI 7.1e Leadership allocates resources based on identified needs and monitors the use of resources.

CSSI Standard 8: Organizational Effectiveness – Organizational Structure and Resources

8.1 Organizational Structure

8.1a The school is organized to maximize use of all available resources to support high student and staff performance.

8.1b The master class schedule reflects that all students have access to the entire curriculum.

8.1c Instructional and non-instructional staff are allocated and organized based upon the learning needs of all students.

- 8.1d The Staff makes efficient use of instructional time to maximize student learning.
- 8.1e Procedures promote vertical and horizontal team planning that is focused on the goals, objectives and strategies in the improvement plan.
- 8.1f The schedule is designed to ensure that all teaching staff can provide quality instructional time.
- 8.2 Organizational Resources
- 8.2a The school has a clearly defined process to provide equitable and consistent use of fiscal resources.
- 8.2b Resource allocations are based on analysis of appropriate data and are aligned with school improvement priorities.
- 8.2c State and federal program resources are allocated and integrated to address student needs identified by the school and/or district.

Grants and Federal Title Funds and Fundraising

Grants and other types of fundraising can be used to pay for startup costs, special projects, technology upgrades, curriculum materials, classroom or program equipment, professional development opportunities, performing arts, athletics, and library materials. Boards commonly maintain one or more committees to handle this work, or they may hire someone to lead fundraising efforts. In addition to generating extra money for specific expenditures, grassroots fundraising efforts can help the school foster valuable relationships with the community. These relationships may provide benefits to the school including monetary and in-kind donations, discounts on goods and services, volunteers, activities for students, marketing, and new ideas.

Grant sources for charter schools are constantly changing. CDE and the Colorado League of Charter Schools keep up-to-date information available on their Web sites. A link is provided below.

Resource: For information on available grants see the CDE Web site at: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/GrantPrograms.htm> and the Colorado League of Charter Schools www.coloradoleague.org

Resource: Grant information is also available at: www.fdncenter.org and [http://www.schoolfundingcenter.info/\(nqq2le2dbiqxlonjep14xhuw\)/index.aspx](http://www.schoolfundingcenter.info/(nqq2le2dbiqxlonjep14xhuw)/index.aspx)

Resource: The National Resource Center has a searchable database at: <http://www.sc.edu/fye/>

Resource: *Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook: Chapter 11, Building Relationships: Board and Community Relationships*, contains information on fundraising as it relates to relationships between people in the school and in the larger community. http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/download/Bd_Trng_HBk_051007.pdf

It is critical to understand that grants and other Federal title funds are supplemental funds. They can be a great source of funding to provide enhancements to regular programming, but avoid over-reliance on these sources of revenue. It's always important to ask the question, "What happens if we don't have this money anymore?" If you always have an answer to that question that won't severely impact the mission of the school, then you're in good shape.

It's also important to remember that each source of revenue usually creates a new reporting requirement. It's the school's responsibility to understand the reporting requirements that come with any source of revenue. It's also the school's responsibility to spend the money in accordance with Federal requirements.

Asset Protection

A good financial system includes policies and procedures for asset protection, or safeguarding of assets. A charter school's largest assets are typically cash, facility, and furniture/equipment, including computer equipment.

Fundamentally, asset protection starts with good accounting procedures that include segregation of duties. This is most critical when protecting cash. There are several examples of sound cash management,

purchasing, and payroll procedures that can be found through the links below. In general, the person who writes a check should not be able to sign the check, and a third person should reconcile the bank accounts.

To protect large physical assets, the school must have adequate insurance, a system of recording and marking assets (including periodic inventory), and policies regarding the use of school assets.

Best Practice: Much more detail on asset protection can be found, as well as best practices, at the Schools of Choice Unit or online at: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/fin/index.htm>

Resource: Financial guidance is available at: www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/fin/pdf/FinanceGuide.pdf

Resource: CDE Public Schools Finance Unit Financial Policies and Procedures Manual is located at: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdefinance/sfPP.htm>

Compliance: Each charter school must be able to present financial information in the CDE chart of accounts format that is prescribed by the Public Schools Finance Unit at CDE.

Compliance: Segregation of duties means that one person cannot be in a position to carry out a transaction from beginning to end.

Purchasing

As a public entity, charter schools have a responsibility to understand and follow accepted purchasing practices. Typically, a charter school will have its own purchasing policies and procedures in place. In some instances a charter school may be subject to its authorizer's purchasing policies and procedures. Regardless, charter schools must understand the policies and procedures that govern its purchasing processes, as well as understand laws that govern public entity purchasing in Colorado.

In general, any purchasing process should be designed to ensure the following:

- Only those persons authorized to make purchases on behalf of the school are allowed to obligate the school.
- Segregation of duties should require that it takes more than one person to carry out a purchasing transaction from beginning to end.
- Orders, receipt of items, and payment for items must all be documented.
- Dollar limits for purchase authorization should be clearly established.
- A process for awarding large contracts should be established.

Typically, purchasing goods and services for an individual school represents a small percentage of overall school expenditures. Payroll and facility rent/lease/bond payments make up most of a school's expenditures. However, from an internal control standpoint, purchasing is, along with handling cash, where an individual school is most vulnerable to financial impropriety.

It is critically important to establish and follow a sound set of purchasing procedures. At the same time, one of the strengths of an individual charter school is its ability to operate efficiently and make decisions quickly. These two concepts do not need to be mutually exclusive and there are simple ways to establish procedures that allow for timely purchases to be made.

One very common way to allow for efficiency in purchasing is to use a school purchasing card or credit card. Not only can this allow for efficiency in ordering and receiving goods, it can also save money. Any type of school purchasing card requires its own set of procedures to maintain appropriate controls. In general, these controls should include:

- Documented instructions on employees' authority and responsibility for using the card
- Limits on transaction amounts and total credit amounts for each card
- Documented instructions for making online purchases with the card

- Documented procedures for issuing and canceling cards, as well as for handling unauthorized purchases
- Segregation of duties to ensure that it takes more than one person to order, pay for, and reconcile card purchases
- Regular reconciliation of purchases with receipts

As with all other business functions, the keys to any purchasing program are documentation, segregation of duties, and regular reconciliation.

Best Practice: More detail on purchasing can be found, as well as best practices, at the Schools of Choice Unit Web site or online at: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/fin/index.htm>

Resource: Consult with your local school district finance office for information about local practices and requirements.

Resource: The Colorado Charter School Financial Management Guide is located at: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/fin/pdf/FinanceGuide.pdf>

Resource: CDE Public Schools Finance Unit Financial Policies and Procedures Manual www.cde.state.co.us/cdefinance/sfFPP.htm

Compliance: Each charter school must have purchasing policies and procedures. The school may follow its authorizer’s policies and procedures or request a waiver and substitute its own.

Compliance: For large expenditures, charter schools must be aware of public bidding requirements.

Tax Status

Charter schools are public schools by law and, therefore, are tax exempt. Charter schools also are allowed to form as non-profit organizations, which most do. Filing Articles of Incorporation as a non-profit organization is all that is required to obtain a separate tax identification number and establish the school as a non-profit corporation.

In addition, most charter schools take the additional step of filing Form 1023 with the Internal Revenue Service to apply for a specific designation as a 501(c)(3) organization. This refers to a specific section of the Internal Revenue Code. Receiving an official designation as a 501(c)(3) organization does not change the tax-exempt status of the charter school. It merely clarifies it for some entities, most notably charitable organizations and potential funders who require official 501(c)(3) documentation in order to give grants. Official recognition also may require the charter school to file informational tax returns (Form 990) annually.

Best Practice: There is not necessarily a best practice when it comes to choosing whether or not to file for 501(c)(3) designation. This is an important decision that should be made in consultation with the school’s attorney. Information can be found at: www.irs.gov and in the charter school finance guide at: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/fin/pdf/FinanceGuide.pdf>

Compliance: Understand filing requirements for Form 990.

Facilities Expense

Next to salaries, facilities are by far the largest expense for any charter school. Planning for short-term and long-term needs is a difficult, but critical task. There are resources, linked below, that give further guidance on what to consider when planning for facilities.

From a financial standpoint, a charter school will typically spend from 15 to 25 percent of its annual operating budget on facilities. When budgeting, a school should always fully understand and carefully consider the relationship between facilities costs and salaries.

Resource:The *Colorado Charter School Handbook* can be found at:

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/charterhbkm.htm>

Resource: The Charter School Guidebook can be found at:

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/index.htm>

Resource: *Colorado Charter School's Financial Management Guide* can be accessed at:

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/fin/pdf/FinanceGuide.pdf>

Resource: Financial policies and procedures can be found on the following page of the CDE Web site:

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdefinance/sfFPP.htm>

Human Resources

Excellent teaching and administration must be central to the mission of any successful school. It is the people who are charged with implementing your programs and who interact with students, parents and other community members on a daily basis that will largely determine your school's success. Indeed, your staff is by far your most important asset. Human resource (HR) policies and practices can go a long way toward facilitating a collegial and respectful environment where ideas are encouraged and staff has a sense of ownership for the success of the school. Administrators should work toward encouraging this type of environment since the positive attitudes fostered in the process certainly filter down to the students.

By their nature, most charter schools have significantly more autonomy in their employment practices than traditional public schools, but administrators must abide by employment and education law practices. Many resources—both online and in hard copy—exist to guide schools in creating and implementing their HR policies and practices. The information that follows is intended to give a brief overview of some salient topics and to provide general guidance. Specific questions should always be directed to an employment attorney or to your authorizer.

Hiring Protocols

Administrators and other school leaders face both unique opportunities and challenges in hiring their teachers. In Colorado, charters typically enjoy increased freedom over who to hire and who to retain as teachers; the ability to select teachers with a commitment to a common vision, mission, and philosophy without being constrained by seniority; and the ability to set salaries and working conditions based on the needs of students.

Charter schools use a variety of different protocols for hiring teachers and staff. For some, the board of directors takes responsibility for hiring and termination of all staff. Others leave the hiring activity and decision making up to the administrator or a supervising staff member. Some schools create hiring teams that comprise various stakeholders such as the administrator, fellow teachers and parents and/or board members. As with so many aspects of charter school operation, the school should design hiring protocols based on its own needs and capacities. Networking with other charter schools that have a similar size, demographic and/or educational program can be helpful in terms of learning what systems work well for different types of schools.

Regardless of what specific structures and procedures are established for hiring staff, all schools should adopt a basic hiring policy that can be published on the school's Web site, policy handbook and employee handbook. This policy should include a description of the process by which new staff will be selected and terminated, who will make these decisions, a statement of non-discrimination, and the process by which essential qualifications or selection criteria will be determined.

Public Notice of Opening

To ensure equal opportunity for open positions and eliminate any concerns of discrimination, it is important that job opportunities be posted in a central area in a school and made available to the public (this can be on the school's Web site). A failure to post and/or advertise open positions can lead to criticism that there was not a fair and consistent effort to find the best person for a specific position. The job posting and advertising should include a summary of the job description including the key elements of job title, essential functions, required experience and/or education and a description of primary job duties. The job posting should also specify where resumes and/or applications should be forwarded and indicate a closing date for accepting applications if a specific deadline for the interviewing and hiring process has been established.²⁵

²⁵ Colorado Department of Education, *Human Resources Employment Manual*

Any and all job advertising or posting should include the terms “Equal Opportunity Employer” to reiterate that a school is non-discriminatory and follows the guidelines established by the EEOC.²⁶

Resource: The EEOC Web site is located at: <http://www.eeoc.gov/>

The Interview Process

The interview process is your opportunity to evaluate candidates along two dimensions: skills and fit. It is important for you to determine whether a candidate possesses the necessary skills to be a productive member of your staff, but also whether the candidate will fit into your school and its unique culture and environment. Make sure your interview team includes an individual who is currently carrying out the same or similar tasks as the person being considered for the position. The following is a suggested list of activities to guide the interview process.

- Develop a protocol for conducting interviews and a process for checking references. Ensure that interviewers are aware of the recruitment and selection process and your school’s guidelines for conducting interviews and maintaining confidentiality.
- An ideal interview team will include a person who is working in the same department, grade level or area that you are interviewing for, the supervisor of the position and an expert on either the school or the subject matter. Make sure all the members of the team have seen the interview questions and understand the hiring process. It’s a good idea to be consistent with your interview questions from candidate to candidate.
- Develop a list of interview questions and a rubric containing objective criteria to serve as checklists. This ensures consistency between interviewers.
- You may choose to pre-screen candidates with a telephone interview prior to having them visit the school. During this conversation, you can discover whether the candidate has the knowledge and experience you need, if he expects a salary that is out of your league, or doesn’t agree with your instructional philosophies.
- The interviews should be scheduled at mutually convenient times and should begin on time. If the interview will be lengthy, be sure to allow for short breaks during the interview or between candidates if you are talking with multiple people.
- Let your candidate know the process for hiring and your timeframe for making a decision.
- Process for final notification.

For privacy and legal reasons, interview questions to avoid include the following:

- Are you a U.S. citizen? (adversely impacts national origin)
- Do you have a visual, speech, or hearing disability?
- Are you planning to have a family? When?
- Have you ever filed a workers’ compensation claim?
- How many days of work did you miss last year due to illness?
- In what off-the-job activities do you participate?
- Do you have children? How old are they?
- What year did you graduate from high school? (reveals age)

Resource: Sample interview questions can be found on the CDE Web site at: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/adm/index.htm>

²⁶ Colorado Department of Education, *Human Resources Employment Manual*

Background Checks

Before employing any person, a Colorado public school must conduct a background inquiry with the Colorado Department of Education pursuant to Section 22-32-109.7(1), Colorado Revised Statutes. Please know that the information CDE provides to a public school in response to its inquiry is considered confidential and that penalties exist for unauthorized disclosure and inappropriate use of this information.

Resource: CDE Web site, HR Employment Manual:

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/download/HREmploymentManual.pdf>

Additionally, based on the Colorado law requiring fingerprinting and criminal background checks for all school employees, it is important to notify any interviewee of this requirement and a drug screening requirement if applicable. It is recommended that no person be allowed to start employment until the necessary background checks are complete. Generally, you should allow four to six weeks for this process. Background checks are done through the Colorado Bureau of Investigation (CBI). For more information, contact the teacher licensure unit at the Colorado Department of Education at 303-866-6628.

Resource: CDE Web site, HR Employment Manual:

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/download/HREmploymentManual.pdf>

Teacher and Paraprofessional Qualifications

Because a well-prepared teacher is vitally important to a child's education, ensuring high-quality teachers for all students is a key tenet of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Research provides a clear connection between student achievement and teacher quality. With this in mind, NCLB requires that all core content teachers be highly qualified (HQ) in their assignment. While this requirement does not guarantee an effective teacher in every classroom, it does set a common expectation for teacher knowledge.²⁷

In accordance with Sec. 1119 of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), Colorado defines "Highly Qualified" (HQ) Teachers as teachers that are fully licensed, hold at least a Bachelor's degree, and are able to demonstrate subject matter competency in all core academic areas in which they are assigned. Charter schools may be waived from the licensure requirement by the State Board of Education; however, they must still meet the degree and subject matter competency requirements. The licensing requirement cannot be waived for Special Education teachers in charter schools.

All K-12 core content teachers must be HQ. This means that regular and special education teachers that are the primary provider of instruction must be HQ in their particular content area(s), including:

- English, reading or language arts
- Mathematics
- Science
- Foreign languages
- Social studies (civics, government, history, geography, economics)
- The arts (visual arts, drama, music)

Resource: For additional information on HQ and specific requirements per discipline as well as avenues for becoming HQ, see CDE Web site on NCLB: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/FedPrograms/tii/index.asp>

Relevant CSSI Standard:

CSSI 6.1a Teachers who demonstrate the content knowledge and instructional skills necessary to challenge and motivate students to high levels of learning are recruited and supported through professional development.

²⁷ Colorado Department of Education, *Highly Qualified Teachers According To NCLB* Brochure

Job Descriptions and Employee Contracts

Your first step in determining and filling your staffing needs is to develop well thought out job descriptions for each position in your school. Typically, these job descriptions are then used when advertising open positions, determining compensation, and as a basis for performance reviews. Once hired, employee contracts specify the terms of employment and are essential for ensuring a clear understanding of job responsibilities, employment terms, compensation, and other benefits.

Job Descriptions

Each school should develop job descriptions for each specific position category, such as elementary teacher, secondary teacher, principal, librarian, office manager, business manager, counselor, etc. In addition to detailing the specific job responsibilities, the job description also becomes the basis for evaluation criteria. Each job description should include the following information:

- Primary responsibilities
- Reporting structure
- Job location
- Starting salary
- Hours/week
- Education at highest level
- Degree or training, licenses, certificates needed for the position
- Years of experience
- Position start date
- Pay periods
- Benefits include: (such as) 401k, clothing/uniform allowance, dental insurance, health insurance, holidays, sick leave, vacation

Sample job descriptions should be edited to match the requirements of each job category for the specific school.

Resource: Job Description samples can be found on the CDE Web site at:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/adm/index.htm>

Employment Agreements

Employees must sign an employment agreement upon hiring on at the school. Employment agreements typically including the following information:

- Position title and responsibilities as defined by the job description
- Effective dates and work year
- Compensation
- Reporting structure
- Evaluation schedule
- Termination of contract
- At will employment statement
- Signatures

Colorado is an “at-will” employment state, which means that unless an employee has a contract that guarantees a specific period of employment, both s/he and the employer have the right to terminate the employment relationship at any time for any reason or no reason.

Resource: Sample employment contracts can be found on the CDE Web site:

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/adm/index.htm>

Resource: The CDE Web site contains an HR Employment Manual, which can be found at:

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/download/HREmploymentManual.pdf>

Resource: *Personnel Policies and Practices: Understanding Employment Law*, published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation; http://www.uscharterschools.org/gb/personnel/personnel_summary.pdf

Independent Contractor Agreements

If a business hires an individual as an independent contractor, the independent contractor must meet the definition of the two key principles of independent contracting:

- Free from the business' control and direction over how the service is performed
- Customarily engaged in an independent trade, occupation, profession, or business related to the service being performed

A written contract may be helpful in proving independent contractor status and is always helpful in defining the work relationship. However, the actual facts of the work relationship are the most important evidence. If the actual facts differ from what the written contract says, the facts will control.

Colorado law requires all public entities (including charter schools) to include numerous certifications and covenants in all of their personal services contracts with independent contractors regarding the immigration status of the independent contractor's employees and subcontractors. See C.R.S. 8-17.5-102. A form of certification and covenants designed to comply with all of these requirements is provided in the resource box below. In addition, if the personal services contractor is an individual or a sole proprietorship (i.e., not a corporation or other form of legal entity), the contractor must sign an affidavit verifying immigration status. C.R.S. 24-76.5-103.

Resource: The CDE Web site contains an HR Employment Manual, which can be found at:

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/download/HREmploymentManual.pdf>

Resource: Independent Contractor Certification and Covenant form:

http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/hr/pdf/hr_contractor_certification2.pdf

Resource: Sample policies and agreements can be found on the CDE Web site at:

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/adm/index.htm>

Staff Handbook and Policies

A comprehensive staff handbook should not only capture all the relevant information a new employee needs to function in the school but also provide a resource for veteran employees to look up policies and other information. Having the employee sign a form stating he has received and read the employee handbook further validates at-will employment and adherence to policies. Information may be organized into categories such as the following:

- School history, mission statement, goals, and campus information
- Curriculum, student placement, homework guidelines, special education, and gifted education
- Procedures for topics such as discipline, emergency procedures, grading policy, attendance procedures and make-up time, dress code, field trips, homework and grading online, student organizations, overtime, press releases, substitute teachers, volunteers, and holiday decorations
- Staff-related information such as benefits, communications process, expectations, extracurricular opportunities, staff ethics, teacher conferences, part-time teachers, and professional development
- Student-related information such as counseling, discipline, plagiarism, and privacy
- General staff duties and expectations for extra duties outside of the classroom
- Description of the school calendar, holidays, vacation policies, school hours of operation

- Communication policies and practices within the school and between the school and parents/community members
- Policies and procedures for addressing grievances, harassment, maintaining a drug-free workplace, supervision of students, reporting suspected abuse, restraint, employee relations and student discipline

Best Practice: When they are first hired, have employees sign a statement to the effect that they have received a copy of the handbook and understand their obligation to carry out the expectations and policies of the school.

Best Practice: Staff handbooks and policies should be reviewed by the school’s legal counsel.

Resource: Sample handbooks can be found on the CDE Web site at:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/adm/index.htm>

Human Resource Records

Adequate record retention is a key responsibility for any HR department. Make certain that the school not only retains the proper records but that they are maintained in a fireproof safe and are secure enough to maintain confidentiality. The HR office must retain the following records:

- Job advertisements and postings: Pursuant to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA), and Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), job advertisements and internal postings should be retained for a minimum of one year.
- Resumes and applications: The ADA, Rehabilitation Act, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, and ADEA require employers to keep all resumes and job applications on file for one year. Because the ADEA further stipulates a two-year retention period for paperwork for individuals over the age of 40 (something that may be difficult to determine and is, of course, illegal to ask), consider making it a school policy to hold onto all resumes and applications for that long.
- Employment action records: Records relating to promotions, demotions, transfers, and terminations must be retained for one year according to the ADA, ADEA, and Title VII. While training records, in general, should also be kept on file for one year, those related to safety and health must be retained for three years in accordance with the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA).
- Wage and hour records: The FLSA and Equal Pay Act oblige a school to keep basic employment and earnings records for two years and payroll records for three years.

Additional specific information on record retention related to the following areas is available through the CDE Human Resources Handbook.

- Personnel information including time worked and salary
- Timekeeping
- Tax records
- Retirement and pension records
- Leave records
- I-9 forms
- Job-related-illness and injury records

Resource: The CDE Web site contains an HR Employment Manual, which can be found at:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/download/HREmploymentManual.pdf>

Resource: Personnel policies and data on charter schools:
<http://www.edexcellence.net/issues/results.cfm?withall=personnel+policies>

Documenting the Immigration Status of Employees

Colorado law imposes obligations on employers to verify the immigration status of their employees that extend beyond the obligations imposed by federal law. Colorado law (C.R.S. 8-2-122) imposes the following additional requirements:

- Within 20 days after hiring each new employee, an authorized representative of the employer must sign an affirmation that the employer has complied with all of the immigration laws.
- The employer must retain legible copies of both the affirmation and the documents required by federal law to verify immigration status. This means that the employer must retain the Form I-9 for the employee AND a copy of the documents the employer examines in the course of completing the Form I-9. The Division of Labor and Employment may conduct random audits of employer files for compliance with this document retention law.
- To comply with the affirmation requirement it is recommend that employers download the “Affirmation of Legal Work Status” form from the Division of Labor and Employment Web site. This form is available online (see Resource box below).

Resource: Affirmation of Legal Work Status form can be found at:
<http://www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/CDLE-LaborLaws/CDLE/1248095356391>

Teacher Pay Systems

Few topics in education provoke more heated debate and discussion than teacher pay systems. As they relate to charter schools, a variety of methods and systems are used to compensate teachers for the work they do. In the contracts with their authorizers, charter schools are typically granted a waiver that allows for flexibility in designing their employee pay systems. Even so, and despite the fact that most charter school teachers are not teachers’ union members, the method of compensating teachers according to their level of education and years of experience is still a common method for determining base pay levels. Many charter schools add a provision for performance pay into their compensation systems, which can reward teachers for student achievement, professional accomplishments, additional coursework taken, or evaluation results.

Regardless of the specific type of pay system that is chosen, the administrator (or business/finance leader) should ensure that the school’s process for determining salaries and bonuses is well understood by the teaching staff. Clear communication and transparency about how compensation is determined will often pave the way for a trusting relationship between teachers and administrators (and the board) on this issue. Conversely, if this process is handled inconsistently and without clear communication between all parties, it tends to be the one that contributes rapidly and significantly to problems with staff morale, teacher turnover and, ultimately, school culture. This is not to say that schools need to publish salary scales or systems, but regardless of the system employed by any given school, clear communication about how the system works is essential to creating a trusting work environment.

Resource: Example pay systems from other schools can be found on the CDE Web site at:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/adm/index.htm>

Merit Pay / Bonus Plans

The concept of merit pay has gained acceptance within general public education as a means by which an employer may reward high performing staff. Given the attention paid among charters to issues of accountability, merit pay programs frequently strike a favorable note among charter organizers – if the school and the students are to be judged on “merit” criteria, why not employees? If you choose to use merit pay make sure that there is an objective standard with quantifiable measures which are used to evaluate every employee (both full- and part-time). The measures you select should have applicability for every position.

Bonuses are a popular method of providing extra compensation to charter school teachers. They offer a flexible and direct way to reward teachers for specific tasks, taking on additional responsibilities, or for

general performance results. Many schools set aside a specific percentage of their budget for bonuses, and then pay them according to individual performance factors. From an operational perspective, bonus pools can be flexible and adjusted as needed according to the school's overall budget from year to year.

Benefits

This section will only apply to state and federal benefits. It will only address public benefits including Public Employees Retirement Act (PERA), Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA), Worker's Compensation and Unemployment Insurance.

Other benefits, such as 401(k) programs, 403(b) programs, Cafeteria Plans, Section 125 programs, health insurance, dental insurance, optical insurance and disability insurance are provided through private companies and may or may not be offered through your charter school. It is important when obtaining information about any benefit program that you obtain multiple bids and references from other businesses/schools that have used their services.

Public Employees' Retirement Association

According to its Web site, The Colorado Public Employees' Retirement Association (PERA) provides retirement and other benefits to the employees of more than 400 government agencies and public entities in the state of Colorado. PERA is the 23rd largest public pension plan in the United States. Established by state law in 1931, PERA operates by authority of the Colorado General Assembly and is administered under Title 24, Article 51 of the Colorado Revised Statutes. In accordance with its duty to administer PERA, the Board of Trustees has the authority to adopt and revise Rules in accordance with state statutes.

Its membership includes employees of the Colorado state government, most teachers in the state, many university and college employees, judges, many employees of cities and towns, state troopers, and the employees of a number of other public entities. More information on the PERA membership is available on the Colorado PERA Members and Benefit Recipients by County fact sheet. PERA is a substitute for Social Security for most of these public employees. Benefits are pre-funded, which means while a member is working, he is required to contribute a fixed percentage of his salary to the retirement trust funds.

Resource: Public Employees' Retirement Association (PERA) Benefits Web site: www.copera.org

Family Medical Leave Act

The FMLA provides a means for employees to balance their work and family responsibilities by taking unpaid leave for certain reasons. The Act is intended to promote the stability and economic security of families as well as the nation's interest in preserving the integrity of families. The law covers all public agencies (state and local governments) and local education agencies (schools, whether public or private).

To be eligible for FMLA leave, an individual must (1) be employed by a covered employer and work at a worksite within 75 miles of which that employer employs at least 50 people; (2) have worked at least 12 months (which do not have to be consecutive) for the employer; and (3) have worked at least 1,250 hours during the 12 months immediately before the date FMLA leave begins.

Resource: CDE Web site, HR Employment Manual:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/download/HREmploymentManual.pdf>

Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA)

The Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA) gives workers and their families who lose their health benefits the right to choose to continue group health benefits provided by their group health plan for limited periods of time under certain circumstances such as voluntary or involuntary job loss, reduction in the hours worked, transition between jobs, death, divorce, and other life events.

COBRA generally requires that group health plans sponsored by employers with 20 or more employees in the prior year offer employees and their families the opportunity for a temporary extension of health coverage (called continuation coverage) in certain instances where coverage under the plan would otherwise end.

COBRA defines a group health plan as any plan of, or contributed by, an employer to employees, either directly or through insurance, reimbursement, or some other means. Group health plans may include hospitalization, surgical, medical, dental, and vision plans as well as the direct treatment at an on-site facility and self-funded plans. Life insurance and disability benefit plans are not covered by COBRA.

Resource: U.S. Department of Labor COBRA Website: <http://www.dol.gov/dol/topic/health-plans/cobra.htm>

Resource: CDE Web site, HR Employment Manual:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/download/HREmploymentManual.pdf>

Worker's Compensation

The purpose of worker's compensation is to speedily and justly compensate employees for injuries incurred during the performance of their jobs and to insure employers against liability for injuries to their employees. Workers' compensation is based on a mutual agreement between the employer and the employee and is called the "exclusive remedy" provision of the Workers' Compensation Act. This serves two basic purposes.

- To promptly provide employees with reasonable and necessary medical treatment and partial wage replacement while the employee recovers from the effects of a work-related injury or occupational disease. In the case of a fatality, to provide death benefits to dependent survivors.
- To provide employers with predictable costs for work-related injuries and illnesses.

Resource: CDE Web site, HR Employment Manual:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/download/HREmploymentManual.pdf>

Unemployment Insurance

Colorado's Employment Security Program (CESP) includes job service and unemployment insurance. Unemployment insurance acts as an income stabilizer for both the worker and the economy. Unemployment insurance is for workers who lose their job through no fault of their own. It is not a "handout," "welfare assistance," "rocking chair money," or a form of social security. Unemployment insurance is paid to a claimant who meets the terms and conditions of the Colorado Employment Security Act (CESA).

Resource: Colorado Employment Security Act:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/artemis/lbe5/lbe55em72006internet.pdf>

Resource: CDE Web site, HR Employment Manual:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/download/HREmploymentManual.pdf>

Volunteers

Parent volunteers can be an essential resource in creating and sustaining a charter school. Volunteers can fill many roles, including helping in the following areas: elementary classrooms, fund development and grant writing, recess supervision, lunch program, tutoring, making copies, committee work such as Accountability, hiring, curriculum, community relations, or serving on the Board of Directors.

Teachers are not to send volunteers away to work on a one-to-one basis alone with a student, unless that volunteer has been fingerprinted and the fingerprints are on file. If one-to-one work by a volunteer is needed, request that the volunteer go through the fingerprinting process. If a volunteer will be driving students for any school-related event such as a field trip, that volunteer must complete a student transportation form that provides vehicle registration and insurance information.

Substitute Plan

Teachers are at all times to maintain a folder for use by a substitute teacher if necessary. It is important to get the folder to the front office immediately at the beginning of the new school year, but in all cases, no later than the first professional day in September. It will include the following:

- Weekly schedule.
- Daily schedule, which includes attendance procedure (with class list), the Pledge of Allegiance, general classroom procedures, etc.
- Lesson Plans.
- Homework.
- Indication of special needs (health or behavior issues with certain students), and strategies to use in case a health or behavior issue arises.

Legal Issues

Informal Pathways to Resolve Problems

Conflicts are inevitable in any organization, and there tends to be a direct correlation between the magnitude of a conflict and the time that lapses before it is addressed. In other words, problems do not go away if one ignores them; they get bigger. Therefore, it is important for the administrator to establish an environment in which conflicts are addressed head-on as quickly as possible. An effective conflict resolution policy encourages the parties to come together informally early on in an attempt to resolve the matter informally prior to filing any formal grievance. Thus, if a person comes to the administrator with a complaint about a school employee (e.g., a parent complaining about his child's teacher, or an employee complaining about a colleague), the first thing the administrator should ask is: "Have you talked to them directly about this situation?" It is surprising how often people complain to administrators without ever having made the slightest effort to address the issue with the person with whom they have a problem. If the complaining party has not talked to the allegedly offending employee, the administrator should advise them to go speak to the employee directly and to come back only if their efforts to resolve the problem are unsuccessful. Many, perhaps most, grievances can be resolved simply by getting the parties involved to speak with one another.

If the complaining party has addressed their grievance directly with the employee involved and the matter has not been resolved, only then should the administrator step in and attempt to mediate the situation informally. Often this places the administrator in a difficult situation. The administrator wants to help resolve the problem if he can, but he must be very careful not to undercut his staff, particularly in dealing with parent-teacher conflicts. If the administrator is not able to bring the parties together without undercutting staff, the only option might be to advise the complaining party to submit a formal grievance to the governing board.

Complaints

Every charter school should have a clearly articulated complaint policy. In fact, the CSI and most districts include a provision in their charter contracts requiring charter schools to develop and publish a formal complaint policy. A sound complaint policy directs the complaining party to attempt to resolve the matter informally as discussed above. The policy will then provide directions for submitting a complaint to the board of directors and/or a complaint submission form in the event informal attempts to resolve the complaint are not successful.

In dealing with parent, student and employee complaints, the governing board should work to resolve legitimate problems. At the same time the board must be very careful not to undermine the authority of the school's administration. Chaos will ensue if, for example, parents learn that every time they disagree with their child's teacher or the administrator, all they have to do is file a complaint, and the board will substitute its judgment for the staff member's judgment. Dealing with complaining parents is particularly difficult, and the situation often creates an atmosphere of urgency, but the governing board must always be guided by considerations of its proper role. The board does not run the day-to-day affairs of the school, and when the matter involves only a disagreement over a matter of judgment, the board should almost always back its administrator, even if individual members of the board would have handled the situation differently. If the board does not respect its administrator's authority, it has no one to blame but itself when no one else does.

That said, there may be situations where the board believes the administrator has engaged in misconduct or made a grievous error. In those situations the board should not hesitate to implement corrective action. The line between differences of opinion on matters of judgment and misconduct/grievous error may sometimes be blurry. In each case, however, the governing board should give deference (but not undue deference) to its administrator's decisions.

Student/Parent

The school's Student/Parent Handbook should contain a clearly articulated complaint policy. The charter school section of the CDE's Web site has examples of well written policies. Schools should provide each family with a copy of the discipline policies and code of conduct at the beginning of each school year.

Resource: The charter school section of CDE's Web site is located at:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/index.htm>

Employee

The school's Employee Handbook should also have a clearly articulated complaint policy. The CDE Web site also has examples of well-written employee complaint policies. Administrators should exercise caution to ensure that employee complaint policies do not create inadvertent employment contracts that undermine the school's at-will employment policies. Administrators should have legal counsel review their employee manuals to ensure that at-will employment is preserved.

There is an important exception to the rule that early informal resolution of employee complaints is usually best, and that has to do with the area of sexual harassment. The school should make clear in its employee manual and elsewhere that sexual harassment will not be tolerated, and that if employees believe they have been the victims of sexual harassment they must immediately file a formal complaint. Under federal law it is a defense to liability on a claim of sexual harassment that the employer had such a policy in place and the employee failed to utilize it. Therefore, a "zero tolerance" sexual harassment policy and a clearly articulated sexual harassment complaint policy go a long way toward protecting the school from liability on sexual harassment claims.

Hearings

If a complaint cannot be resolved informally, the governing board should hold a hearing. The complexity of the hearing and the amount of time devoted to it will be a function of the gravity of the complaint. A hearing on a simple disagreement between a parent and the child's teacher might involve nothing more than letting the parent have their say at a board meeting. Caution: Hearings in which individual students will be discussed should be held in executive session. Conversely, if there is an allegation of serious malfeasance, the board might wish to appoint a committee to investigate the matter and report its finding at a later hearing in which the accused party will have an opportunity to defend himself. Legal counsel should be consulted if there is doubt about how a particular hearing should be conducted.

Expulsion and Suspension

Under Colorado law, expulsions and suspensions are governed by two statutes. C.R.S.22-33-106 sets forth the grounds for which a student may be expelled or suspended. It is important to understand that these are the ONLY grounds for lawfully expelling or suspending a student. If the student's conduct does not fall within one of these categories, the student may not be expelled or suspended. C.R.S.22-33-105 sets forth the procedure for expulsion and suspension.

Practice varies among Colorado charter authorizers concerning the authority to expel. Some authorizers delegate expulsion authority down to the charter school governing board. Other authorizers reserve the power to expel students themselves. Prior to initiating expulsion procedures, the administrator should consult the charter contract to determine where the expulsion authority lies and from which schools an expelled student will be barred. Expulsion law can be complex and expulsion hearings can be difficult. It is highly recommended that administrators consult legal counsel prior to commencing any expulsion proceeding.

Truancy

Colorado law defines a habitually truant student as any student between the ages of six and sixteen who has more than four unexcused absences in a month or more than ten unexcused absences in a school year.

C.R.S.22-33-107(3)(a). Each school district has a policy regarding habitually truant students, and unless that policy has been waived (which is not usually the case), when faced with a truancy situation the administrator's first step should be to review the applicable truancy policy. Most policies require at a minimum that parents be notified by telephone each time there is an unexcused absence. If the administrator determines that a student is at risk for habitual truancy, he must develop a remedial attendance plan and make every reasonable effort to meet with the child's parents to review the reason for the truancy. Colorado law also requires each school annually to notify parents of their obligations under the compulsory attendance statutes. In extreme cases where informal efforts to resolve truancy issues have failed, it may become necessary to initiate a judicial truancy action, in which case legal counsel should be consulted.

Resource: An excellent overview of truancy issues in Colorado is set forth at:
http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/adm/pdf/TruancyCaseReview_RubioDawn.pdf

Academics

Not only is a school's identity largely defined by its academic program, it is the critical component by which the school's success will be measured within the context of student achievement. Although the curricula in charters can vary widely, all public schools must meet or exceed Colorado state standards in core content areas, and student achievement must satisfy state and federal requirements.

Regardless of a school's focus or typology, these critical components comprise a successful academic program. In order to achieve its academic goals, a school must:

- Certify that it has a guaranteed viable curriculum that is consistently executed.
- Protect instructional time.
- Establish assessments that measure student progress in an accurate and comprehensive way.
- Strive to continually improve the quality of instruction.
- Create efficient and high-quality support systems that adapt to the school's changing needs over time.

If these five components are handled in an excellent way, measurable student achievement will be high and stakeholder satisfaction will follow suit.

Academic Achievement

Academic achievement is the single most important concern a school has. According to Marzano, Pickering & Pollack, a guaranteed and viable curriculum (GVC) is the school level factor with the greatest impact on student achievement.²⁸ This is true regardless of a school's philosophy, focus, size, geographic location or student body demographic. Research also confirms that a rigorous curriculum (one that has high expectations for student achievement at each grade level) is associated with greater gains in achievement, even for those in the lowest quartiles (Education Trust, 2005).²⁹

Standards and Alignments

Colorado Model Content Standards specify what students should know and be able to do in each subject area at each grade level. The Colorado standards can be found on the CDE Web site (link given in the Resource Box below). Within each of the links available on the Web site, each individual standard is explained and outlined by grade. Curriculum that is aligned to state standards will further specify exactly how students demonstrate their knowledge and skills. Research confirms that students who have access to a common core curriculum (one that has the same outcome expectations for all students and that specifies essential skills and knowledge they are expected to attain), are better prepared for college and the workforce.³⁰

The job of the school administrator is to lead the staff in the process of curriculum definition/development and alignment to standards across all levels and programs within the school. A step-by-step process for addressing this process can be found in the CSSI Resource Handbook.

Relevant CSSI Standard:

CSSI 1.1b. School leadership initiates and facilitates articulation of curriculum standards across all levels and programs within the school.

²⁸ Marzano, R., Pickering, D., & Pollack, J. (2003). *Classroom Instruction that Works*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

²⁹ Education Trust (2005). *Getting the job done: How Some High Schools are Boosting Student Achievement*. www2.edtrust.org/EdTrust/Press+Room/High+School+2005.htm

³⁰ Barth, P. (Ed.). (2003, Winter). A New Core Curriculum for All: Aiming High for Other People's Children. *Thinking K-16*, 7(1), 1-32. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED476116).

Resource: Colorado standards can be found at: http://www.cde.state.co.us/index_stnd-access.htm

Resource: CSSI's Resource Handbook can be found at:
http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/download/CSSI_Handbook_Final.pdf

Resource: More about standards and assessments can be found at: http://www.cde.state.co.us/index_stnd-access.htm and http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeassess/documents/OSA/k12_standards.html

Relevant CSSI Standards:

CSSI 1.1a The curriculum is aligned with the Colorado Model Content Standards, grade level expectations, and assessment frameworks.

CSSI 2.1f Proficiency standards and performance level descriptions are clearly communicated, evident in classrooms and observable in student work.

CSSI 2.1g Samples of student work are analyzed to obtain information on student learning, identify achievement and curricular gaps, and to refine instruction.

Curriculum Selection and Improvement

The process for selecting curriculum will vary by school according to its philosophy, programs and needs; however, regardless of that variability, the process should include criteria for ensuring that the curriculum is research-based, proven to be effective with the school's target population, and aligned with state standards. Additionally, the curriculum should include assessments that allow student progress to be measured in a concrete, quantifiable way. Assessments include those that are generated internally as well as those that originate externally.

The curriculum improvement process is one that takes place over time by analyzing data obtained from both internal and external assessments. Data allows an administrator to know what is working and where improvements need to be made. Using data to drive curricular and instructional improvements means setting concrete achievement goals, specifying strategies and activities that will be used to achieve those goals, and determining what measures will be used to monitor and evaluate progress over time.

When starting a new school, the process of curriculum development and improvement can be daunting and extremely time consuming, particularly during the first three years of operation. One approach to address this reality is to buy the curriculum from another school that has a similar vision and mission as yours. This allows the administrator to focus significantly more time and resources on developing instructional skills, student achievement and school climate than in developing curriculum. Adjustments to the curriculum can be made over time as data is collected and analyzed and the school's systems and procedures are solidified.

If the school does decide to use curriculum developed by another school or an outside curriculum development company, it should consult with legal counsel to ensure that all appropriate intellectual property licenses and agreements have been obtained.

Relevant CSSI Standards:

CSSI 3.1e Instructional resources (textbooks, supplemental reading, library resources and technology) are sufficient to support the effective delivery of the curriculum.

CSSI 7.1c Leadership ensures that all instructional staff has access to resources related to the content standards for Colorado public schools.

CSSI 7.1e Leadership allocates resources based on identified needs and monitors the use of resources.

Resource: Curriculum and Instruction (CDE Web site)
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/cur/index.htm>

Technology Plan

A quality technology plan will contain guidelines for planning and purchasing decisions related to technology. The plan should include the school's overall vision for technology use as well as goals to be achieved over a

three, five or ten-year period (make sure the goals are aligned with the school’s vision, mission and strategic plan). Include goals about relevant staff development and technology integration in the curriculum. The technology plan should specify resources that are or will be available for students and staff. Additionally, the plan should identify funding sources for initial technology purchases as well as costs for maintenance and replacement over time.

Policies are an important component of a solid technology plan. Include policies that address:

- Student and patron access of equipment and resources (during school, after school hours or remote access), ensuring equitable access for everyone.
- Acceptable use guidelines that specify expectations of use and limits placed on staff and students with technology.
- Any other policies required by law or authorizer guidelines.

Relevant CSSI Standard: CSSI 3.1d Teachers and students incorporate the use of technology in teaching and learning.
Resource: A link to the Startup and Implementation Grant Program is: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/cchgrn00.htm
Resource: Links to technology-related policies and templates can be found on the CDE Web site: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/adm/index.htm

Library Plan

Research has shown that when teachers and media specialists cooperate in establishing common lesson objectives, plan together, and coordinate their instructional and assessment strategies, student achievement improves.³¹

As stated in the *Charter School Startup and Implementation Grant RFP*, a library media center is more than just books and computers in a room that is visited only occasionally by the students and staff. To be truly effective, it must be integrated into the school curriculum, with goals and instructional activities that correspond with those of the classroom teacher. All materials should support the curricular goals of the school and align with the development criteria established in the school’s library plan. Several items to consider building into the development process for a quality school library program are described in the table below.³²

	Quality Plan	Lacks Quality/Less Than Acceptable
Vision	Reflects considerable thought toward “information literacy”	Geared toward “library skills”
Long-range Planning and Goals	Goals appear attainable, and are geared toward identified need. There is a clear timeline and measures for activities and accomplishments	Goals seem too ambitious, or have no stated activities to support them. Timeline and/or measures are unreasonable or lacking
Equipment (Circulation Software or Technology)	Contains rationale for purchase, and/or thoughts behind why equipment is selected and how it is used	Little or no reference to why equipment is being purchased and how used
Materials and	Keyed to or aligned with school curricula	Not clear how materials will be aligned with

³¹ *How School Libraries Help Kids Achieve Standards*, www.lrs.org (Library Research Services)

³² *Planning for and Developing a Quality Charter School Library*, Colorado Department of Education, 2005

Access	(collection development plan)	curricula (no collection plan developed)
Staff	Staff presence is evident	Staff presence is limited or lacking
Teaching and Learning	Library is integral to the school's curriculum, collaboration is evident	Library is stand-alone or drop-in only
Research-based Practices	Plan quotes or alludes to Keith Curry Lance or LRS library studies about student achievement and/or mentions ALA <i>Information Power</i>	Library studies are not mentioned. <i>Information Power</i> is not mentioned

Resource: CDE Startup and Implementation Grant Program RFP:

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/cchgrn00.htm>

Relevant CSSI Standard:

CSSI 1.1f Information literacy is integrated into content curricula.

Protecting Instructional Time

Protecting instructional time is likely one of the greatest challenges an administrator faces. Seemingly innocuous activities and practices that rob students of instructional time are plentiful. Examples include non-emergency intercom interruptions throughout the school day; parents bringing forgotten lunches, homework or projects into the classroom during core instructional times; class and individual picture sessions; vision and hearing screenings; and birthday parties and other holiday events.

In cooperation with the school's governing board, the administrator should ensure that school policies and procedures reflect a priority of protecting instructional time. The school schedule, structure and support systems should work in concert to provide adequate time for quality instruction that maximizes student learning and minimizes disruptions.³³

In their important work, *School Leadership that Works* Marzano, Walters and McNulty reinforce this idea with supportive research, and its on-point message bears repeating here:

"One important task of the school principal is to protect teachers from undue distractions. It is an acknowledged aspect of instructional leadership, and many theorists address it directly or indirectly. Elmore (2000) explains that "school leaders are hired and retained based largely on their capacity to buffer teachers from outside interference." (p.7) He goes on to say, "Buffering consists of creating structures and procedures around the technical core of teaching." (p.6). The structures and procedures Elmore speaks of are those that protect instructional time. Specifically, he notes that "there is a role for leaders in moving non-instructional issues out of the way to prevent them from creating confusion and distraction in school systems, schools, and classrooms" (p.24). Youngs and King (2002) have also highlighted the importance of protecting or shielding teachers. In describing the behaviors of one highly successful principal, they explain that "she buffered the school from the potentially negative effects of the new district initiatives." (p. 662).

Best Practice: Ask yourself, "How are you going to protect instructional time?"

Best Practice: Ask yourself, "How will you design the school schedule to reflect a singular focus on increasing student academic achievement?"

Relevant CSSI Standard:

CSSI 7.1d Leadership ensures that time is protected and allocated to focus on curricular and instructional issues.

³³ Bartell, C.A. (1990). Outstanding Secondary Principals Reflect on Instructional Leadership. *The High School Journal*, 73(2), 118-128.

Working with Parents to Promote Student Achievement

Creating a support system to provide short and long term interventions will be vital to student success. A systematic approach can maximize efforts and decrease the work load on any single person.

Positive parent involvement must be deliberate and focused on the needs of the student(s). Each grade level has unique assessments, expectations, characteristics and challenges, and parents must be educated on each of these topics.

- Host a grade level meeting to increase parent involvement in critical areas.
- Provide a calendar with key quarterly assessments, social events, and other critical times.
- Develop a home/student/school contract.
- Develop achievement goals.
- Develop parent support expectations.
- Agree to a code of conduct for students.
- Establish expectations for interventions if necessary.
- Agree to use of communication pathways.
- Use calendar and contract between home and school as agenda items for meetings.

Other Support Systems that Enhance Student Achievement

If we accept nothing less than mastery, we must be sure to have the support structures in place to intervene when necessary. Teacher office hours, a tutoring center, study halls, student aides, student organizations and other similar types of support must all work in harmony to increase student achievement and provide support when necessary.

Student Assessments

The purpose of an assessment plan is to improve overall academic achievement by organizing a system of assessments that is aligned with state standards and provides information that can be used to measure individual and collective student growth, track progress toward goals, and target resources effectively.

The Colorado Growth Model provides a common understanding of how individual students and groups of students progress from year to year toward state standards based on where each individual student begins. Colorado developed the model in 2008 to answer three essential questions about student, school and district performance:

- What is the growth rate of a student, a school and a district?
- What should the growth rate be for a student to reach a desired level of achievement within a period of time?
- What are the highest sustained growth rates that exist today and under what conditions could they improve?

Within this growth model framework, a school measures the impact the curriculum is having on student achievement with both external and internal assessments. Developing an assessment plan involves four main activities, which should be an ongoing part of the school's operation:

- Identifying the external and internal assessments to be used and establishing a master assessment schedule.
 - External – CSAP, NWEA MAPS, AP, ACT, SAT, etc.
 - Internal – program specific, multiple choice, short answer, essay, projects, labs, etc.
- Monitoring student progress, managing ongoing data collection.
- Disaggregating the data, prioritizing categories based on the specific needs of the school's population.
- Based on the data analysis, creating an action plan to improve instructional planning, resource allocation, lesson planning, assessments and corresponding professional development.

Colorado Basic Literacy Act (CBLA)

The Colorado Basic Literacy Act (CBLA) (C.R.S. 22-7-501 et. seq.) was enacted in 1997 by the Colorado General Assembly to ensure that all students by the third grade have the literacy skills essential for success in school and life. CBLA calls for local school districts to identify students who are reading below grade level and give them the necessary reading interventions. Specific assessment tools should be used to gather a body of evidence about students' literacy levels. Students that fall below proficiency levels must be placed on Individual Literacy Plans (ILPs) and their performance closely monitored until they achieve proficiency. Please consult the CDE Web site for information about specific assessment frameworks related to CBLA.

Resource: Detailed information about CBLA can be found on the CDE Web site at:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/coloradoliteracy/cbla/index.htm>

External and Internal Assessments

Administrator involvement in assessment planning and execution is a vital part of demonstrating instructional leadership to the staff and ensuring a school's success. Administrators should take a hands-on approach to supporting teachers in their efforts to develop meaningful assessments for their classrooms.³⁴ As stated in *Windows on Leadership*, "in developing effective multiple assessment strategies, criteria, rubrics, and communication are essential. Students should be involved in the evaluation of their work and understand

³⁴ Stein and D'Amico, 2000; Marzano, Water and McNulty, *School Leadership that Works*, page 53.

ways to improve and move toward proficiency or more advanced levels in achieving standards at each grade level. Performance benchmarks for each standard should be created and be quantifiable. This information might be shared with parents and students through more specific report cards, at conferences, and in the context of the classroom.”³⁵

Assessments should support and contribute to student learning while reflecting the essential content and skills of state standards. Two broad types of assessments will be used: external and internal.

External Assessments

External assessments are an important component of an accountability system to define and measure academic quality and performance. They provide broad, standardized information that allows all stakeholders (students, staff, parents, the district or the school’s authorizer and the state) to validate (or challenge) results from internal assessments, to identify trends and patterns and to determine how well a school is serving students and achieving its goals. Some external assessments are mandated by state and federal requirements (e.g. CSAP, ACT); others may be chosen by the school as an objective measure of student performance against school standards or programs that are specific to its mission or philosophy (e.g. AP, NWEA MAPS, DIBELS).

CSAP: The Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) is designed to provide a picture of how students in the state of Colorado are progressing toward meeting academic standards in math, reading, writing and science, and how schools are doing to ensure learning success of students. Content standards define the broad knowledge, concepts, essential learning, and skills that students should be mastering at each grade level. Assessment frameworks are developed based on the standards in each grade level; each item on the CSAP is designed to measure a single assessment objective through selected-response and constructed response. Links to the content standards and assessment frameworks are provided below.

Best Practice: Find the most detail-oriented person on staff to run CSAPs.
Resource: Information about Colorado’s Growth Model can be found on the CDE Web site at: http://www.schoolview.org/media/Introduction/GrowthModelIntro.asp
Resource: Content standards are available on the Colorado Department of Education’s (CDE) Web site under the Office of Standards and Assessment. http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeassess/documents/OSA/k12_standards.html
Resource: CSAP assessment frameworks can be reviewed at: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeassess/documents/csap/csap_frameworks.html
Compliance: Colorado law related to CSAPs and other assessments: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeassess/co_law.html

Colorado ACT: All students enrolled in the eleventh grade in a Colorado public school are required to take the ACT. The ACT is a standardized, curriculum-based, achievement, college entrance examination. It has been selected by the Colorado Department of Education because it meets statutory (C.R.S. 22-7-409 (1.5) (a)) requirements to be a test that is administered throughout the United States and relied upon by institutions of higher education that minimally require test results in the areas of reading, writing, mathematics, and science.

Other External Assessments: Non-mandatory external assessments may be useful for a school to measure progress objectively toward specific content goals or college readiness (e.g. AP, SAT), or to track student growth in specific areas like reading and mathematics (e.g. NWEA MAPS, DIBELS, SRA). Whatever system is chosen, the school will need a data management system that is capable of tracking, monitoring and manipulating data for analysis. Data from these sources should be triangulated with mandated external

³⁵ K. Knox, *Windows on Leadership*, 2000, page 15

assessments as well as internal assessments to gain a complete understanding of student progress over time and to identify trends, patterns or gaps in learning that need to be addressed.

National Assessments: The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a.k.a. “the Nation’s Report Card,” is the only nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America’s students know and can do in different subject areas. Its two major goals are to measure student achievement and to report change in performance over time. The first national assessments were conducted in 1969. Voluntary assessments for states began in 1990. In 2003, NCLB mandated NAEP grades 4 and 8 reading and math assessments. Selected Colorado schools that qualify for Title I funding have participated in the NCLB-mandated evaluations since 2003. More information about the NAEP and Colorado student progress can be found on the CDE Web site (link provided below).

Resource: Information about NAEP can be found at:
http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeassess/documents/NAEP/index_naep.html

Internal Assessments

Quality internal assessments will increase the predictability of progress toward student achievement goals. They also increase the effectiveness of targeted interventions at critical times during the learning process. Assessments can be summative or formative in nature. Summative assessments usually come at the end of a unit or a lesson block, and will measure a student’s comprehensive knowledge in a given area. Formative assessments are smaller pieces of evidence, collected daily, weekly or on an ongoing basis. Formative assessments are useful for measuring learning in process. Regardless of the method used, with a focus on quality internal assessment, the curriculum will align.

If internal assessments are certified at the correct level of difficulty, the expectations for student achievement can be raised. If we know the assessments are valid and we know the assessments results are valid (because of rater reliability), then why would we settle for anything less than mastery of identified content and skills?

- Assessments must be at or above the grade level standard.
- Assessments must focus on the essential learning elements.
- Assessment skills must be taught to both students and teachers.
- Assessments that use rubrics must have rater reliability (both students and teachers) to be useful.
- Pre/post testing occurs for each unit.
- Learning goals are established after pre-test.
- Assessment data is used to drive instruction and interventions.
- Create an assessment schedule, which provides structure and stability for teachers and students. This prevents anyone from having too many assessments all at once. Teachers should not only coordinate weekly assessments but also, on a school-wide basis, the weeks and assessments that are given. For example:
 - Science – Monday
 - Math—Tuesday
 - English – Wednesday
 - Social Studies – Thursday
 - Electives – Friday

Data-Driven Decisions and Program Evaluation

The board and administrator are responsible for continually monitoring performance in all aspects of the school. Establishing a practice of strong progress monitoring is essential to the success of a school program and to effective board oversight.

Several layers of evaluation must occur to monitor the entire school program effectively. First, school leaders, the board and the administrator together, must evaluate the school's academic performance. The administrator has the primary responsibility of monitoring academic accomplishment, and effectively communicating those accomplishments to the board. The board must then make strategic decisions based on the academic progress. The second layer of evaluation is a self-evaluation of the board's own performance, development, and progress toward meeting goals. Finally, the third layer of evaluation is also the responsibility of the board. The board must support and evaluate of the administrator through an effective, comprehensive, and useful evaluation process that results in a clear direction and a clear set of goals for the administrator.

Data is one of the most powerful tools you have as an administrator to help establish and maintain practices that support student achievement as well as to inform improvement efforts and school-wide strategic planning. Data also allows you to communicate clearly and specifically with stakeholders about school goals and expectations. This type of communication can motivate stakeholders and empower them to behave in ways that positively affect the school culture and, ultimately, student achievement. The following sections contain some basic information and links to resources to help you use data results effectively.

Being "data driven" simply means that you have put systems and processes in place to collect and analyze various types of data and that you use the data to guide decisions that impact student achievement. For example, using data as a basis for decisions, you make strategic plans and decisions to improve student achievement, develop meaningful school improvement goals that result in student achievement, target strategies for improvement and track effectiveness through adequate assessment of those strategies, communicate in a meaningful way with stakeholders about school and student progress and, finally, allocate school resources as effectively as possible.

Best Practice: Ask yourself, "How will our achievement results be used to change and improve our programs?"

Resource: More about standards and assessments can be found on the CDE Web site:
http://www.cde.state.co.us/index_stnd-access.htm

Using Data in the Classroom

Teachers can use data results in the classroom to refine instructional strategies and classroom activities, develop effective assessments, and to communicate with parents about student goals and progress. Teachers who use student achievement data to guide and improve their teaching are more effective than teachers who do not use such information.

Staff Performance

Ideally, staff performance expectations will be explicitly aligned with the school's vision, mission and strategic goals, particularly as they relate to student achievement. Student achievement data will be used to evaluate and monitor staff performance and to target resources for supportive professional development. Evaluation tools should incorporate the school's values and provide staff with specific feedback that

measures success in critical areas such as: planning and lesson design; assessments (internal and external); teaching strategies and classroom management; professional development; and general responsibilities, such as contributing positively to the school culture and environment, fulfilling administrative requirements, and communicating effectively with all stakeholders. Research confirms that staff evaluations, when conducted effectively, are a key factor in determining a school's success. ³⁶Moreover, "in the most effective schools, 'constant evaluation' (of the effectiveness of the school's curricular, instructional and assessment practices, as well as a constant awareness of the impact of the school's practices on student achievement) is the norm."³⁷ Ultimately, the goal of an effective staff evaluation plan is to improve student achievement.

Best Practice: Ask yourself how you will use student achievement results to drive staff evaluations and plans for improvements. What tools do you need to have in place to ensure an alignment between staff performance/improvement and student achievement?

Best Practice: Form partnerships with similar schools. Borrow evaluation methods and tools from similar schools; then modify to customize for your environment.

Curriculum Evaluation

As with staff performance, student achievement data can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of your programs and their components. Assessment data can provide information about a program's strengths as well as where gaps are present and where refinement or improvement is needed.

Best Practice: Ask yourself how you will know that a particular program is worth your time, money and investment? How is the program tied to your goals and results?

Resource: The Charter School Support Initiative is described in detail on this Web site: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/cssi.htm>

School Evaluation

Schools will evaluate their performance based on many factors. Academic program success is measured not only by student achievement data, but also by the quality of classroom instruction, school culture, community involvement and support, professional development activities, school leadership, operational health and the quality of strategic planning. The CDE has established a comprehensive evaluation system for use in charter schools, originally based on a Kentucky model rubric and then modified for traditional Colorado public schools, that were not meeting AYP standards. This evaluation system, called the Colorado School Support Initiative (CSSI), has been updated and refined for use in Colorado charter schools; it is available to any charter school that requests it. New schools that receive startup funds through the Startup and Implementation Grant Program, which is funded by Title V, typically schedule a CSSI visit in Year 3 of their operation.

The CSSI is an evaluation service for self improvement provided by the CDE's Schools of Choice Unit. The service is voluntary and independent of other evaluations such as those required for charter renewal and accreditation. Participating schools receive a comprehensive review of the school's strengths and weaknesses based on the Standards and Indicators for School Improvement, a research-based rubric that covers curriculum, assessment, instruction, school culture, student, family and community support, professional development, leadership, organizational structure and resources, planning, and board leadership.

There are a wide variety of measures to evaluate successful implementation of a school program, and the administrator should speak with his board about what measures best match the school's vision. For instance, some schools care more about performance on the ACT than the CSAP if their school claims to be "college prep." The strategic plan should offer some guidance to the performance measures that are most meaningful to the charter school. Goals set in the charter application, charter contract, and school improvement plans

³⁶ De Pree, 1989

³⁷ Kaagan and Markle, 1993 and Marzano, Water and McNulty, *School Leadership that Works*, 2005.

should each have measures that guide the administrator to effective progress monitoring. These are further detailed in the sub-section titled “Charter Goals”.

In addition, progress monitoring must include accountability structures (see the sub-section titled “School Accountability”) and measures for assuring accreditation of the school program (see the sub-section titled “School Accreditation”). The board and administrator must coordinate efforts to monitor the entire school program and the board will rely heavily on the administrator for reporting.

Relevant CSSI Standards:

CSSI 2.1a Classroom assessments of student learning are frequent, rigorous and aligned with district and/or state content standards.

CSSI 2.1d Tests and assessment results are used by staff to obtain information, identify achievement and curricular gaps, and to refine instruction.

Charter Goals

The original charter school application includes a list of school goals specific to the school. These goals probably align with state accreditation indicators, and may include additional goals specific to the school. Schools may want to set goals, and measure performance, of issues specific to their unique mission. For example, a school may set a goal for the hours of community service performed by each student. Goals in the school’s strategic plan should also align with the charter in addition to the vision and mission statements. The administrator should look to each of these documents when establishing a structure for progress monitoring and school performance evaluation.

The goals in the charter application easily transfer to the school’s accreditation plan. Goals in the accreditation plan should build upon the original charter goals, and progress based on accomplishments and growth. Different terminology is used since language in the statute has changed over the years. This plan may be called the School Improvement Plan (SIP), but current language indicates it is the accreditation plan, or School Accreditation Plan (SAP). The format for this plan will differ from school to school and the authorizer may require a certain format.

School Accountability

There are several layers of accountability in charter schools. The charter school is accountable to federal measures, such as Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). State accountability measures include the School Accountability Report (SAR), CSAP results, and Accreditation. Ultimately, charter schools are accountable to the families that choose to enroll in this choice option. Establishing strong structures for accountability will aid in effective progress monitoring and evaluation of the school program.

“Charter school governing boards are responsible for negotiating the charter renewal and preparing the district-required School Accreditation Plan. Many districts have combined their charter renewal and accreditation processes.” Charter schools typically accomplish these tasks by establishing the required School Advisory Council (SAC) as a subcommittee of the board. When writing a policy to describe the committee’s purpose, the board should consider what other responsibilities would further the board’s oversight of the school. For example, the SAC may review a different content area every year.

The SAC is made up of a good balance of teachers and parents, and, by statute, the school administrator. The administrator should guide the work of the SAC to make sure the school’s specific data needs are being addressed. The administrator is the key person to convey data analysis findings to individual teachers. Board reporting structures will vary from school to school, based on the board policy. Most charter school SACs develop and administer the annual parent survey after the board has approved the survey instrument. The SAC will assemble the data and prepare reports for the board and school community.

The charter school SAC also monitors data related to accreditation. The annual accreditation report is submitted to the authorizer via the board and not directly by the SAC. This is to ensure the SAC’s work aligns

with the work of the board. This report must be formally approved by the board. Additionally, the board may assign certain other tasks to the SAC such as reviewing a different core subject area each year or making a recommendation for a spelling curriculum. The purpose of the SAC should be based upon the needs of the school rather than just a focus on meeting the detail of the SAC law.

Best Practice: Read and absorb the information contained in the *Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook: Chapter 8 Guiding Renewal and Accreditation (School Advisory Council)*.

Resource: Information on School Advisory Councils is located at:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/gov/pdf/AccountabilityHandout.pdf>

Resource: More about governance and leadership in Colorado charter schools can be found at:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/gov/index.htm>

Compliance: State law requires a charter school to have a School Advisory Council (See C.R.S. 22-11-401 to 406 for additional information), unless the requirement has been waived.

School Accreditation

The administrator is primarily responsible for ensuring the charter school is fully accredited. Each authorizer has an accreditation contract with the State Board of Education. All public schools within the district are accredited similarly. Whatever format the district uses for accrediting applies to the charter school. Further, the charter contract may require the stipulation that the school is accredited.

Many districts pre-populate annual accreditation reports with data and ask the school to verify the data and add to the report where indicated. Additional indicators, if they are included, should be in the charter contract or application. Much like the School Advisory Council (SAC) discussed above, the district also has an accreditation committee that reports to the local board of education. School reports and data are typically submitted to this committee. Charter school administrators or representatives may serve on the district's accreditation committee.

Resource: Information about Colorado accreditation standards can be found at:
http://www.cde.state.co.us/index_accredit.htm

Needs Assessment

A process for needs assessment should be developed and conducted annually to gather information. The process of conducting a needs assessment is different for every school and may employ a combination of practices. Needs assessment may include information gathering practices, such as surveys, interviews, or observations. Focus groups may also be established to gather information about certain topics or specific areas of interest. In addition, schools may embark on a records research project to evaluate for certain needs. This may include an examination of purchase order records, professional development activities, staff employment records, or student academic records. Depending on the area of interest, the needs assessment may be conducted at the school level by the school administrator, and is not necessarily a function of the board. Boards may conduct a separate needs assessment to determine their own professional development needs or to inform the strategic plan.

When designing a process for conducting a needs assessment, schools should begin by asking some driving questions. For example: What resources are necessary to accomplish the ultimate goals for the school? What kind of environment is required to pursue the vision and mission of the school? Are there specific areas of focus for the needs assessment? What information is lacking in order to proceed with a plan for improvement?

When conducting a needs assessment for the first time, schools should start small, choosing a specific area of focus. Some examples may include focusing on professional development for the board or for staff, improving

communications at the school, school climate, parental involvement, or student academic achievement. Taking an inventory of resources may reveal certain gaps in staff expertise, support services, or curriculum resources that can inform selected activities or resources to facilitate improvement.

Professional Development

The quality of instruction has a direct impact on the level of student achievement. A clear focus on the essential teachings skills and teacher implementation of research-based strategies will increase student achievement. Frequent classroom visits and focused discussion about the interventions are vital to the improvement process. Observations targeted for specific skills can be used to cause immediate growth in those specific areas.

- Essential teaching skills must be identified and prioritized.
- Rubrics for each essential teaching skill must be created.
- Each teacher must be trained in the peer observation/coaching process.
- Professional development must target the essential teaching skills.
- Levels of mastery for each skill are crucial so the professional development can be differentiated for skill level of teaching staff.

When designing specific professional development activities and programs, keep in mind that Colorado’s Staff Development Council (an affiliate of the National Staff Development Council) lists the following characteristics of promising professional development programs:

- They include a process that is rigorous, result-based, data-driven, and tied to student achievement.
- Activities are ongoing and an integral part of an educator’s workday.
- They use a variety of approaches and professional development models (individually guided, observation/assessment, involvement in development/improvement process, training, action research/inquiry, reflective practice).
- They are teacher-designed, collaborative and school-centered.
- They focus on teachers as central to student learning, yet include all other members of the school community.
- Program content focuses on student learning.
- Program is rich in academic content, learning processes, current research, materials, and technologies.
- Content uses the systematic study of student work to improve teaching and learning.
- The school allocates adequate resources, including people, time and facilities.
- The professional development plan aligns with long-term school and district vision, goals, accountability plans, and other components of a standards-driven system.
- Professional development opportunities require participation and support of all administrators.
- Plan promotes an understanding of change, leadership, and organizational development.
- Activities occur in environments of safety, trust, and shared problem solving.
- Professional development plan and activities promote equity.³⁸

Additionally, professional development needs to show a direct correlation to the evaluation rubric or system the school uses to evaluate teacher performance, as well as demonstrating an increase in instructional and leadership skills.

Resource: Examples of professional development “menus” from a middle school can be found at: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/download/summitprofdev.pdf>

³⁸ Adapted from Colorado Department of Education’s *Professional Development in Colorado Schools* and National Staff Development Council’s Standards for Staff Development. Adopted by Colorado Education Goals Panel, Colorado Staff Development Council, CONNECT, and Professional Development Stakeholders in Colorado, 3/30/98

Resource: *Windows on Leadership* begins at this link:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/adm/pdf/winonldr.pdf>

Resource: *Windows on Leadership* has a discussion about professional development at:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/adm/pdf/winonpd.pdf>

According to the Colorado Charter School Handbook, “professional development is essential to continue to build skills to help teachers be successful. Without professional development, teacher’s burn out more easily, stagnate in their own learning, and fail to set a model of learning for students in their classrooms.

Basic principles that can guide professional development involve allowing visitations to other schools to observe best practices and to form mentorships with more experienced administrators, faculty or staff. Professional development should always include a detailed induction of new members of your school team along with allowing more experienced members of the team to assist in the development of their own development plans. Support from the school can come in helping them to identify specific training needs by using past student achievement or behavioral data. Further, training obtained by any one member of the administration, faculty or staff should be expected to be disseminated to other team members so that all members can benefit from the new learning opportunities. It can’t be stated enough that the best way to learn and integrate any new skill is to teach someone else that same skill. This allows you to better leverage your professional development investment so that you can gain more impact on student achievement in your school. Promote and reward any staff members who want to share their expertise with others whether at a conference, workshop, or seminar as this too will help them solidify their learning and implementation of new skills.

The Colorado Charter School Handbook contains specific information on creating a professional development plan, defining “Highly Qualified” teachers, using student achievement data to guide professional development, maintaining current professional development as the school matures, training for administrators, and evaluating professional development efforts.

Resource: The Colorado Charter School Handbook: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/charterhbk.htm>

Professional Learning Community

The term Professional Learning Community (PLC) describes a collegial group of administrators and school staff who are united in their commitment to student learning. They share a vision, work and learn collaboratively, visit and review other classrooms, and participate in decision making.³⁹ The benefits to the staff and students include a reduced isolation of teachers, better informed and committed teachers, and academic gains for students. Hord (1997b) notes, “As an organizational arrangement, the professional learning community is seen as a powerful staff-development approach and a potent strategy for school change and improvement.” Professional learning communities are established in a variety of ways:

- Book studies can create a PLC and train staff to use reading strategies (Readers Guide). Additionally, the book groups can be tiered so that books rotate on a two- to three-year basis with cohorts within the staff (from two to the whole staff).
- Peer coaching.
- Staff meetings that include professional development.
- Leadership cohorts: instructional, curriculum, data, climate.

³⁹ Hord, S. M. (1997b). *Professional learning communities: What are they and why are they important?* [Online]. Available: <http://www.sedl.org/change/issues/issues61.html>

Assessing Professional Development Needs

Conducting a needs assessment for professional development is a reflective activity that will help the school target its professional development resources most effectively and ensure that the activities chosen are meaningful for the participants and, ultimately, beneficial to the students.

Be sure that the professional development plan and activities the school adopts are developed using a strategic planning process and based on actual needs the teachers and staff have. Conducting a thorough needs assessment will allow the staff to describe the way things are and explore the way things should be (Rouda & Kasy, 1995). Three key components of a needs assessment are: planning, data gathering and decision making. Additionally, needs assessments should be repeated often so that they become an ongoing practice as the school grows and develops over time.

Data collecting tools for needs assessments include: surveys, interviews, observations, analysis of student achievement data, performance evaluations, strategic planning documents, budgets and feedback from stakeholders, especially staff members themselves. With all data collected, look for clear and consistent trends to identify true needs within the organization.

Resources: Links to best practices and examples can be found at:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/index.htm>

Professional Development versus Staff Meetings

The quality of instruction that happens in your school is the most important determinant of its success. The administrator's job is to ensure that professional development for teachers supports the development of effective instructional skills and knowledge. A common pitfall is using time that is or should be dedicated to professional development for staff meetings where employees gather to discuss school business or logistical issues. To be sure, there are times when staff meetings need to occur so that school business can be addressed; however, it is your duty as an administrator to protect and prioritize professional development time over time spent on administrative minutia. Avoid creating (or allowing) a culture where meetings are used largely for social interaction. Whenever possible, handle administrative issues via email or memo rather than in person; this will preserve valuable time for deliberate and focused professional development. Keep in mind that the frequency of meetings is often as important as the content of the meetings – too many meetings creates a culture of boredom and is a good way to dampen the motivation of even the most enthusiastic teachers.

Professional development should ultimately be designed to improve instructional strategies that affect student achievement, the quality of assessments and the quality of relationships between teachers, administrators and students. Specific professional development activities should be identified through a focused evaluation tool(s) that is aligned with the school's mission, values and strategic goals, particularly as they relate to student achievement. Consider hiring people from other successful charter schools to train your staff.

Focus on Specific Instructional Skills

When designing effective professional development activities to meet the needs of your staff, your needs assessment will be driven by data you collect during the observation and evaluation processes.

In designing professional development activities, select the instructional skills that you value the most or that need the most improvement. Then focus on developing those instructional skills in every teacher. Look for them when you visit classrooms. One approach is to focus exclusively on one or two skills per month on a school-wide basis. Let teachers know which skills you are focusing on and create a tool for observation that allows you to record data and capture information around that particular skill. The tool can be set up in a way that allows you to record whether you saw the skill being demonstrated – or not. With this type of observation and focus, it is not necessary to create a comprehensive observation matrix. Just focus on one (or

two) specific skills and take note of whether you see those skills being demonstrated in the classroom. Then provide specific feedback to the teacher about your observations. A sample tool is included in the resource box below. Examples of skills that you might consider focusing on include the following:

- Anticipatory sets – use high pay off strategies
- Closures – use high pay off strategies
- Test taking – directions, multiple choice, short constructed response, annotating
- Active participation
- Essential learning objectives – are they meaningful?
- Reading strategies
- Note taking
- Relevance
- Goal setting
- Levels of questioning
- Curriculum connections to self, text, and the world
- Think time / think aloud / think often

Mentoring, Induction and Peer Coaching

Effective teaching requires a continuous and ongoing commitment to a philosophy of reflective practice, which means that teachers continually seek to improve their craft by examining the results of their lessons, appraising their methods and materials, and learning from their experience. Administrators should encourage teachers to seek input and assistance from colleagues and administrators, and to participate in both formal and informal pedagogical discussions. Three interrelated types of teacher support are discussed below: mentoring, induction and peer coaching.

Mentoring

Mentoring programs can take a variety of different formats, from a buddy system to pairing experienced and novice teachers, to generalized mentoring from one department or grade level to another, to group mentoring. Any of these models can be effective, depending on the specific needs of the staff. Variables include the size and structure of the school, available resources and the makeup of the staff (e.g. level of experience of the staff as a whole or the number of novice versus highly experienced teachers). Mentoring programs generally seek to cultivate novice teachers or those who are new to the school itself by pairing them with one or more people who are more experienced. Mentoring programs allow teachers to develop professional and personal relationships with each other, which in turn boosts teacher satisfaction and increases teacher retention.

Induction

Many schools offer informal support to teachers who are new to the school or to the profession of teaching. Formalizing this type of support, however, offers a wide range of benefits to teachers and administrators. It allows the administrator to clarify school expectations, ease the transition for teachers new to a school, and support areas of growth through professional development. Components of this program might include a new teacher orientation at the beginning of the school year and ongoing professional development meetings and workshops throughout the year. An induction program participant might be expected to meet with supportive administrators, mentors and in small groups with other colleagues on a weekly, monthly, or some other appropriate regular interval. Moreover, induction programs may be used to support the licensure process for new teachers, either through a district program or through a waiver that allows a school-developed induction program to use their model to fulfill the requirements.

Peer Coaching

Peer coaching is a non-threatening support system that allows two teachers to grow professionally. This is a formalized relationship in which two teachers agree to meet regularly, discuss instructional strategies and pedagogy and observe each other teaching and offer constructive feedback based on an agreed-upon set of

criteria. In addition to providing support and assistance for teachers, peer coaching offers the following benefits:

- Supports an increase in student learning.
- Facilitates/increases discussion between/among colleagues of professional topics/research.
- Provides opportunities for sharing of successful practices through collaboration.
- Provides encouragement of and provisions for reflective practice.
- Provides a problem-solving vehicle.
- Reduces isolation among teachers.
- Promotes the teacher as researcher.
- Creates a forum for addressing instructional problems.
- Supports and assists new and beginning teachers in their practice.
- Builds collaborative norms to enable teachers to give and receive ideas and receive assistance.

Relevant CSSI Standards:

CSSI 3.1a Effective and varied instructional strategies are used in all classrooms.

CSSI 3.1d Teachers and students incorporate the use of technology in teaching and learning.

CSSI 6.1a Teachers who demonstrate the content knowledge and instructional skills necessary to challenge and motivate students to high levels of learning are recruited and supported through professional development.

CSSI 6.1b Professional development opportunities are selected based on a range of criteria and data.

CSSI 6.1c Professional development opportunities impact classroom practices, staff efficiency, and school functioning.

CSSI 6.1d Professional development is implemented and evaluated for effectiveness.

CSSI 6.1e The school provides fiscal resources for professional development.

CSSI 6.2a A clearly defined evaluation process is implemented at the school.

CSSI 6.2b The employee evaluation process is used to improve staff proficiency.

CSSI 6.2c Leadership uses the evaluation process to provide teachers with follow-up and support to improve professional and instructional practices.

CSSI Standard 4: Learning Environment – School Culture

Resource: Classroom Observation tips can be found at:

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/adm/pdf/LAClassroomObservationTeacher.pdf>

Resource: Evaluation of Aide:

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/adm/pdf/LAIAEvaluationFormteacher.pdf>

Resource: Model Notification of Rights Under the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA). PPRA affords parents certain rights regarding our conduct of surveys, collection and use of information for marketing purposes, and certain physical exams.

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/adm/pdf/PPRAModelNotice05.pdf>

Resource: PPRA Model Notice and Consent/Opt-Out for Specific Activities is located at:

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/adm/pdf/PPRAModelConsent05.pdf>

Administrator, Faculty and Board Evaluations

Continuous review of employee performance is important for developing the culture of any school. Employees want feedback – both positive and constructive – so they can improve their skills and know that their hard work is recognized. Reviews of employees should be standardized and occur at regular intervals, as frequently as possible. Feedback should be both written and verbal and all documentation should be maintained in the personnel file.

Likewise, employee behavior that needs to change requires that the employer clearly communicate the issue to the employee as soon as possible and that this communication, whether written or verbal, is documented and placed in the personnel file.

There are three key words that apply to employee reprimands, regardless of the severity of the incident: document, document, document. Smaller incidents may just include a written note reviewing the incident. Larger concerns should include a written reprimand that requires the employee's signature indicating receipt of the reprimand. The employee should also be allowed in this case to submit a written response.

The HR Employment Manual provides sample review forms and reprimand forms as well as information about these processes. This is another example of when the school should consult legal counsel.

Resource: CDE Web site, HR Employment Manual:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/download/HREmploymentManual.pdf>

Evaluating the Chief Administrator

The primary objective of the administrative evaluation is to create a strategic link between the school's mission, goals and behavioral values and staff performance. The administrator is evaluated by the board of directors. In compliance with state law, staff evaluations are confidential, and all board discussion related to specific administrator evaluations or concerns are conducted in executive session, consistent with the provisions of Colorado's Open Meetings Law, C.R.S. 24-6-402(4).

Evaluations should be completed annually and preferably in January or February so that if there is agreement that the administrator should move on, there's time to search for a new position. Typically, each individual board member completes the evaluation form and then one member compiles the results. The board may discuss the evaluation in executive session with the administrator. It's best to give the summarized evaluation to the administrator prior to the discussion so that he has time to review it and ponder comments.

Several charter school boards also establish specific performance benchmarks for the administrator. These benchmarks may be tied to bonus pay. Minimally, goals correlating with the board's strategic plan should be aligned with the administrator's professional goals. The evaluation tool, performance expectations, and benchmarks should be clearly communicated to the administrator at the beginning of each year. Administrators are employees of the charter school governing board, not the authorizer, which means the authorizer will not have any role in evaluating the administrator.

The board should annually evaluate the performance of the administrator to identify opportunities for professional growth and acknowledge areas of excellence in the following areas:

- Personnel management
- Vision and mission

- Communication
- Finances and operations
- Student Achievement
- School Safety

The outcome of the administrator evaluation will determine his areas of strength and weakness. Acknowledgement of accomplishment is important. The board may publicly acknowledge the achievements or create a reward/bonus plan. The board may create a corrective action plan for areas in need of improvement that includes long-range goals and interim benchmarks provided that it is done in a manner that does not modify the administrator’s at-will employment. Evaluation should be followed with support and resources. Boards support administrators by ensuring that they have the necessary resources to accomplish goals and by conveying confidence in their day-to-day decisions.

One charter school uses the following materials in the evaluation process:

- **Quarterly Goal Reviews:** Goals will be determined by the administrator with input from the full board following the quarterly goal updates. The attainment of each goal will be discussed by the full board as the year progresses. It is not unusual to set and reset goals many times during the period. The categories for goals are to be aligned with the Strategic Plan and may include: student achievement/climate, curriculum/assessment, staff success, financial health, risk management, professional development, and personal development.
- **Job Description/Evaluation Rubric:** The complete list of standards and indicators in the evaluation process are addressed in the evaluation of the administrator through the completion of the performance rubric tailored to the job description. In each identified area, strengths and area(s) of development are described as observed and substantiated by specific comments and data. Specific recommendations are included if an area(s) of need is identified.
- **Evaluation File Material:** The administrator evaluation file includes the following items:
 - Professional growth plan, which includes self-evaluation data, any observation summaries, goals and documentation of professional development.
 - Addendum documents, including a description of duties performed outside regular responsibilities or special work arrangements.
 - Documentation of quarterly goal updates.
 - Pertinent documentation of verbal and written communication received from staff, students, parents or community members concerning administrator performance.
 - Any other information relevant to administrator performance.
- **Community Survey Data:** Data from the community survey will be used to show broad trends in the community perception of performance.

Best Practice: It is a best practice to evaluate the administrator in January or February.
Resource: Sample administrator evaluation forms: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/gov/index.htm
Resource: <i>Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook: Chapter 10 Selecting, Reviewing and Supporting the Administrator:</i> http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/download/Bd_Trng_HBk_051007.pdf
Resource: Sample job descriptions are at: www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/gov/index.htm
Resource: Sample interview questions are available at: www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/gov/index.htm
Resource: Sample administrator evaluation forms are available at: www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/gov/index.htm

Evaluating Faculty

An effective teacher evaluation plan should support teachers in their professional growth toward becoming master teachers. The primary objective of the evaluation plan is to improve the quality of instruction throughout the school and to promote student achievement.

At some charter schools, teachers have a personalized professional growth plan that contains information related to their goals, growth and needs throughout the term of their employment at the school. Professional growth plans, written by the teachers with input from the administrator, are modified and enhanced over time to reflect updated goals, growth and needs. Each plan addresses a student goal, an instructional goal, a professional goal and a personal goal.

The administrator observes teachers on an informal basis frequently throughout the school year. Informal observations facilitate ongoing communication and strong relationships between teachers and the administrator. Additionally, the administrator will formally observe teachers at least once during the school year. After the observation, teachers will meet one-on-one with the administrator for feedback and evaluation. Use of a formalized evaluation rubric with standards and criteria for scoring helps to ensure that the evaluation is fair and unbiased.

Evaluating Board Performance

Board self-assessment refers to a set of practices used to examine board performance against standards that define good performance. Board assessment is not unlike school assessment. Like school assessment, it needs to be viewed as part of commitment to continuous improvement of the board's performance.

It is considered a best practice for charter school boards to conduct an annual self-evaluation. It is the board's responsibility to develop and implement the process for self-evaluation. This process will usually include gathering feedback from stakeholders, including parent and staff members. Often, the board will request the administrator's feedback as well. Inexperienced boards may look to the administrator for advice and guidance. While a knowledgeable administrator may have much to offer, it is important for the board to maintain the responsibility for oversight of the school. Administrators should consider carefully any advice or guidance that may overstep appropriate boundaries.

In general, an effective board self-assessment process has the following characteristics:

- It has the enthusiastic support of board leadership.
- The assessment is based on a set of standards or best practices that characterize effective board performance.
- The assessment is a formal process in that it is conducted on a regular, agreed-upon basis and a written assessment tool that all board directors complete is the centerpiece of the process.
- Finally, there is a plan to use the results of the assessment to set goals for board improvement and the plan is implemented.

Additionally, board self-assessment provides board members with the opportunity to:

- Look internally in addition to assessing programs and chief executive performance.
- Reflect on their individual and shared responsibilities.
- Identify different perceptions and opinions among board members.
- Point to questions that need attention.
- Use the results as a springboard for board improvement.
- Increase the level of board teamwork.
- Clarify mutual board/staff expectations.
- Demonstrate accountability as a serious organizational value.
- Display credibility to funders and other external audiences.

Resource: Information on board development and self-assessment:

http://www.boardsource.org/Search.asp?query=&searchIn=all&search_category_id=%2C20%2C22%2C

Resource: Information and tools on board self-assessment can be found at:

<http://www.uscharterschools.org/gb/governance/contents.htm>

Special Populations and Student Support Services

Special Populations

Colorado law requires a charter school to comply with all federal laws prohibiting discrimination based on disability. A charter school is accountable to its authorizer for compliance with the Individuals with the federal Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Colorado's Exceptional Children's Education Act (ECEA). Under the IDEA and ECEA, the administrative unit of the charter school's authorizer is responsible for ensuring that all students who are eligible for special education in the administrative unit receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE).

Because a charter school is accountable for complying with special education laws and its administrative unit is responsible for ensuring that all students eligible for special education in its unit receive a FAPE, it is essential for a charter school and its authorizer's administrative unit to work together in developing a plan to ensure compliance with these laws.

Resource: Colorado Charter Schools Best Practices Guidebook offers sample special education and 504 compliance plans at this location:

http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/sped/pdf/SampleCS_spedcomplianceplan-082008.pdf

Resource: Information about CDE's Exceptional Student Leadership Unit can be found at:

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/index.asp>. This site is a resource to teachers, administrators, and parents of students with exceptional educational needs due to disability, giftedness, unique talents, or English language learners who also have special needs.

Resource: The CDE Web site contains information on special education and gifted and talented programming at: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/sped/index.htm>

Relevant CSSI Standards:

CSSI 5.1b Support structures and programs are in place to reduce barriers to learning for all students.

CSSI 4.1k Support for the physical, cultural, socio-economic, and intellectual needs of all students reflects the school's commitment to equity and appreciation of diversity.

CSSI 7.1e Leadership allocates resources based on identified needs and monitors the use of resources.

Special Education

As public schools, charter schools must open their enrollment to any student and must provide appropriate special education services as needed for students with disabilities. The charter school developer should consider the general philosophy of the school when developing the philosophy for delivery of special education services. For instance, a charter school may have an experiential delivery model making the needs of a student with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) more unique. Further, a charter school with a philosophy that no student "falls through the cracks" may have an aggressive remediation program for students that are not attaining their full academic potential and yet do not qualify for special education services.

Each charter contract describes the funding and responsibilities for provision of services for the charter school. A charter school may 1) provide all of the services in compliance with federal special education laws; 2) pay the district a predetermined amount of money for the district to provide the services to the charter school; 3) contract for the services needed. Some charters are written with a combination of these appropriations. Importantly, while charter schools can obtain waivers from teacher licensure, special

education licensure requirements cannot be waived. Schools must also allow the administrator or classroom teacher to participate in staffing meetings.

Charter schools often offer special education services differently than their district counterparts. Furthermore, services may be offered by special education-certified teachers who are hired by the charter school and function as regular staff, or by special education teachers provided by the district or authorizer. There are advantages and disadvantages for both approaches. Special education teachers who are hired by the school will generally have more time to spend with the school's students, but they may be more expensive than hiring a part-time person from the district or authorizer. If the number of service hours offered is less than full-time, it may be more difficult for the charter school to find job applicants who are interested in the part-time hours. Either way, the most important consideration is that the charter school students are being served appropriately and to their greatest benefit.

Resource: Publication entitled, *Fast Facts: How is Special Education Provided in Charter Schools in Colorado?* Can be found at: http://www.cde.state.co.us/artemis/ed14_16/ed14402c382001internet.pdf

Resource: The CDE Web site contains information on special education and gifted and talented programming at: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/sped/index.htm>

Resource: Colorado Charter Schools Special Education Guidebook can be found at: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/sped/pdf/charterspedguidebk_08-2008.pdf

Resource: A study entitled, "Special Education Services in Colorado Charter Schools: Surveying Perceptions of Charter School Administrators and Special Education Directors, 2006" can be found at: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/sped/pdf/charterSpedreport2006.pdf>

Resource: Information about the Response to Intervention system can be found at: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/rti/>

504 Plans

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act specifies that no one with a disability can be excluded from participating in federally funded programs or activities; this section applies to students in elementary, secondary or postsecondary schools. "Disability" in this context refers to a "physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more major life activities." This can include physical impairments; illnesses or injuries; communicable diseases; chronic conditions like asthma, allergies and diabetes; and learning difficulties. A 504 plan spells out the modifications and accommodations that will be needed for these students to have an opportunity to perform at the same level as their peers, and might include such things as wheelchair ramps, blood sugar monitoring, an extra set of textbooks, a peanut-free lunch environment, home instruction, or a tape recorder or keyboard for taking notes.

Resource: Information about 504 plans can be located at: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/504Info.asp>

Resource: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Link: <http://www.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/idea2004.html>

English Language Learners (ELL)

According to the English Language Proficiency Act (ELPA), districts are required to identify and support students whose dominant language is not English and whose academic performance is hindered because of a language barrier. Charter schools must comply with this law and may establish a variety of support provisions with their districts. The ELPA program is funded annually on a per pupil basis. Programs eligible for funding under ELPA include bilingual education, ESL and other methods of achieving the English language proficiency.

Resource: CDE Web site: English Language Acquisition: Language, Culture and Equity Unit home page: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cde_english/index.htm

Resource: CDE Web site: Home page for Language, Culture and Equity Unit:
http://www.cde.state.co.us/cde_english/index.htm

Resource: Teaching Reading to ELL students:
http://www.cde.state.co.us/coloradoliteracy/crf/downloads/resources/presentations/ELL_Info.pdf

Resource: Overview of Accommodations Manual for English Language Learners:
http://www.cde.state.co.us/cde_english/download/Resources-Links/Accommodations%20OVERVIEW.pdf

Gifted and Talented

The CDE Web site states: "Gifted and talented children" refers to those persons between the ages of five and twenty-one whose abilities, talents, and potential for accomplishment are so exceptional or developmentally advanced that they require special provisions to meet their educational programming needs. Children under five who are gifted may also be provided with early childhood special educational services. Gifted students include gifted students with disabilities (i.e. twice exceptional) and students with exceptional abilities or potential from all socio-economic and ethnic, cultural populations. Gifted students are capable of high performance, exceptional production, or exceptional learning behavior by virtue of any or a combination of these areas of giftedness:

- General or specific intellectual ability
- Specific academic aptitude
- Creative or productive thinking
- Leadership abilities
- Visual arts, performing arts, musical or psychomotor abilities

An Advanced Learning Plan (ALP) is "a written record of gifted and talented programming utilized with each gifted child and considered in educational planning and decision making." C.R.S. 22-20-103—Criteria for ALPs, is detailed in the Rules promulgated by the State Board of Education. ALPs may be electronic or paper versions, and are to be reviewed annually.

The ALP is a direct link between the student profile created during the identification process and the implementation of programming services matched to the child's strengths and interests. ALPs are a planning guide for making instructional decisions about materials, programming options and assessments for gifted students based upon strengths, interests, and social-emotional needs. They are critical in the transition of gifted students from one level of schooling to the next and from school to school. The ALP should include information about the student's areas of strength and what curriculum and programming options will be provided to match these strengths at tiers 2 (targeted) and 3 (intensive). It should describe the differentiation methods to be used for acceleration, depth and complexity, higher order thinking skills and content extensions.

Resource: CDE link to talented and gifted information: http://www.cde.state.co.us/gt/download/pdf/FF_G-Ed_ALP.pdf

Resource: CDE Web site contains information on talented and gifted students:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/gt/index.htm>

Resource: Information on identification for gifted students:
http://www.cde.state.co.us/gt/download/pdf/Guidelines_2nd_Edition.pdf

Resource: Information on programming for gifted students can be found at:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/gt/download/pdf/GiftedEdGuidelines.pdf>

Resource: Information on twice exceptional students is located at:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/gt/download/pdf/TwiceExceptionalResourceHandbook.pdf>

Student Support Services

Response to Intervention (RtI)

Response to Intervention is a framework that promotes a well-integrated system connecting general, compensatory, gifted, and special education in providing high quality, standards-based instruction and intervention that is matched to students' academic, social-emotional, and behavioral needs. More detailed information about RtI can be found on CDE's Web site.

Some points to consider when implementing RtI programs:

- Have the RtI process and procedures for all levels of intervention ready at the time school begins.
- While it will be good to have staff input, this is a crucial piece that must be in place before the school year begins in order to have the maximum effect.
- Having established interventions in place at the beginning of the school year will allow all staff to follow the same protocols and expectations.
- Having established interventions will create consistency and help communication with staff and families.

Resource: CDE Web site pages on RtI are located at: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/RtI/>

Counseling

Depending on the grades and numbers of students served, most schools employ a school counselor to address the social/emotional needs of students. Additionally, depending on the mission of the charter school, the counseling staff may also support college and career counseling.

Social/Emotional Counseling: According to Colorado Connections for Healthy Schools, essential functions of school counseling, psychological and social services include direct services and instruction; developing systems, programs, services and resources; and connecting school and community resources.

School counseling, psychological and social services provide the following benefits to students and the school:

- Most school administrators, board members, teachers, parents and students realize that for students to benefit from their school, society must address social, emotional and physical health problems and other major barriers to learning.
- School-based mental health services, with the involvement and support of families and educators, improve educational outcomes by addressing behavioral and emotional issues and other barriers to learning.
- Youth receiving mental health services have experienced decreases in course failures, absences, and disciplinary referrals and improved grade point averages.
- Children who participated in social service interventions aimed at promoting student success by improving parent-child and parent-teacher communication resulted in improved academic performance.

College and Career Counseling: Depending on the grades of students and the mission of the charter school, some schools integrate college and career counseling into their program. College counselors establish and maintain relationships with colleges and universities and support students in the college selection and application process. Counseling departments also monitor students' academic records and aid in the course selection and graduation process.

High schools that are vocationally focused should consider school-to-work resources such as School to Career Partnership, which helps students K-12 understand the link between education and their career opportunities and options.

Resource: Colorado Connection for Healthy Schools:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeprevention/eightcomponents.htm>

Resource: Information on School to Career Partnership:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/schooltocareer/download/pdf/parent.pdf>

School Psychologist

School psychologists are the mental health professionals who help children and youth overcome barriers to success in school, at home, and in life. They use many different strategies to address individual needs, as well as enhance systems that support students on school and district-wide levels. School psychologists lower barriers to healthy learning and behavior through intervention, prevention, assessment, consultation, and advocacy. School psychologists work with parents, educators, and other mental health service providers to help each child develop resiliency, competence, and self esteem, resulting in improving the lives and learning of children and youth. Many charter schools contract with their districts for a portion of time for a school psychologist, especially concerning Special Education assessments and IEP development in a staffing meeting.

Resource: A Guide to School Mental Health Services can be found at:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/download/pdf/Guide2MntlHlthSvcs.pdf>

Resource: Information about the Colorado Society of School Psychologists is located at:
<http://www.cssponline.org/>

Speech-Language Pathologist

Federal and state special education laws and regulations require public school districts to identify, assess and evaluate students from birth through 21 years of age, and then provide speech and language services to students who exhibit speech-language impairments that adversely affect educational performance.

Colorado policy states that speech-language services are special education instructional services and not a related service. Given the critical linkage between speech-language skills and literacy, the underlying purpose of that policy has been to ensure that children who meet the criteria for a speech-language impairment and who need speech-language services would be eligible for special education.

Resource: Colorado Guidelines for Speech-Language Assessment and Eligibility can be found at:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/SD-SLL.asp>

Resource: Guidelines on speech-language requirements is located at:
http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/download/pdf/Guidance_SLOTPT_2009April1.pdf

Therapies Outside Special Services

Please consult with the Colorado Department of Education and/or your authorizer regarding situations where students require therapies that fall outside the boundaries of IDEA and ECEA, such as occupational therapy or physical therapy. In most cases, unless the condition is directly connected to a student's need for special education services, the therapies will be considered unrelated to rules governing special education services.

Resource: A memo that addresses specific therapies outside the boundaries of IDEA and ECEA can be found at: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/download/pdf/Guidance_SLOTPT_2009April1.pdf

Student Records and Performance (Data) Management

Keeping track of students once they are enrolled is an important task for an administrator. Additionally, the effective use of data on student and school performance is critically important to charter schools given the No Child Left Behind Act, Colorado's education accountability requirements, and the state's focus on closing the achievement gap. In addition, the regular use of data to inform decision making is a characteristic of effective schools. Data-driven decision making is facilitated by the use of high quality performance management strategies and technologies that gather, organize, analyze, report, and share information about student and school performance.

Performance Management

The ultimate goal of an effective performance management system is to create a data-driven culture in which a school not only collects and analyzes student achievement data but uses it on an administrative level to make key operational decisions, and in the classrooms to guide instructional practice to best meet the challenges and strengths of students. In addition, charter school governing boards in high performing charter schools use data to make strategic decisions and inform school improvement efforts.

In choosing a performance management strategy, school leaders should assess their school's needs and capacities and evaluate the functionality, costs, and ease of implementation of any prospective system, including those currently used by their district or authorizer. The Colorado League of Charter School's Web site also has helpful information about different aspects of performance management (link provided below).

Resource: The Colorado League of Charter School's Web site contains helpful information about creating a data driven school culture: <http://www.coloradoleague.org/index.php>

Student Information System (SIS)

A Student Information System (SIS) is an important part of an effective performance management strategy. A SIS is software that collects and stores student contact and demographic data and tracks grades and attendance in a database sitting either on a local school network or online. There are many SISs available, each with differing functionality and potential for expansion. Popular SISs in Colorado include Infinite Campus and PowerSchool.

Providing parents with access to student records such as attendance, grades, assignments and homework status can be a powerful tool for teachers and administrators in supporting student accountability. Research shows that parents who have access to Web-based academic records feel better informed about their children's schoolwork, are more involved in their children's academic lives and feel that the system allows for better and quicker communication with teachers.⁴⁰

Some considerations for determining which SIS is best for your school include the following:

- What SIS is currently used by your district/authorizer and what is the cost of using it for your school?
- You will need to provide data to your district/authorizer on your students and also will want the authorizer to transfer data to you. If you are choosing to use another system than your authorizer, do you have a written arrangement for sharing data with your district/authorizer?
- What is the cost of the system including setup, licensing, equipment, security requirements, ongoing management and training? How will you handle upgrades to the system and other maintenance?

⁴⁰ Sonak, Suen, Zappe, & Hunter, 2002, April. *The Efforts of a Web-Based Academic Record and Feedback System on Student Achievement at the Junior High School Level*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED465768).

- How will necessary training for implementation and ongoing use fit with your school’s professional development schedule and budget?

Interim Assessments

The next critical step in having an effective performance management strategy is having rigorous, research-based interim assessments in place. Employing a measure other than the CSAP to look at student progress longitudinally offers some tremendous advantages like utilizing a different testing cycle (i.e., fall-spring) which then enables schools to periodically measure student performance multiple times throughout the year and receive quick results that aid schools in making data-driven decisions during the school year. Popular interim assessments among Colorado charters include AimsWeb, Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA), Scantron, Acuity, ITBS, SAT 10, EXPLORE, PLAN, etc.

When deciding on assessments to be used at your school, consider the following:

- For what purposes will you use the assessment at your school?
- If the assessment is computerized, is it “computer adaptive?” That is, does the testing system adjust the difficulty of questions based on student responses? If the assessment is computerized, do you have the technology infrastructure to support the implementation? Do you have enough computers and adequate lab space for the testing days?
- What standards and tests (i.e., CSAP) will you choose to align with the assessment? Does your curriculum align with the assessment?
- Are other schools in the district/charter community using the same assessment? If so, have you connected with any of those folks to talk about likes/dislikes, etc?
- How will necessary training fit with your school’s professional development schedule and budget?
- What is the cost of the system including setup, licensing, implementation, equipment, security requirements, and ongoing management? How will upgrades be provided? What, if any, hardware upgrades are needed for the school to use the assessment? How will training be provided- for example, through your district, vendor, the League, CDE?

Performance Data Management Systems

Another critical component of an effective performance management system is the Web-based system that stores student information from different sources, such as SISs, interim assessments, and standardized test publishers. A data management system links the systems together. Combining this data in one system allows for quick analysis of multiple student indicators. The objective of such a system is to create a single, powerful source of key student, school and organizational information that enables the data to be translated into an actionable format, supporting sustained improvement. Popular data management systems among Colorado charters include Alpine Achievement, Edusoft, Inform, and other district created systems such as Scholarsmart, CSNAP, Enrich, etc.

When finalizing a decision about a data management system, consider the following:

- What are your analytical needs; what questions do you want to answer? Data management systems come at different price points, each with differing functionality. For example, some incorporate curriculum, build lesson plans and tests for teachers, etc.
- What is your capacity? In other words, how will the system create and maintain your data driven culture and engage *all* staff in conversations around data?
- What is the cost of the system including setup, licensing, implementation, equipment, security requirements, ongoing management and training? How will upgrades be provided?
- How will training be provided and how does it fit with your school’s professional development schedule and budget?

Privacy Concerns Related to Performance Data Management Systems

Families have certain rights with regard to their children’s education records under the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA). Parents have a right to inspect and review student’s education records maintained by the school. They can request that a school correct records they believe to be inaccurate or misleading. Additional information about FERPA and its application to student records can be found by following the link below.

Resource: FERPA text can be found at:

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/adm/pdf/FERPAModelNotice05.pdf>

Resource: U.S. Department of Education, Family Compliance Office can be found at:

<http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco>

Relevant CSSI Standards:

CSSI 4.1f Staff members are assigned to maximize opportunities for all students to have access to the staff’s instructional strengths.

CSSI 4.1g Teachers regularly communicate with families about each student’s progress.

CSSI 4.1i Multiple communication strategies and contexts are used for the dissemination of information to all stakeholders.

CSSI 5.1c The school maintains an accurate, secure student record system that provides timely information pertinent to the student’s academic and educational development.

CSSI 7.1b School leadership disaggregates data, communicates the information to school staff, and systematically incorporates the data into the school’s improvement plan.

CSSI Standard 9: Organizational Effectiveness – Comprehensive and Effective Planning

CSSI 9.1b The school planning process involves collecting, managing, and analyzing data.

CSSI 9.1c The school analyzes and uses a variety of data to set goals for school improvement.

CSSI 9.1e School goals for student learning are clearly defined.

CSSI 9.1f Methods to achieve school goals are identified in clear, specific action steps.

CSSI 9.1g The means for evaluating the effectiveness of the improvement plan are established.

CSSI 9.1h The school improvement plan is implemented as developed.

CSSI 9.1i The school evaluates the degree to which it achieves the goals and objectives for student learning set by the school improvement plan.

CSSI 9.1j The school sustains a commitment to continuous improvement.

Compliance: FERPA text can be found at:

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/adm/pdf/FERPAModelNotice05.pdf>

Enrollment and General Operation

Setting up an organizational structure, recruiting and hiring a qualified staff, creating a fiscally sound budget and all the other effort put forth to open a school is for the ultimate purpose of enrolling students. Driven by your vision and mission, the enrollment process is one of the most important tasks you will undertake as an administrator. Your district or authorizer will likely guide the process you must follow for enrolling students and for general school operation. This section provides some general information about the enrollment process, structuring the school calendar, activities, safety and risk management.

Enrollment

Enrollment of students is the ultimate testament to the viability of the programs and organizational structure you establish; indeed, it is the school's lifeline. Your student recruitment plan is one of the most important tasks to develop and execute during the startup phase. Since your revenues are based on the number of students attending your school, it is critical that you are able to enroll the number of students stated in your charter application and contract with your authorizer. It goes without saying that significant under-enrollment affects the financial health of your school and the quality of the programming you are available to provide.

Advertising and Promotion

The number and types of students you serve should be driven by your school's vision and mission. How you plan and execute your outreach activities to inform the community about your school will have a long-term impact on your success. Your recruitment activities should be based on a good understanding of the educational niche your school is designed to fill and, equally important, a sensitivity to the needs of the immediate community. It is imperative that your marketing materials and school communications be created in multiple languages, depending on the needs of your targeting community. Methods of advertising the school may include:

- Hold parent and student open enrollment meetings.
- Develop a press release with dates for your open enrollment information sessions.
- Develop a PowerPoint for the open enrollment sessions.
- Develop supporting marketing materials for distribution through a variety of channels.
- Place advertisements in the open enrollment or school choice sections of your local newspaper.
- Place fliers in local community areas.
- Host a booth at community events, such as local hometown fairs, and distribute fliers or brochures.
- Place radio advertisements.
- Distribute fliers or brochures door to door in targeted neighborhoods.
- Join the local chamber of commerce.
- Ensure your Web site is inviting and clearly states open enrollment information.
- Depending on your program level, contact potential feeder schools and ask to distribute information through them.

Lottery

The Charter Schools Act allows the authorizer and the charter applicant the flexibility to use any enrollment policy, such as a wait list or lottery. Federal funds distributed through the federal Charter School Grant Program and administered by CDE require the use of a lottery while funds are being spent. Many charter schools have elected to use a lottery in order to access these startup and implementation grant funds. More information on lottery requirements can be found in the grant's Request for Proposals at <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/cchgrn00.htm>.

State law does require a public charter school to not discriminate on the basis of disability, race, creed, color, gender, national origin, religion, ancestry, or need for special education services. Charter school lottery policies should address the following elements:

- The date of the annual lottery.
- The definition of a “founding family.”
- How the community will receive adequate notice about the formation of a new charter school.
- Any requirement for parents to reaffirm their intent to enroll on an annual basis.
- The process for names not drawn in the lottery.
- How siblings of enrolled students are handled in the process.
- How long parents have to make a decision on whether or not their child will attend the school.

Resource: National Alliance for Public Charter Schools’ Web site can be accessed at:

<http://www.publiccharters.org/>

Resource: A Lottery Day Tool Kit created by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools can be viewed at: <http://www.publiccharters.org/Lottery+Day+Tool+Kit>

A charter school lottery day event allows families of applicant students to gather together at the school for an exciting lottery event to learn who will attend the school the following year. It presents a wonderful opportunity to draw media attention to the demand for quality charters, grow awareness among families of the availability of quality schools of choice, and create an opportunity for charters to communicate their quality and success.

The Enrollment Application

According to state law, a charter school shall be subject to all federal and state laws and constitutional provisions prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability, race, creed, color, gender, national origin, religion, ancestry, or need for special education services. You may request basic demographic and school history information. Enrollment decisions must be made in a nondiscriminatory manner specified by the charter school applicant in the charter school application. As an example of information that may be requested in an application, BVSD’s open enrollment Web site states that parents or guardians should have the following information available before starting to complete the district’s online open enrollment form:

- Demographic information for your student, parent/guardians and other household members.
- Emergency contacts information, including health care provider contact information.
- Educational history for student.
- Health information for student.
- Special needs information for student.
- Immunization records.

Calendar and Activities

Not only do yearly calendars and daily schedules ensure that sufficient instructional time is being provided, they are also integral to the operations process. School year start and end dates, as well as daily start and end times, have implications for student recruitment, staff retention, transportation and food services planning. This is especially true if your schedule is significantly different than nearby schools.

When establishing your school calendar, ensure the minimum number of instructional hours required by statute are met [C.R.S. 22-32-109 (1) (n)]. Consider the number of contact days per year that are required by your district or authorizer, special schedules that you may decide to use such as block schedules, professional development days for staff, school assemblies, the lunch schedule’s impact on instructional time as well as time for recess in the elementary grades. Be sure to publish the school calendar for the school community as early as possible, and provide an opportunity for parents and staff to give input prior to finalizing it each year.

School Calendar

The master calendar should include as many events as possible before the school year starts. From the master calendar, the office staff or administrator can develop other levels of calendars for specific audiences, such as parents, students and staff. A link to the parent/student calendar(s) should be included on the school's Web site. Teachers should also have online access to the faculty calendar. The high-level calendar showing vacation and professional development days should also be sent home to families or included in the school directory. Some dates to remember for the calendar(s):

- Start and end dates for the school year and school day
- End of quarters and grading periods.
- Closure notice information
- Teacher professional development and other non-contact days
- Vacation days
- Professional development days
- Parent/teacher conferences
- Academic awards nights
- Testing such as CSAP, AP/IB, ACT, etc
- Major assessments
- Social events such as dances, activity nights, talent shows, and assemblies
- Student performances and plays
- Graduation date and major associated activities
- Progress reports sent
- Expected dates and times for grades to be updated if an online grade book is available
- Activities and athletics schedules
- Student competitions such as spelling bee, speech and debate meets, and science or math competitions
- Fundraisers such as parent auctions, student fun runs and dine-out nights
- Faculty/administrator evaluations timeline
- Staff meetings
- Board meetings
- Committee meetings
- Student meetings

Some suggestions for creating a master calendar that will best serve students and teachers include:

- Build in a late start or early release as often as possible, preferably once a month. There will be a tremendous need to meet with staff on a regular basis, especially in the first few years. Having a late start or early release will create the time for professional development and school business vital for success in the first few years.
- Schedule full staff and level meetings to discuss vital instructional skills and expectations on a regular basis; discuss weekly goals for staff, students and school; understand major assessments coming due; and plan ahead and discuss upcoming events.
- Build an assessment calendar with teachers before school starts. On this calendar, limit the number of assessments on any given day or week and inform staff of assessments being given by other teachers. Also, post the assessment calendar for each grade level in the school, online and in communication sent home. Finally, train teachers, students and parents to use the assessment calendar to plan for field trips, appointments and planned absences.
- Create a reasonable amount of workload for staff and students.

- Create opportunities to train teachers together on different types of assessments, to train teachers to use rubrics, and to train teachers to correctly assess written responses. Also, create a training process for each type of assessment.

Activities and Events (During and After Hours)

Numerous other activities and events require careful planning to ensure a smooth and enjoyable experience for all participants. The following sections describe questions to ask and things to consider in event planning.

Assemblies: Before the start of the school year, determine the purpose and types of assemblies you will have, such as pep assemblies, awards assemblies, character assemblies, sports banquets, etc. It is important to ensure that each assembly has a clear purpose, as student behavior is typically better when expectations are clear. Considerations when planning an assembly include:

- Determine who will create the agenda.
- Determine seating arrangement (will each grade level sit together?).
- Determine who will set up and clean up.
- What are the behavior expectations for students and who will clearly communicate these expectations to the students?
- How are speakers determined?
- Who will be in charge if there is an emergency?
- What are the emergency procedures during an assembly?

Social Events Outside the School Day: For any social event outside the school day, first clearly define the purpose of the event and then determine the location for the event. Be sure to establish the protocols for each event and train students on social event behavior and expectations. Some suggestions to consider for each social event include the following:

- Dress code is likely different for the social event; discuss with students beforehand.
- Be prepared for students who do not follow dress code (what will you do if someone shows up in jeans and jeans are not allowed dress for this dance?).
- Do not allow students to leave the event and then return later.
- Have any student who leaves excessively early call his parents to let them know he is leaving the event at that time. This is especially important for students who do not drive themselves.
- How will you support students who cannot afford the event or its dress code?
- Ensure there is enough staff on duty to cover all exits and key areas.
- Create safety procedures for the event.
- What will you do in an emergency? Who will you contact for building emergency? How will you communicate with local officials if necessary?
- How will you handle a student's request to invite students from another school?
- Will you have an age limit (on both ends) for students who can attend?

Parent/Teacher Communication and Conferences: Good communication is the key to developing and maintaining a good relationship with parents and the community. As the standard for communication between all stakeholders at the school, set clear guidelines regarding expectations on communication protocols as well as the expected communication pathways for each person to follow. It is important to set clear expectations regarding how staff is expected to communicate with parents as well as how staff should document that communication. Additionally, consider how you will introduce yourself to parents as well as the forms of communication you will send on a regular basis.

Before the start of the school year, schedule parent/teacher conferences. A sample plan for establishing the purpose and procedures for parent/teacher conferences is as follows:

- Determine the purpose of the conferences.
- Determine the time necessary to accomplish this purpose.
- Determine how you will hold teachers and parents to the established time limits. In general, time limits work. The challenge is managing the parent or teacher who grossly abuses the established time limits. Determine what you will do if a parent or teacher does not follow the time limits.
- Determine how parents will know which teacher(s) they need to see; how will you get them their child's schedule?
- Determine how the staff will receive breaks, including dinner if necessary.
- Determine who will create signs, print schedules, arrange set up and clean up, and make sign-in rosters.
- Determine what data will be collected, how the data will be collected and how the data will be used.
- Determine how you will address a staff member's absence, prearranged or otherwise.
- Determine the counselors' and administrators' roles during conferences.

Before and After School Care: Many elementary schools offer before and after school care services for families. Schools can either contract out for this service or they can develop their own program. If the school manages the program internally, be sure to meet all state requirements as these requirements are different for child care versus the school day. Additionally, some schools develop arrangements with local day care centers to pick up children after school and transport them to the day care facility.

Administrators should be aware of fiscal requirements for public funds not to be co-mingled with funds raised from private endeavors. In the case of before and after school care programs, make sure to maintain separate budgets and do not mix funds.

Food Services

There are four ways that a charter school can approach food service. A school can contract with its authorizer, contract with a private food service provider, provide food service on its own, or not provide food service at all. In the last case, families would be responsible for providing their own lunch.

If a school does provide food service, there are sources of revenue to help and there are regulations to follow. Specifically, if a charter school provides food service through its authorizer, it would have the opportunity to participate in federal Nutrition Programs, which include National School Lunch, School Breakfast, After School Snack, and Special Milk. Participation in these programs allows for more funding, but also comes with regulations. The charter school would need to work closely with its authorizer to properly implement these programs. Also, the authorizer is not required to provide food services. That is something that is negotiated in the charter and the authorizers' willingness and/or ability to provide services may be impacted by physical limitations in the charter school facility or other factors.

If a school contracts with a private provider, the school is still responsible for the program, including the facility requirements. If any food is prepared on site, the school will need Health Department approval of the space. Regardless of how food services are provided, issues of staffing, supervision, space, health, and availability of nutritional food for all students must be considered and managed. Management time and staffing in dealing with lunch room issues should not be underestimated.

Resource: Colorado Charter School Handbook is located at:

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/charterhbk.htm>

Compliance: Information on school nutrition can be found on the CDE Web site at the following address:

www.cde.state.co.us/index_nutrition.htm

Transportation and Busing

It is not required that charter schools provide transportation services. The decision to do so or not to do so is impacted by many factors. If a charter school chooses to provide transportation services, it may contract with its authorizer for services, contract with a private transportation company, or provide services on its own.

If the charter school provides transportation services on its own, it must meet federal and CDE regulations with regards to transportation. Generally, these regulations cover standards for vehicles, training for vehicle operators, transportation routes, and safety standards. The school also must take into consideration the budget and insurance implications of providing transportation.

Whether or not the charter school provides transportation on a daily basis, there are transportation issues to be considered. Depending on several factors, such as grade levels, school program, facility location, land/facility characteristics, etc., plans for the following should be considered:

- Daily traffic pattern in the morning and afternoon.
- Procedures for pick-up and drop-off of students.
- Field trips and extracurricular activities.
- Transportation for special needs students when required as part of an IEP.

Again, with the exception of IEP required transportation, the charter school may choose to provide transportation or not. If the school does not provide transportation, it still must be aware of legal and insurance issues involved with other solutions. For instance, if school staff or parent volunteers are used to provide transportation to students, they may or may not be covered by their own insurance and the charter school may or may not be liable. These are legal and risk management issues that need to be understood with professional guidance.

Resource: Colorado Charter School Handbook can be found at:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/charterhbk.htm>

Compliance: CDE transportation regulations can be found at:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdenutritran/transregulations.htm>

Safety and Risk Management

Administrators have a duty to prevent crisis through proactive planning and diligent oversight. By definition, however, crisis situations are not planned; they sometimes just happen. Every school needs a thoughtful crisis management plan to handle potentially dangerous situations in order to ensure the safety and well being of students, staff and community members, and to protect people and property. Beyond student academic achievement, safety is an administrator's number one priority. Below are some quick tips for ensuring the safety of everyone at the school:

- Establish operating procedures for each emergency.
- Identify an emergency response team that has specific responsibilities during an emergency. Detail team members' individual roles for different types of emergencies.
- Practice all necessary drills at regular intervals (monthly or bimonthly, as appropriate).
- Post emergency procedures in each classroom and other rooms as appropriate.
- Work with local safety officials to ensure your protocols are aligned.
- Invite local officials to watch drills on a yearly basis. Monitor and adjust drills as necessary.
- Create an action plan for each major drill: fire, intrusion, medical emergency, student emergency (belligerent, uncooperative, endangering other students or staff) and others deemed necessary by board, administration and local officials.
- Create a site evacuation plan, with a designated place to meet off campus in a location that is communicated with parents. Practice drills for this situation at least once per year.

Safety, risk and crisis management protocols will most likely be defined by the district in which each school operates. Most districts have a designated crisis management team that can help with specific situations. A crisis management plan will generally cover the following areas: violence and crime, medical issues, weather emergencies, and facility issues. More Information about these specific topics is provided below.

Relevant CSSI Standard:

CSSI 7.1f School leadership ensures the implementation and maintenance of a safe and effective learning and work environment.

Emergency Communication

When a safety or health issue that affects the student body occurs, be proactive in your communication with parents and contact them by letter, email or phone as appropriate as soon as possible after the incident. Parents have a right to know about unusual activity at their child's school.

In the midst of a crisis situation, first identify all students involved and pull those students' emergency cards. Communicate directly with the affected students, staff and parents. Be sure to contact at least one parent in each affected family and preferably all parents of each affected student. If a student has died, contact the parents in person; never telephone news of a death.

After a crisis or during an ongoing emergency, develop fact-based talking points and instruct anyone answering telephones to work only from these talking points. Do not release information specific to any individual student(s).⁴¹ Prepare a letter to parents and share updates with parents as warranted. If necessary, keep the school open after hours to answer questions, provide counseling or other help. Finally, develop information for staff, including information from the letter to parents. The communication should also include appropriate follow-up measures for staff members.

As an administrator, be available to students, staff and parents during and after a crisis to provide information as well as emotional comfort and support. Consult with your district or authorizer for protocols around situations that may require crisis counseling or school closure.

Drills

As part of your school's emergency planning and procedures policies, you are required to instruct and train your students on how to exit the building in the shortest possible time without confusion or panic. The instruction must be in the form of fire drills or rapid dismissals. Having and communicating a clear plan and expectations will ensure the staff and students take safety drills seriously, which in turn allows the administration to establish clear behavior expectations and goals for appropriate behaviors. If the drill practice begins the first day of school, the climate expectations are also established at this time. Using the first day to practice the drill establishes your priority of safety for all.

Fire Drills: The following action steps and questions provide a framework for conducting effective fire drills:

- Determine safety routes for each classroom and office.
- Determine location for each classroom and office to check for attendance.
- Create classroom maps of fire exits.
- Create safety procedures to be used during drills and emergencies.
- Plan the training of staff and students.
- Walk the staff through the procedures:
 - What are teachers expected to do during the drills?
 - What are students expected to do during the drills?

⁴¹ Adapted from the Boulder Valley School District *Crisis Management Quick Guide: A Guide and Resources for Managing Crisis Situations*

- What is support staff to do during the drills?
- What will administration do during drills?

Establish time expectations; specifically, make sure you can answer the following questions:

- How quickly do you expect the building to be cleared?
- How quickly do you expect everyone to take attendance?
- How quickly do you expect learning to begin after the drill?
- Who will check bathrooms, locker rooms and other areas of the school for students who were not in the classroom at the time the drill began?

Finally, here are some practical tips for planning and executing effective fire drills:

- Practice the drill with the expectations clearly outlined to staff and students. Be sure to determine all dates for fire drills, and determine which will be announced to staff and which will not be announced to staff. Do not inform students after the first drill.
- Debrief with administration and staff after each drill to ensure safety procedures, cards, communication is all working as expected.
- Be prepared to monitor and adjust the procedures after the first few drills.
- Do NOT laminate the emergency cards until after the system has been used several times.
- After the procedure is running smoothly, begin “taking” students to ensure attendance checks are working. The teacher(s) should be holding red cards and getting administration for confirmation of missing student.
- Continue to reinforce expectations for time and behavior.

Tornado Drills: The most important part of tornado safety in schools is to develop a good tornado safety plan tailored to your building design and ability to move people. Ideally, the lowest possible level is the safest. However, in some large schools, there may not be enough time to direct all occupants of the upper floors into safe areas, or enough space in those lowest-floor safe areas to hold everyone. Ultimately, the school administrators need to evaluate the time, space, traffic flow and coordination needed to direct all the students and staff down into safe areas in an organized manner. That will require a customized drill which will vary from building to building, so the guidelines here must be rather open-ended by necessity.

A carefully developed tornado drill should be run several times a year to keep students and staff in good practice, and to work out any kinks in the drill before it is needed for real. Also, large and easy to read maps or signs with arrows should be posted throughout the hallways directing people to the safe areas. Here are some other important tips:

- If the school's alarm system relies on electricity, have a compressed air horn or megaphone to sound the alert in case of power failure.
- Make special provisions for disabled students and those in portable classrooms. Portable classrooms are like mobile homes: exceptionally dangerous in a tornado.
- Make sure someone knows how to turn off electricity and gas in the event the school is damaged.
- Keep children at school beyond regular hours if threatening weather is expected; and inform parents of this policy. Children are safer deep within a school than in a car. Students should not be sent home early if severe weather is approaching, because they may still be out on the roads when it hits.
- Lunches or assemblies in large rooms should be postponed if severe weather is approaching. Gymnasiums, cafeterias, and auditoriums offer no meaningful protection from tornado-strength winds. Also, even if there is no tornado, severe thunderstorms can generate winds strong enough to cause major damage.

- Know the county in which your school sits, and keep a highway map nearby to follow storm movement from weather bulletins. Online maps and weather sources can be valuable, but if the power is out, it helps to have paper maps.
- Have a NOAA Weather Radio with a warning alarm tone and battery back-up to receive warnings quickly and directly from your local National Weather Service office. A technology called WRSAME allows you to set such weather radios to alarm for your county and surrounding counties; so look for the WRSAME feature when purchasing weather radio units.
- Listen to radio and television for information when severe weather is likely. Outlooks and watches from the Storm Prediction Center can also help you be aware of the possibility of severe weather during the school day.⁴²
- The school will need a portable first aid kit.

Intruder / Lock Down Drills: Lock down drills should be practiced at least once per year. If a lock down becomes necessary, make an appropriate announcement over the intercom and then follow these instructions as appropriate:

Lock down level 1 means that a threat exists outside of building and off campus.

- Bring all students and staff inside.
- Lock classroom doors and windows, close blinds and shades, cover windows with black paper.
- Classroom activities continue as normal; everyone wait for further instructions.
- If your students are at lunch, report to the café and escort students to class. Students may bring lunches with them.
- Classes may pass inside the building. Depending on the situation, classes may or may not pass outside the building.
- Parent volunteers stay in the classrooms and follow procedures.
- Report missing children.

Lock down level 2 means that the threat is on campus; there is acute danger in the immediate vicinity.

- If outside, evacuate to previously agreed upon location.
- If inside, lock all doors and windows, pull blinds, use black paper. Turn out the lights. Keep quiet.
- Use interior rooms if possible.
- Have everyone get down on the floor and underneath desks and away from windows as much as possible.
- Do NOT go to lunch or pick up these children. Stay in your designated area.
- Use red/green cards in outside windows to indicate status. Red = distress, Green = OK.
- If children are at lunch, evacuate to the kitchen area if possible.
- No one moves from a safe location until instructed to do so.
- Report missing children.

Visitors and Volunteers

Schools are busy places with many people coming and going throughout the day. Charter schools are no exception. Policies that set boundaries around visitors to the school are necessary to ensure the safety of everyone on campus and to protect the instructional environment from interruptions. Uniform written rules regulating visitors to the schools are to be based upon the need for preserving the environment necessary to effectively conduct the educational process. Many charter schools will adopt from their authorizer or district a set of policies that govern visitor access to the facility. These policies generally require that all visitors check in with the front office, sign a visitor log and obtain a visitor badge, so they are easily identifiable to employees and students. School visitors are required to report to the office of the school principal at the time of entering a school building.

⁴² Adapted from procedures published by the Storm Prediction Center in Norman, Oklahoma;
<http://www.spc.noaa.gov/faq/tornado/school.html>

Safety On Campus

Protocols for on-campus safety should be established before the school opens, and they should be revised as needed once the school is operating. Campus safety plans should articulate guidelines for ensuring safety in every area of the facility, including classrooms, hallways, bathrooms and common areas. They should also include safety procedures for areas outside the school, including playgrounds, parking lots, crosswalks and sidewalks near the school where students walk. Establishing a specific traffic flow pattern for drop off and pick up procedures is essential, particularly in charter schools where it is common for parent drivers and carpools to be the primary mode of transportation. Educate parents and other drivers about these patterns, and be diligent about enforcing the established protocols.

Create strict policies and procedures about who has access to the school facility, including times and days. Keep up-to-date lists of people who have keys, and be sure to set up a process for retrieving keys from employees who leave their jobs. Keep a log of everyone who has ever been issued a key to the building, as this information is needed by law enforcement in the event of a break in.

Storage of hazardous chemicals is subject to Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations. In a school, these regulations apply to chemicals used in science classrooms, for custodial and maintenance purposes, and in health rooms, kitchens and other places where chemicals are used. In some cases, notification about the presence of potentially hazardous chemicals and special storage is required. Please consult with your district, authorizer or other appropriate entity with specific questions.

Resource: The Colorado School Safety Resource Center's Web site offers helpful information and trainings on school safety issues: <http://safeschools.state.co.us/>

Resource: OSHA regulations can be found on the following Web site: <http://www.osha.gov/>

Safety Off Campus

Behavioral rules and expectations that are set for students during the regular school day can generally be extended to off-campus, school-sponsored events. The procedures for setting up off-campus events should be well articulated and consistently enforced. The importance of communication before, during and after school-sponsored activities that take place off campus cannot be overstated. For field trips, in addition to obtaining written parental permission, be sure to leave an itinerary with the school that includes location, arrival and departure times, and cell phone numbers for all the adults in the group (including parent chaperones). In the case of overnight trips or excursions out of the country, establish chaperone guidelines, and consider hosting a parent meeting beforehand to gather information and support for the trip. All parent, staff or teacher drivers should leave a copy of their driver's license and insurance card in the school office prior to departure. Written policies for student transportation in buses and private vehicles should be established before any trips take place. Consult your district or authorizer about legal requirements associated with specific types of trips.

In the case of athletic events hosted off campus, establish behavioral expectations for students and spectators, as well as written procedures for transportation to and from each event. Again, communication between the school vis a vis the coaches, sponsors and the participants is essential. Clear, comprehensive itineraries for every event should be provided to the school office prior to the event.

Emergency Response Team

Look to your district or authorizer to provide training for key staff on how to handle emergency health situations at school. Many times local Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) staff will facilitate trainings for school personnel.

Schools should designate an emergency response team (ERT) of people who have specific roles during an emergency. ERT members must have current CPR and First Aid certification, and go through a training that focuses on role playing particular scenarios. Decide ahead of time who will respond to ERT calls and what

their specific roles will be. Err on the side of having more staff respond than may be necessary; once called, people can be dismissed from the scene as the situation allows, but this will ensure that each situation will have adequate staff. This approach will ensure that an adequate number of people are available to assist multiple victims as needed.

ERT Activation instructions should be posted at every phone. Designate a specific location on each card, so the pager can give precise directions to the scene. Provide training for all staff members on ERT procedures at the beginning of the school year and more frequently as needed.

Resource: Sample ERT procedures document can be found at: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/adm/pdf/ERTProceduresSample.pdf
Resource: a sample ERT teacher orientation outline is online at: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/adm/pdf/ERTTeacherOrientationsample.pdf
Resource: A sample ERT Announcement can be viewed at: http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/adm/pdf/ERTAnnouncementsample.pdf

Health Room Policies and Procedures

Charter schools are required to provide health services for students. In addition to providing a variety of different medical screenings (at the elementary school level) and intervention with students who are sick while in school, the health room personnel is also responsible for the supervision and implementation of school policies for the administration of medications to ensure the safety, health, and welfare of the students.

Regardless of whether your school has a full time nurse or shares services of a nurse with other schools, you have to give some thought to having an appropriate room set aside for nursing services that include:

- Sufficient square footage to house all necessary equipment.
- Hot and cold water.
- Floor-to-ceiling walls.
- No through-traffic.
- Telephone.
- Heat and air conditioning.
- An off-corridor room to be used as a waiting area (strongly preferred).

The health room must also be able to house a computer which will allow the nurse to access and update student records. There will also need to be secure areas to keep medications, permission slips for dispensing, and emergency medical cards.

Insurance

Charter schools must have appropriate insurance coverage. This includes workers compensation, liability insurance, and insurance for the building and its contents. Transportation may also need to be covered. Charter schools are public entities and liability is limited by the Colorado Governmental Immunity Act, C.R.S. 24-10-101 et seq. The risk management office in your local school district is a very good resource for finding information about your particular insurance needs. Also, the Colorado School District Self Insurance Pool is the insurance provider for many charter schools and can provide information. Once insurance needs are understood, costs need to be estimated and incorporated into the budget.

Relations and Communications

The ultimate success of the school is mainly measured by academic achievement. The administrator's success is also measured by academic achievement, but often success is judged by the quality of relations and communications with several different constituencies. The ability of the administrator to successfully manage several different complex relationships is a factor in determining success.

Internal Relations

Internal relations include everyone within the school building. This is best described as setting the daily culture in the school. While many individuals set the mission and the strategic direction of the school, the administrator establishes the day-to-day environment in the school.

The administrator sets the tone and establishes the expectations for how students, staff, contractors, visitors, and anyone who enters the building during a school day relate to each other. There are many different personalities and styles that work successfully, so there is no how-to guide when it comes to relating to others. However, there are a few key components that are necessary to establishing successful relations in the school building. An administrator must:

- Be aware of how the school culture impacts students and staff and know that the administrator's actions impact everyone on the campus.
- Communicate constantly, both informally and formally, with everybody in the building. The less uncertainty there is during a school day, the better everyone will perform. This includes keeping those in the building aware of anything that may affect them, such as fire inspections, special visitors, future building plans, etc.
- Communicate consistently throughout the school. People talk to each other. Nothing breaks trust faster than inconsistencies in what one person is told versus what another person is told about an issue.
- Respond in a timely way to all issues.
- Know the staff and the students.
- Establish procedures for regular communication from staff to stay informed about what is happening throughout the school.

Employee Relations

Employee relations differ from how an administrator relates to staff. While internal relations establish the day-to-day school culture and working environment, employee relations are boss/worker interactions. For purposes of this section, employee relations are listed simply as a way to point out the different type of relations that must be managed by the administrator. Formal employee relations are discussed in more detail in the "Human Resources" section of this guide.

There may be several ways that an administrator relates to individual staff. There's the relationship to the staff as a whole as discussed in internal relations. There may be a staff member who is also a parent, which leads to parental relations. There may be a social relationship, a colleague relationship, or any other number of ways to relate to one individual staff member. It is critical to understand when that relationship is an employee relationship.

Employees expect to be treated in a certain way. These expectations stem from labor laws that guarantee certain protections as well as from an individual's need to be treated fairly and equitably in the workplace. In addition to the items listed under internal relations, in order to establish effective employee relations, an administrator must:

- Be aware that your actions as a boss have a tremendous impact on employees' work lives. In fact, a boss' interactions with employees have more impact on employee morale than any other interaction they have at work.
- Communicate honestly, professionally, and clearly in all employment matters.
- Be aware of the legal implications of employer/employee interactions.
- Establish a consistent formal form of communication to and from each employee.
- Always be conscious of an employee's needs and provide opportunities to develop each employee's professional skills.

Board Relations

The board/administrator relationship is discussed in much greater detail elsewhere in this guide. Compared to all of the other relationships that the administrator is responsible for, this relationship is the most complex in two regards. First, this is the only relationship that involves one employee and many bosses. Technically, the board as one entity is typically the boss, but the board is also made up of several individual personalities. Second, this relationship involves the two leaders of the school that set the mission and the strategic direction for the school. That, as discussed in more detail elsewhere in this guide, can lead to unclear roles and responsibilities.

For obvious reasons, managing the board relationship is of critical importance for the administrator. That can only be done with clear and consistent communication. The administrator also manages the board's relationship to the school. Board involvement in school operations varies widely from school to school. Regardless of the level of board involvement, the administrator must ensure that the relationship and communication between the board and the internal school community is healthy. An unhealthy relationship between the board and the internal school community can lead to a myriad of problems.

To foster positive board relations, the administrator should represent the best of the board to the internal school community and the best of the internal school community to the board. This can be difficult, as it can put the administrator in uncomfortable positions. It is, however, in the best interest of the school. The internal school community's impression of the board is largely formed by the administrator's communication about the board.

External Relations

Usually, the administrator is the face of the school to external parties. School district/authorizer relations are discussed separately from other external relations. Unlike managing internal, employee, and board relations, many external relations are not day-to-day relationships. Many times, the administrator is required to seek out and establish these relationships, such as potential funders or community partners. Sometimes these relationships come to the school, such as media or neighborhood associations.

Regardless of the nature of these external relations, the administrator must always remember that he is representing the school to these parties. In many cases, this is the only interaction that someone may have with the school. Due to the fact that these relationships can be temporary or intermittent, there may be a temptation to not pay as much attention to them. The best way to keep positive relations with external parties is to treat them as importantly as if they were internal parties and to communicate clearly, timely, and consistently.

Parent Relations

Parent relations, like all others, are dependent on communication. Of all of the relations that an administrator must manage, parent relations can be the most emotionally charged. Parents have a vested interest in the operations of the school and, unlike traditional public schools, charter schools are schools of choice for the parent.

The administrator must be intentional about communication with parents. Regular, ongoing, consistent communication with the parent body as a whole is important. This can be accomplished through regular newsletters, blogs, emails, Web sites, parent events at school, parent coffees, and other ways. The key is that the administrator must be open and transparent with the parents about what the school is doing, how the school is doing, and what the school is planning to do in the future. The biggest mistake an administrator can make is to seem distant or inaccessible to the parent body. Parents have chosen to entrust the care and education of their children to the school and they need to be able to trust the school.

In addition to communication with the parent body as a whole, the administrator has a significant responsibility to carry out effective communication with parents on an individual basis. Most often, these individual communications deal with difficult issues regarding a student's performance, behavior, or needs. It is impossible to make everybody happy all of the time. Effective communication requires honesty, professionalism, and respect. Although the administrator has a duty to honor confidentiality, not every parent is concerned about maintaining confidentiality. That means that the experience that a parent has with an administrator is often shared with others. Although an administrator cannot control a parent's reaction to a situation, he can control how he treats that parent. If parents are consistently treated respectfully and communicated to in a positive way, that treatment is shared with others. The opposite is also true.

Managing parent relations may also have a direct impact on the success of the school. Simply, if parents do not want to send their children to a charter school, they don't. If a charter school does not attract enough students, it will not survive. Valuing parents, and working hard at establishing positive parent relations, is at the heart of charter schools and school choice.

All of the items listed under internal relations and employee relations apply to parent relations as well. In addition, an administrator must:

- Be aware that parents share their experiences with other parents and with teachers.
- Remember that a parent's most important issue is the progress and happiness of his child.
- Be honest and consistent in communicating with parents.

Student Relations

Student communications occur in school through daily announcements, assemblies, and student newspapers. Additionally, students should have access to information on the Web site including announcements, and teacher homework and information pages. Administrators should expend considerable energy in developing positive relationships with students, recognizing that those relationships will look different depending on the level of the school (elementary school, middle school, high school). Avenues to building positive relationships may include holding pizza lunches with small groups of students (be sure every student is invited at least once during the course of the school year), talking to students in the hallway during passing periods, conducting informal interviews with each student, sponsoring a club or leadership group such as student government, and talking to students during lunch or recess.

District/Authorizer Relations

The relationship between the school district/authorizer and the charter school is often complex. The authorizer is the regulator of the school and it is also many times a service provider. Each relationship is unique due to the local political environment. As with the many other relationships the school has, the administrator must manage the relationship with the authorizer.

Before being able to effectively manage the authorizer relationship, the administrator needs to read and understand the contract between the school and the authorizer. The relationship can only be positive if both sides live up to what they have agreed upon in the contract. At a minimum, if the school follows through on its commitments in the contract, the administrator can interact with the authorizer from a position of strength. That also increases the respect from the authorizer for the administrator.

In addition to adhering to the contract, the administrator must understand the politics of the relationship with the authorizer and communicate with the authorizer. Effective communication in this case, unlike the other constituents, may not always involve constant communication. The contract lays out the formal communication channels and required communication. However, understanding what the individuals working for the authorizer want sometimes takes a deeper understanding of the relationship. For example, if an authorizer's main concern is that overseeing a charter school takes too much administrative time, the administrator should only communicate as required. If the relationship is also a service relationship, such as when the authorizer is contracted to provide special education services, then greater communication is required with the authorizer.

Ultimately, it is in everyone's best interest to have an open, professional, and courteous relationship with the authorizer. An administrator that respects the authorizer and that can earn the respect of the authorizer can help establish that relationship.

External Communications: Communicating with the General Public and the Media

Communicating proactively rather than reactively whenever possible is the key to successful communication with the general public and the media. One person within the school should have responsibility for managing external communications; this person can be the administrator or another employee with other job responsibilities. For ease of reference, this guide uses the term "communications director" to specify this function. Some schools effectively create a marketing/public relations committee with volunteers who can help write press releases and contact the media.

Creating a Communications Plan

The communications director should create a communications action plan to obtain positive "earned" media coverage and to assist in handling a crisis. The director should revisit the plan quarterly to ensure that it is meeting objectives and that information is current and accurate. Each member of the board and the administrator should have a copy of this communication plan. The plan should contain the following elements:

- Identification of the school's spokesperson.
- Critical contact information for your school's staff and board.
- List of reporters and contact information.
- Calendar of story ideas that correspond with current events.
- Sample press releases.
- List of community calendars to which you can submit school events.
- List of who to call for assistance during a crisis, such as the authorizer, attorney, Colorado Department of Education, or Colorado League of Charter Schools. You may also want to contact pertinent district personnel in certain circumstances.

Sharing Positive News

The communications director should share positive news with the media in a timely fashion. The local media, especially education reporters, are often looking for positive school stories. Following are tips to increase the success rate of getting stories published in the local media:

- Build relationships with reporters in advance. Track education news stories and who is writing them. Determine who the local media (newspapers, TV and radio) education reporters are; create a spreadsheet with that contact information. If a reporter writes a story that resonates with you, let them know.
- Create a media kit or fact sheet and send it to reporters at the beginning of each school year.

- Invite a reporter to visit the school. Ask a reporter to participate in a school activity, such as speaking at an assembly or serving on a panel. Remember to invite reporters to school events such as parent nights, student talent shows, and open houses.
- Brainstorm positive media stories about the school and then tie them to current events. For example, if students are cleaning up a local park as a community service project in conjunction with Earth Day, the chances of getting media coverage increases. Create a calendar and make note of the best times to pitch stories to the press.
- When sending a press release or calling a reporter, be prepared for the media to show up at the school. Ensure that the school’s spokesperson is immediately available for interviews.
- Do not be discouraged if the media does not run a positive story on the school. Even what seems like the most newsworthy story could get bumped if breaking news hits.
- Take advantage of tools such as YourHub.com if available in the school’s area. This is a great way to get stories in print. To understand the types of stories reporters are seeking, subscribe to www.helpareporter.com.

Resource: A sample press release can be found at:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdelib/powerlib/download/SamplePressRelease.pdf>

Managing Crisis Communications

Crisis communications happen anytime a less than positive story about the school emerges in the media. It is critical that the spokesperson is ready to respond quickly and efficiently when this type of scenario arises. If a story is brewing, and a reporter is unable to get answers from the spokesperson, the reporter will find answers elsewhere, which could further ignite the crisis.

The best defense is to have a plan of action before a crisis happens. The following are some key elements of a crisis communications plan, and tips for handling this type of situation.

- Identify the school’s spokesperson and a board spokesperson. One individual should be designated the primary spokesperson to make official statements and be the media contact. Designate a back-up spokesperson in the event that the primary spokesperson is unavailable.
- Create a crisis communications team to develop a plan of action and immediately supply talking points to the spokesperson. Members of the crisis communications team may include representatives from the district, authorizer, the Colorado Department of Education, the Colorado League of Charter Schools, the school’s attorney, etc. Include this list of people in your communications plan and reach out to them in times of crisis.
- Gather crucial contact information.
- At the beginning of every school year, prepare a crisis communications reference binder that includes information such as staff and board contact list (including cell phone numbers), contact information for the authorizer, media contact list, the Director of Communications at the Colorado League of Charter Schools, etc.

During a crisis, consider the following tips:

- Follow the communications action plan.
- Before talking to a reporter during a crisis, know what to say. Develop talking points or brief statements to communicate in any interaction with the media.
- Always tell the truth. State only the facts and never guess or speculate.
- Be proactive.
- Tell the story first. If possible, send a fact sheet to the media before they contact the school if you know a story is brewing. If this is not possible, respond to the media in a timely fashion. Do not avoid the media or say “no comment.”
- The side that embraces accountability wins.

- Offer solutions to the problem. For example, if the school had lower than average CSAP scores, explain how the school will address this problem moving forward, versus denying that the problem exists.
- Call the Communications Director at the Colorado League of Charter Schools or at the district for assistance and guidance before speaking to the media, if possible.

Consider the following tips for talking to a reporter during a crisis:

- Do not volunteer information.
- Never talk off the record.
- If there are personnel issues involved, know the policy related to the incident and speak of that and not specifics related to the incident.
- Never say “no comment.” You can always explain the information requested cannot be divulged due to personnel issues or pending law suits. Go back to explaining the process of the situation.

Internal Communications

One of the best ways to avoid crisis communications issues is to practice regular communications with parents and other stakeholders via email, newsletters, up-to-date information on the school’s Web site and a recorded information hotline. As a general rule, err on the side of communicating too much rather than too little, keeping in mind that some families will only receive the information once, even if it is sent in three or four different formats (email, newsletters, Web site updates, etc.).

Web site

Keep the announcements page of the school’s Web site current and direct parents to the Web site for information about happenings at the school. The announcements page can include anything from upcoming events, school closings, incident reports and more. It is critical that this information is timely; if parents check the page only to find out-of-date information, it is likely they will not continue to use the Web site as their first source of information. Another idea is to have a news ticker/crawl on your home page so anyone visiting your Web site can get the latest news right away without searching for it.

Best Practice Examples: Web sites: <http://www.civacharterschool.org/>, <http://www.scienceandtech.org/>, <http://www.freehorizonmontessori.org/>

Best Practice Example: News ticker/crawl: <http://www.dpsk12.org/>

Newsletters

Newsletters are a great way to keep parents in the loop about happenings and announcements at school. Depending on the school’s demographics, either electronic or print newsletters may be appropriate. For example, if the school has a lower income demographic that may lack access to or skills to use computers, then it may be better to send a print newsletter. If parents have access to computers, and if the school is environmentally friendly, then an electronic version may be better. In addition, cost is a factor as publishing an e-newsletter is much less costly than a print version. Be sensitive to the need for bilingual communication with your parents.

After determining the frequency of publishing the newsletter, be sure to adhere to the schedule so that parents know when to expect it. A good practice is to publish the newsletter at least once a month.

Newsletters may include articles about a variety of topics, such as a principal’s letter, student spotlight, upcoming events, awards or grants received, student activities/trips, etc. Keep an archive of your newsletters on your Web site so parents and others can access them at a later date, if desired. Always include contact phone numbers, Web site and information hotline information in your newsletter.

Best Practice Examples: Sample newsletters can be found at: <http://www.ventureprep.org>, http://freehorizonmontessori.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=202&Itemid=1, <http://www.libertycommon.org/news/letternews/index.htm>

Social Networking

With the advent of businesses using social networking sites as a primary form of communication with constituents, charter schools may also want to consider this form of communication. Facebook and/or blogs may be an excellent method of publishing frequent updates to students, parents, employees and the broader community. However, administrators will want to use discretion and reasonable caution when posting information to social networking sites, especially those where people outside the school community have access, or where information is shared outside the context of school business. Careful monitoring will ensure that posted information is used for its intended purpose and that communication remains appropriate.

Telephone Hotline and Automated Caller

It is a good idea to have a recorded information hotline where parents can call for the latest information about your school, particularly if they need to find out about school closings due to inclement weather. Include your hotline number on all correspondence that goes out to parents, including newsletters, fliers, and brochures.

Additionally, some districts offer an automated caller service to inform families of upcoming events and emergency situations. These services can call all or identified groups of families.

Best Practice: Print refrigerator magnets with the school's information hotline and Web address so parents have it available should they need up-to-date information about the school, particularly during a school closure or emergency.

Student/School Incidents

Before an emergency arises, be aware of the authorizer's (charter school liaison and/or communications director) policies and procedures for communicating with parents after an emergency involving a student (i.e. fight, threat, sexual assault, injury, etc). Most districts have sample letters that can be customized and used for many scenarios during an emergency situation. Be aware of how to respect student privacy while still ensuring that parents have been informed of the incident and how it is being handled. If the district cannot/will not provide you with this information (not all authorizers provide this type of service to charter schools), contact the Colorado Department of Education's Schools of Choice Department or the Colorado League of Charter Schools' Communications Department for guidance.

It is critical to send a letter or email to parents as soon as possible after an incident has occurred, especially if it involves student safety. Remember, parents are entrusting you with the most important people in their lives – their children. If they feel they are not receiving open and honest communication from their school or if they find out about an incident from the media before hearing from the school, they will be upset and their trust in the school's ability to keep their children safe could be permanently broken. Disgruntled parents are also more likely to tell the media and the public when they are dissatisfied with the school, which could turn an emergency into a larger crisis communications situation.

School Closures and Emergencies

Before a closure or emergency arises, ensure the school's emergency procedures are documented and posted on the Web site. It is a good idea to include emergency procedures in back-to-school packets and discuss them at parent orientation events at the beginning of each school year.

Be aware of the authorizer's (charter school liaison and/or communications director) policies and procedures for notifying parents and the public about school closures and emergencies. Some districts notify the media

on the school's behalf if the school needs to close due to an unforeseen emergency (i.e. pipe burst) or inclement weather. Other districts require charter schools to handle this on their own.

If the school must notify the media about school closures, contact local media to ask about their procedure to notify the public about school closures. They may provide a unique user ID and password that must be referenced when calling in a school closure report.

If your school must close due to inclement weather or an emergency, be sure to include the information on the school's information hotline and Web site, and send an email to parents as early as possible. Also consider a calling tree, where staff splits up the list and calls parents. Be sure to post information on the school doors and have a school representative available in the car pool lane/parking lot to provide information in case a parent does not receive the message. Additionally, use the automated calling service if available.

If the school must close in the middle of a school day when students are already on campus, it is even more imperative to call parents, especially if they will need to pick up their child or arrange for transportation.

Best Practice: An example of an emergency communication plan can be found at:
<http://www.cherrycreekacademy.org/communication/emergency.htm>

Facilities

Each facility is unique. Charter schools have historically been housed in a variety of facilities. Some of the more common examples include renovated storefronts, renovated or shared churches, modular campuses, old school buildings, and renovated office or industrial buildings. Increasingly, charter schools are building their own buildings early in their existence by using various financing mechanisms.

Each type of facility provides the administrator with unique challenges. Current maintenance must always be weighed against long-term plans and needs. Regardless of the situation, the issues outlined below must be managed.

Maintenance/Janitorial Services

Charter schools must keep their facilities maintained. There are different ways to handle the maintenance of a facility and each school needs to choose the right way for them. Some schools maintain their own facilities with their own employees. Some schools contract with a janitorial service for routine cleaning and use their own staff for regular maintenance. Some schools contract for maintenance items, but use their own staff for regular cleaning. There is no right or wrong way, but the school must plan for maintaining its buildings.

Other charter schools are the best resource for getting ideas and finding out what has worked well for them. Also, a charter school's authorizer may be a good source of information or even a possible provider of maintenance services if they are willing and if agreeable terms can be negotiated.

Zoning, Fire Code, Certificates of Occupancy

This is one of several areas discussed in this handbook where legal counsel is necessary. Each situation is unique. The links below should provide some helpful information and, again, legal counsel must guide the school through any zoning and occupancy process. Generally, the school is responsible to local governmental bodies for zoning issues impacting the land on which the school is situated. The school is also subject to local fire code and must work with the local fire department to comply. Finally, the school is subject to all Federal facility laws regulations, most notably the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

As for obtaining a certificate of occupancy, an office within the State of Colorado Department of Labor, Oil & Gas Division is responsible for issuing those to all public schools in Colorado. That includes charter schools. When planning construction or renovation, or when moving to a new facility, make sure to contact this office. They will provide what's needed in order to receive a certificate of occupancy and they will ultimately issue the certificate of occupancy. This must be done before anyone can occupy the facility.

Resource: The Colorado Charter School Handbook is located at:

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/charterhbk.htm>

Resource: The Charter School Guidebook is located at:

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/index.htm>

Resource: Information from the Department of Labor, Division of Oil & Public Safety can be found at:

<http://oil.cdle.state.co.us/Public%20Safety/Schools/Public%20Schools%20home.asp>

Risk Management

As it relates to facilities, risk management means the charter school must make sure that it carries all coverage required. Professional guidance is needed. Many charter schools purchase risk management services from their authorizer. If that's the case, the school needs to work closely with the risk management office of the authorizer to make sure policies are in force and up to date at all times.

Generally, school districts in Colorado participate in the Colorado School District Self-Insurance Pool. If the charter school's risk management services are provided by the school district, this is likely the source of the coverage. Charter schools may also access the coverage they need directly from the Colorado School District Self-Insurance Pool. Make sure you know who is responsible to cover the deductible.

Charter schools may also contract for risk management services on its own with a private provider. There are several options available to schools but, again, professional guidance is needed. Also, even when contracting with a private provider, the charter school and its authorizer will need to communicate about the insurance policies before they are put in force. There may even be specifications that are spelled out in the charter that govern what is required for risk management purposes. In addition to many other reasons, this is an important reason to read and understand the charter agreement between the charter school and the authorizer.

Resource: Information about the Colorado School District Self-Insurance Pool can be found at:
<http://www.csdsip.net>

Compliance: Understand the insurance coverage requirements in the charter.

Appendix A: Windows on Leadership

The text of Windows on Leadership: A Manual for Developing Leadership in Charter Schools by Kathryn A. T. Knox, Ph.D. can be found at: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/adm/pdf/winonldr.pdf>

Appendix B: Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook

The Charter School Governing Board Training Handbook can be found at http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/download/Bd_Trng_HBk_051007.pdf

Appendix C: Charter Schools Guidebook

The Charter Schools Guidebook can be found at: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/guidebook/>.

Appendix D: Charter School Support Initiative (CSSI)

Relevant resources and comprehensive information about the Charter School Support Initiative can be found at: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/cssi.htm>.

Appendix E: Charter School Acronyms

The following acronyms are frequently used in education generally, and charter school administrators should be familiar with all of them:

504 Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973—a civil rights statute that prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability

ACT American College Test

ADA Americans with Disabilities Act—federal law governing access to public buildings

ADD Attention Deficit Disorder

ADHD Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

AYP Adequate Yearly Progress

AERA American Education Research Association

BOCES Board of Cooperative Educational Services (Small schools and small districts that have pooled their resources together. A BOCES can include 15-25 school districts. The important question to ask is what BOCES does a district belong to and for what projects. Some districts may be in a BOCES only for Title I funds.)

BOD Board of Directors

BOE Board of Education

CASB Colorado Association of School Boards (membership organization of the state’s school district Boards of Education)

CASE Colorado Association of School Executives (professional organization for administrators)

CBLA Colorado Basic Literacy Act—state law that ensures students are reading at grade level by third grade

CDE Colorado Department of Education

CEA Colorado Education Association—the state teachers union

CECFA Colorado Educational and Cultural Facilities Authority—issues bonds for charter schools

CK Core Knowledge

CLCS Colorado League of Charter Schools

CREA Colorado Reading Excellence Act

CRS Colorado Revised Statutes

CSAP Colorado Student Assessment Program

CSAP-A CSAP-Alternate. The assessment for a small percentage (less than 1%) of students with IEP’s that need significant support in order to progress in their learning.

CSR Comprehensive School Reform—a federal grant for failing schools, formerly known as Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration

CSR Class Size Reduction

CSSEAC Charter Schools Special Education Advisory Committee

DI Direct Instruction

ECS Education Commission of the States

EDGAR Education Department General Administrative Regulations

ELA English Language Acquisition

ELL English Language Learner

ESEA Elementary and Secondary Education Act—federal education law replaced with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

ESL English as a Secondary Language

FAPE Free Appropriate Public Education

FERPA Family Education Rights and Privacy Act—federal law governing privacy

FPP Financial Policies & Procedures

FTE Full Time Equivalent—one full-time salary

FY Fiscal Year

GED General Education Diploma

GT Gifted & Talented

HB House Bill in the Colorado Legislature

IASA Improving America’s Schools Act of 1994 (Federal Law)

IDEA Individuals with Disabilities Education Act—federal law regarding educating students with disabilities

IDEA-B Individuals with Disabilities Education Act—Part B

IEP Individual Education Plan—an official plan for students with disabilities that qualify for Special Education services

ILP Individual Literacy Plan—state law requires an ILP for any student not reading at grade level by third grade (the state law is the Colorado Basic Literacy Act)

ITBS Iowa Test of Basic Skills

LEA Local Education Agency or official school district

LEP Limited English Proficiency

LRE Least Restrictive Environment—educating disabled students with non-disabled students

NACSA National Association of Charter School Authorizers

NAEP National Assessment of Educational Progress

OCR Office of Civil Rights—federal law pertaining to Section 504 and disability regulations

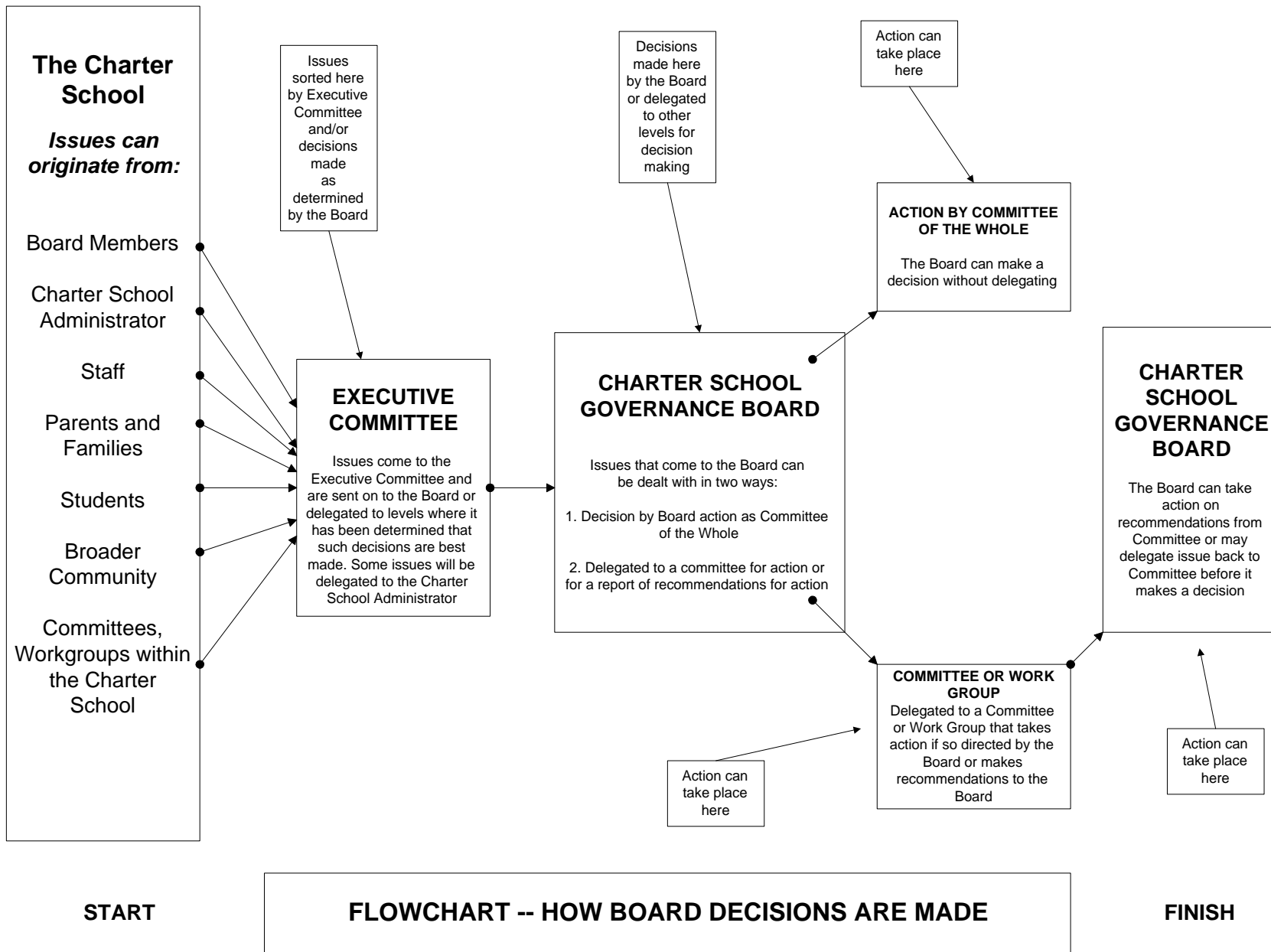
OSEP Office of Special Education Programs

PCD Perceptual Communicative Disorder

PCSP Public Charter School Program

PD Professional Development
PL Public Law (Federal Law)
PPOR Per Pupil Operating Revenue
PPR Per Pupil Revenue
PSAT Pre-Stanford Achievement Test
R2A Read to Achieve
RFA Request for Application
RFP Request for Proposal
SAR School Accountability Report
SAT Stanford Achievement Test
SB Senate Bill in the Colorado Legislature
SBE State Board of Education
SBRR Scientifically-based Reading Research
SEA State Education Agency—Colorado Department of Education
SIP School Improvement Plan
SLIC Significant Limited Intellectual Capacity
USDOE United States Department of Education

Appendix F: Decision Matrices



Washington Core Knowledge School Decision-Making Matrix

Purpose

The purpose of the WCKS Decision-Making Matrix is to meticulously define the role of each member of the WCKS community. In this overview we are summarizing the themes contained within the matrix, but the final authority resides with the contents of the matrix and its interpretation by the Site-Based Management Team. Each decision area is specified with respect to the following categories:

Who Should Decide -- which person or group has the final say in a decision area.

Who Should Recommend -- which person or group will be responsible for recommending a solution.

Solicit Input From -- which person or group will be contacted in order to obtain an opinion or information prior to the decision being made. Inputs are always welcome from anybody, but some need to have their input solicited.

Who Will Be Informed -- which person or group will be informed of the decision once it is made. The decision-maker is responsible for informing the proper people.

Decision-Making Process -- which of the five possible decision-making processes will be followed.

Summary of the Roles of Various Persons and Groups

SBMC

The Site-Based Management Council (like the board of directors at a charter school) is the primary policy-making body in WCKS. It is this group that sets the school's goals, improvement strategies, and calendar, and makes all major site policies. Any authority not mandated by statute or State or District policy either resides with the SBMC or is delegated by the SBMC. In cases of controversy, the SBMC may choose to retain decision-making authority from the groups to whom authority has been delegated. The SBMC consists of Parent Advisory Board (PAB) and the Teacher Advisory Board (TAB).

PAB

The PAB consists of seven parents elected by the parent community. Its primary function is being half of the SBMC, but it also has a special role in mentoring and evaluating the principal. Members of the PAB are to serve as advocates for the parents in disputes with staff members.

TAB

The TAB consists of six teachers plus the principal. Like the PAB, its primary function is as part of the SBMC. The TAB has a unique role in classroom scheduling and making Certified Job Descriptions.

Administration (Principal)

The principal is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the school and has the final say in matters of personnel hiring and evaluations, in accordance with PSD policy. The principal works with the faculty on the utilization of textbooks and classroom materials.

Teachers

Teachers decide on their own use of textbooks and classroom supplies, elect the TAB, and are represented on various committees.

Faculty (all school staff)

The staff decides teaching strategies, their own classroom organization, and have input into all major policy decisions.

Parents

Parents elect the PAB, are represented on committees, and have input into all major policy decisions.

Committees

The various committees in the school are responsible for making the final recommendation on their relevant policies or personnel items.

Decision-Making Processes:

Problem -> Decide -> Share

Problem -> Input -> Decide -> Share

Problem -> Recommendation -> Input -> Decide -> Share

Problem -> Input -> Recommendation -> Input -> Revisions -> Decide -> Share

Problem -> Recommendation -> Input -> Revisions -> Input -> Revisions -> Decide -> Share

Key to Abbreviations

A = Administration (Principal)

All = All Stakeholders

C = Committee (as listed)

CDE = Colorado Dept. of Education

CKF = Core Knowledge Foundation

F = Faculty (all school staff)

P = Parents

PAB = Parent Advisory Board

PSD = Poudre School District T = Teachers

SAAC = School Accountability Advisory Committee

SBMC = Site Based Management Council

SC = Student Council

S = Student body

TAB = Teacher Advisory Board

Area	Who Should Decide (e.g. Who is Accountable)	Who Should Recommend	Solicit Input From	Who Will Be Informed	Decision-making Process
<u>School Goals</u>	-	-	-	-	-
Determine, Assess and Evaluate School Improvement Plan (School Goals: State Mandated and Our Own)	SBMC	SAAC	All Committees	All	5
Strategies to Achieve Above Goals	SBMC	SAAC	All Committees	All	3
Committee Structure (Mission, Vision, Goals and Reporting, Responsibilities)	SBMC	Committees themselves	P, F, S	All	5
<u>Curriculum and Instruction</u>	-	-	-	-	-
Determine Academic Standards (State, PSD, WCKS)	SBMC, PSD, CDE	C (Curriculum)	T, C(Assessment)	All	3
Textbook Selection	SBMC	C (Curriculum)	T, A, PSD, CKF	All	3
Use of Selected Texts	T,A	n/a	n/a	n/a	1
Instructional Materials and Supplies Selection	T,A	n/a	n/a	n/a	1
Computing Equipment, Strategy and Selection	SBMC	C (Technology)	PSD, CDE, F	All	5
Equipment and Supplies Selection and Storage (location, accessibility and use)	F	n/a	F	F	2
Teaching Strategies (i.e. Classroom Organization, Scheduling, Lesson Planning, etc.)	F	n/a	n/a	n/a	1

Area	Who Should Decide (e.g. Who is Accountable)	Who Should Recommend	Solicit Input From	Who Will Be Informed	Decision-making Process
Handling of Missing Assignments	F	n/a	n/a	P, S	1
Policy for Process of Student Placement and Transfer	SBMC	TAB	T, P	All	5
<u>Personnel</u>	-	-	-	-	-
Teacher Job Description	A	T	F	F	3
Staffing Utilization (Certified and Classified)	SMBC	A	F, PAB	All	4
Teacher Hiring (includes confidential development recommendations to Administrator)	A	C (Hiring)	Appropriate references	All	3
Administration Hiring	PSD	C (Selection - per charter)	Appropriate references	All	See charter
Classified Hiring	PSD	C (Selection - per charter)	Appropriate references	All	3
Schedule for Specials (i.e. Art, Music, Library, P.E., etc.)	TAB	Specials teachers	F	F	4
Administration Job Description and Responsibilities	PSD	PAB	F, P	All	2
Administration Evaluation	PSD	PAB	F, P	A	2
Certified Job Description and Responsibilities	TAB	A	F, PSD	T	4
Certified Evaluation	A	n/a	F, P, S, PSD	Individual	2

Area	Who Should Decide (e.g. Who is Accountable)	Who Should Recommend	Solicit Input From	Who Will Be Informed	Decision-making Process
Classified Job Description and Responsibilities	A	n/a	F, PSD	F	2
Classified Evaluation	A	n/a	F, P, S, PSD	Individual	2
<u>Staff Development</u>	-	-	-	-	-
Initial and Ongoing Education of the School Philosophy	SBMC	TAB	PAB, F	F	4
Utilization of In-Service days (i.e. What is Done on Scheduled Days)	TAB	A	F	All	3
WCKS Mentoring Program	TAB	A	F, PAB	F, PAB	3
Professional Conferences Paid for by WCKS	A	n/a	F	F	2
Individual Corrective Action Plan (see #15)	A	n/a	mentor, SBMC as individuals (confidentially)	Individual	2
Professional Development Goals and Plans	T, A	n/a	T, CDE, PSD	Individual	2
Teacher Planning Days Guidelines	TAB	n/a	T, A	T	2
<u>Communication</u>	-	-	-	-	-
Report Card Format and Grading Policy	SBMC	C (Assessment)	T, P, A	All	5
Behavioral Standards Policy (Door to Door Code of Conduct)	SBMC	C (Discipline & Decorum)	F, P, S	All	5

Area	Who Should Decide (e.g. Who is Accountable)	Who Should Recommend	Solicit Input From	Who Will Be Informed	Decision-making Process
WCKS School Calendar (Includes Social Events, Meetings, etc.)	SBMC	A	All	All	4
Process for Scheduling Parent Conferences	TAB	n/a	PAB, F, PSD	All	2
School-wide Requirements (i.e. Science Fair, ECO week)	SBMC	C(appropriate)	F, PAB	All	4
Study Hall Policy	SBMC	A	T, PAB	All	4
Weekly Communication. (i.e. Friday Notes Content, Brochures, Press Releases, Parent Education, Advertisements)	Rob will work on first pass				
Curriculum Maps	T	n/a	n/a	A, P, S	1
<u>BUDGET</u>	-	-	-	-	-
Annual School-wide Budget	SBMC	PAB & TAB Treasurers, A	F, PAB	All	4
School-wide Budget Policy	SBMC	PAB & TAB Treasurers, A	F, PAB	All	5
Classroom Budget Policy (e.g. Appropriate Use of Funds)	SBMC	TAB	F, A, PAB	A	5
Facilities Planning and Capital Improvements	SBMC	C (Facilities)	F, PAB, PSD	All	5
Fundraising Policy	SBMC	C (Fund Raising)	PAB, SB, F	All	4
Grant Writing Policy	SBMC	C (Grants)	SBMC	All	4

Area	Who Should Decide (e.g. Who is Accountable)	Who Should Recommend	Solicit Input From	Who Will Be Informed	Decision-making Process
Parent Contribution Policy (i.e. Money Requests for Field Trips, Class Activities, etc.)	SBMC	PAB	F, P	All	4
Non-profit Foundation (i.e. 501(c)3)	SBMC	C (Ad hoc)	F, P, PSD	All	4
<u>Assessment and Evaluation</u>	-	-	-	-	-
Formal Assessment Plan (Includes CO Mandated Tests, PSD Tests and WCKS-specific Tests)	SBMC	C (Assessment)	T, A, PSD, CDE, C(Curriculum)	All	3
Informal Classroom Assessments (i.e. Math Facts Challenges, 1-minute Readings, etc.)	T	n/a	n/a	P, S	1
<u>Record Keeping</u>	-	-	-	-	-
Inventory of Supplies and Equipment (by Classroom)	A	n/a	n/a	F, PSD	1
Academic (e.g. Cumulative Folders, Yearly Grade Books, etc.)	T	n/a	n/a	A, PSD	1
Behavioral (i.e. Documentation of Behavior Code Offenses)	A	n/a	n/a	P, S, F	1
Agendas for Staff Meetings	1. A	1. n/a	1. F	1. F	1.
<u>School Culture</u>	-	-	-	-	-

Area	Who Should Decide (e.g. Who is Accountable)	Who Should Recommend	Solicit Input From	Who Will Be Informed	Decision-making Process
Professional Conferences for Parents Paid for By School (e.g. CK Conference, etc.)	SBMC	A	PAB	Individual	3
Student Attendance Policy / Procedure (Absences, Tardiness, Make-up Policies)	SBMC	A	P, PSD	All	5
Field Trip Policy (Including Funding, Types and Approval)	SBMC	TAB	F, PAB, PSD	All	4
Assembly Guidelines	TAB	A	F, SC, C (appropriate)	All	3
Classroom Location	TAB	n/a	C (Facilities), F	F	2
Policy for Rewards and Recognition for Students	SBMC	A	PAB, SC, TAB	All	4
Policy for Rewards and Recognition for Teachers	SBMC	A	PAB, SC, TAB	All	4
Partnership Behavioral Standards	SBMC	C (Discipline & Decorum)	F, P	All	3
Student Safety and Security Plan	SBMC	A	F, C (Ad Hoc-Safety), PSD	All	5
Lunchroom and Recess Scheduling	TAB	n/a	F	F	2