



nacsa
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZERS

CORE CHARTER SCHOOL RENEWAL APPLICATION AND GUIDANCE

NACSA KNOWLEDGE

CORE

Empowering Excellence | Advancing Practice

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INTRODUCTION

Charter school authorizers are responsible for evaluating charter school performance and deciding whether to renew a school's charter. A strong renewal process is critical to protect charter school autonomy, student rights, and the public interest, and ensures that schools are held to high standards of academic, financial, and organizational performance.

To ensure the integrity of the renewal decision-making process and to guard against potential attacks by low-performing schools on the legitimacy of the process, it is critical that authorizers conduct a process that is rigorous yet also fair, transparent, and publicly defensible.

Authorizers should establish criteria for charter renewal in their charter contracts and clearly communicate those criteria to schools and the public.

Once a renewal decision is made, authorizers should promptly notify the school and the public and provide a written explanation for the decision. If a school's charter is not renewed, authorizers should also explain to the school in writing any available rights of legal or administrative appeal.

NACSA's *Principles & Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing* states that "a quality authorizer designs and implements a transparent and rigorous process that uses comprehensive and reliable data to inform merit-based renewal decisions. The Principles & Standards further emphasizes that a quality authorizer uses a formal renewal application and a fair and transparent process, provides schools and the public with a cumulative performance report, and makes renewal decisions based on merit and objective evidence of the school's performance over the term of the charter contract in accordance with the Performance Framework set forth in the charter contract.

Remember that because the renewal process may result in the closure of schools that fail to meet their performance expectations, it is important to plan the process so that decisions are made and communicated in sufficient time for families to choose a new school, if necessary.

NACSA's *Principles & Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing* emphasizes that a quality authorizer:

- Uses a formal renewal application as part of a fair and transparent process
- Provides each school a public, cumulative performance report prior to the school's renewal application, which states the authorizer's summative findings concerning the school's performance and its prospects for renewal
- Makes renewal decisions based on merit and objective evidence

RENEWAL PROCESS STAGES

The renewal process is a multi-stage review of each school's performance. During the first stage of the renewal, the authorizer prepares a preliminary, school-specific Renewal Performance Report. The Renewal Performance Report constitutes the authorizer's record of the charter school's academic, financial, and organizational performance in relation to the criteria for renewal and the school's obligations as outlined in its charter contract. Schools will have an opportunity to comment on the Renewal Performance Report and to propose corrections or additional data to supplement the record.

The second stage of the process requires the school to prepare and submit a Charter Renewal Application. The Renewal Application provides each school an opportunity to summarize its performance over the course of its charter term ("Part I: Executive Summary"), discuss its past and current record of performance, and supplement, clarify, or correct information contained in the preliminary Renewal Performance Report ("Part II: Looking Back: The Record of Performance"). Although a school's past and current record of performance should always be the primary focus of the application, it also provides an opportunity to outline future plans, priorities, and potential modifications to its charter ("Part III: Looking Forward: Plans for the Next Charter Term").

The third stage involves gathering any necessary additional information not already collected, and analyzing the school's application in order to determine whether the information presented changes the authorizer's initial view of the school's renewal prospects, as contained in the preliminary Renewal Performance Report. Once all information has been collected, analyzed, and synthesized, the authorizer will prepare the final performance report and present the Renewal Recommendation. Schools should receive their recommendation reports prior to their being made public.

Each Renewal Recommendation should be accompanied by the Renewal Performance Report, any school comment or supplement to those findings, and an assessment of the school's Plans for the Next Charter Term. The Renewal Recommendation should reflect a professional judgment based primarily on the school's performance over the current charter term. Schools should be given an opportunity for a public hearing prior to the authorizer decision to renew or non-renew a charter, consistent with state law and authorizer policy.

Following a decision to renew a charter, the authorizer and the school will enter into negotiation of the charter contract that will govern the new charter term.

RENEWAL PROCESS COMPONENTS

When deciding whether to renew a school’s charter, the authorizer must determine, first and foremost, whether a school has met its academic, financial, and organizational performance expectations over the course of the charter term.

The decision-making process is designed to provide the authorizer with all relevant information necessary to make an informed renewal decision and to provide the school a fair and transparent opportunity to present all relevant evidence.

Renewal Performance Report

The Renewal Performance Report constitutes the authorizer’s cumulative record of the charter school’s academic, financial, and organizational performance in relation to the criteria for renewal and the school’s obligations as outlined in its charter contract, authorizer policy, and state law. The record of school performance is based on the cumulative evidence available from all relevant sources, including performance data (academic, financial, and organizational), responses in the Renewal Application, other data collected by the authorizer over the charter term, and—at the authorizer’s discretion or as required by state law—interviews, site visits, stakeholder focus groups, and public hearings.

“A quality authorizer provides to each school, in advance of the renewal decision, a cumulative performance report that:

- Summarizes the school’s performance record over the charter term, and
- States the authorizer’s summative findings concerning the school’s performance and its prospects for renewal.”

-NACSA’s *Principles & Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing*

The purpose of this component of the process is to provide the school with the authorizer’s evaluation of the school’s performance relative to the performance expectations contained in its contract and its prospects for renewal so that there are no surprises as the process proceeds.

Ideally, the Renewal Performance Report should be a summation of the authorizer’s Annual Performance Report that it provides to each school. The more that an authorizer communicates with schools about their performance prior to

renewal, the more predictable the renewal decision should become and, hopefully, the less contentious the process.

The Performance Report also serves a critical role in guiding the school in developing its Renewal Application so that it focuses on and responds to its record of performance rather than providing information that is unrelated to its record.

Renewal Application

After the authorizer delivers its Performance Report, the school should be required to submit an application for renewal in a format provided by the authorizer.

NACSA's *Principles & Standards* states that a quality authorizer requires any school seeking renewal to apply for it through a Renewal Application, which provides the school a meaningful opportunity and reasonable time to respond to the cumulative Performance Report; to correct the record, if needed; and to present additional evidence regarding its performance.

Schools should use the Renewal Application to respond directly to evidence and analysis presented in the Renewal Performance Report and should submit evidence of performance related only to the Performance Framework that is not included or is incorrect in the Renewal Performance Report or that the authorizer may not have. Schools should not use the Renewal Application to tell a story about why the school should be renewed that is disconnected from its record of performance or to provide anecdotal information or evidence that is not relevant to the school's academic, financial, and organizational performance and the school's performance expectations as defined by the authorizer's Performance Framework and the school's charter contract.

"A quality authorizer requires any school seeking renewal to apply for it through a Renewal Application, which provides the school a meaningful opportunity and reasonable time to respond to the cumulative Performance Report; to correct the record, if needed; and to present additional evidence regarding its performance."

-NACSA's *Principles & Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing*

NACSA's *Principles & Standards* states that a quality authorizer bases its renewal recommendations and decisions on thorough analyses of a comprehensive body of objective evidence defined by the Performance Framework in the charter contract and grants renewal only to schools that have achieved the standards and targets stated in the charter contract, are organizationally and fiscally viable, and have been faithful to the terms of the contract and applicable law. The *Principles & Standards* also states that a quality authorizer does not make renewal decisions, including granting probationary or short-term renewals, on the basis of political or community pressure or solely on promises of future improvement.

NACSA recommends that authorizers develop and use a uniform timeline and renewal application that is clear and concise and aligned with the material terms, legal and compliance requirements, and academic, organizational, and financial performance standards contained in its charter contracts.

SAMPLE CHARTER RENEWAL TIMELINE

NOTE: The charter renewal timeline is usually set by statute. The timeline below is an example and should be modified to align with the legal requirements in your jurisdiction. When setting a timeline for renewal, it is critically important to plan the process to ensure that any available appeals process may take place and final decisions made in a timely manner so that schools and parents will know as early as possible whether each school will be open the following year.

Renewal Stage	Purpose	Date
Release of Renewal Application and Decision Criteria	Provide school leaders and the public with transparent expectations for renewal decision-making	Early Spring of Year Prior to Expiration of Charter
Renewal Orientation Conducted with Board of Directors and School Leader of Each School Up for Renewal	Explain the elements of the renewal process, set expectations regarding requirements and timeline, and discuss school's prospects for renewal in light of the school's record of performance as contained in the authorizer's Annual Performance Reports	Late Spring of Year Prior to Expiration of Charter
Preliminary Renewal Performance Report Provided to Each School Up for Renewal	Establish a record based on the cumulative evidence of school performance in relation to expectations as set by the Performance Framework and included in the charter contract, and communicate that record to each school that is up for renewal	July 1 of Year Prior to Expiration of Charter
Renewal Application Due	Provide an opportunity for schools to formally request renewal; submit comments and factual corrections to the Renewal Performance Report; and present plans for a new charter term	October 1 of Year Prior to Expiration of Charter
Renewal Recommendations and Public Hearing	Following analysis by a team of experts, Commission staff will assemble the Renewal Recommendations and present to the schools and authorizer for discussion and public comment	November 15 of Year Prior to Expiration of Charter
Charter School Renewal Decisions	Authorizer to make charter renewal decisions and communicate decisions to families and other stakeholders	December 15 of Year Prior to Expiration of Charter
Contract Negotiations	Establish the terms for the next charter contract	By June 30

USING NACSA'S CORE RENEWAL APPLICATION

The Core Resources are provided as examples of high-quality authorizing in practice and are designed to be useful to authorizers of all sizes and agency types across the country. NACSA encourages authorizers to adapt these Core Resources to fit their own needs and circumstances. As explained in the introduction to each appendix, however, each resource does contain essential elements that should not be removed or substantively modified. These essential elements are derived from NACSA's *Principles & Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing* and are common to each Core Resource.

ABOUT NACSA

The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) is a non-profit association committed to advancing excellence and accountability in the charter school sector and to increasing the number of high-quality charter schools across the nation. To accomplish this mission, NACSA works to improve the policies and practices of authorizers—the organizations designated to approve, monitor, renew, and, if necessary, close charter schools. NACSA provides training, consulting, and policy guidance to authorizers. It also advocates for laws and policies that raise the bar for excellence among authorizers and the schools they charter. www.qualitycharters.org

ABOUT NACSA'S KNOWLEDGE CORE

NACSA's Knowledge Core is a new, interactive, web-based knowledge and learning portal designed to serve the professional needs of both novice and experienced charter school authorizers in carrying out their complex work. From the basics of authorizing to advanced topics, NACSA's Knowledge Core provides a rich array of core authorizing resources, training, guidance, practical tools, and professional networking opportunities to deepen NACSA members' knowledge and help them meet NACSA's *Principles & Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing*. NACSA's Knowledge Core includes short interactive courses and self-paced, multimedia learning modules; easy-to-customize templates, protocols, and policies; a dashboard to track individual learning progress; and a discussion forum and searchable peer network to facilitate knowledge sharing among members.



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NACSA CORE CHARTER RENEWAL APPLICATION

Instructions

Charter Renewal Applications must be submitted to the authorizer in both print and electronic form by [TIME] on [DATE]. [INSERT SPECIFIC SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS]

Format for Submissions

- The renewal application narrative should not exceed 25 (twenty-five) pages, excluding attachments.
- Attachments should not exceed 25 (twenty-five) pages.
- The application must include the Renewal Application Form and must be signed by both the School Leader/Director and the Board Chair/President.
- The application should include a Table of Contents.
- The application should have standard one-inch margins, be clearly paginated, and use at least 11-point font.
- Printed application pages should be double-sided.
- Any attachment should provide information that a) meaningfully augments the body of evidence that the authorizer has already collected on the school's performance, or b) illustrates or supports plans or strategies for the next charter term that would be material to the charter contract for the renewal term. Applicants should reference attachments clearly in the application.
- The application should not include any photographs, pictures, or news clips unless they are being submitted as evidence of performance for renewal criteria.
- The electronic and print versions of the application should be identical in content, including all attachments.

RENEWAL TRANSMITTAL FORM

Name of School

Name of the Board Chair/President

Name and Title of Contact Person

Name of Alternate Contact Person

Mailing Address of Contact Person

Mailing Address of Alternate Contact Person

Telephone Number of Contact Person

Telephone Number of Alternate Contact Person

E-mail of Contact Person

E-mail of Alternate Contact Person

Telephone Number of Board
Chair/President

E-mail of Board Chair/President

School's Initial Opening Date

Current Grades Enrolled

Grade levels to be served at full
enrollment¹

Maximum projected enrollment (at full
growth)²

¹ "Grade levels to be served at full enrollment" refers to the grade structure that has been approved by the authorizer, rather than an anticipated or desired future grade structure.

² "Maximum projected enrollment" refers to the maximum student enrollment that has been approved by the authorizer, rather than an anticipated or desired future student enrollment.

Signature of School Director/Leader

Date

Signature of the Board Chair/President

Date

RENEWAL QUESTIONS

I. Executive Summary

Provide the enrollment and demographic information for the current school year (Table A). Then provide a brief (one to two page) description of the school, including an overview of the mission and vision, educational program, community and local connections, and leadership and governance.

CURRENT YEAR ENROLLMENT & DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION	
Total Enrollment	
# of Students Enrolled	
# of Students on Waiting List	
Gender	
# Male	
# Female	
Ethnicity/Race	
# White	
# Black	
# Hispanic	
# Asian	
# Other	
Special Populations	
# Students with Disabilities	
# English Language Learners	
# Homeless Students	
# Eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch	

II. Looking Back: The Record of Performance

Section II provides schools with an opportunity to supplement or augment the performance record. Schools should use the Renewal Performance Report as a guide for their responses and submit only evidence of performance related to the Performance Framework that is not included in the Renewal Performance Report and/or that the authorizer may not have. Responses should reference the specific criteria and benchmarks in the Performance Framework to which the information applies.

Responses may include, but are not limited to, information about interim assessments or progress reports; evidence of performance on school- or mission-specific goals; and improvements undertaken at the school along with evidence of progress for any areas in which the school has not previously met or is not currently meeting the performance standard.

Responses should not include anecdotal information or evidence that is not relevant to the school's academic, financial, and organizational performance and the school's performance expectations as defined by the authorizer's Performance Framework and the school's charter contract.

Renewal Recommendations will be based on all evidence of school performance in the record, including but not limited to the school's responses in this section.

A. Academic Performance

1. Using the results contained in the Performance Framework, explain whether or not the school has met its performance expectations.
2. Provide any academic performance-related evidence, supplemental data, or contextual information that may not be captured in authorizer records. Submissions may include supplements related to the Renewal Performance Report. Please reference the specific Performance Framework measures to which the information applies, as appropriate.
3. Provide evidence of outcomes related to any mission-specific academic goals and measures established in the charter contract (if not already captured in Renewal Performance Report).

B. Financial Performance

1. Provide an assurance that the school is current in meeting its liabilities, including but not limited to payroll taxes, debt service payments, and employee benefits.

2. Provide any financial performance-related evidence, supplemental data, or contextual information that may not be captured in authorizer records. Submissions may include, but are not limited to, updated financial records and other updates regarding the Renewal Performance Report. Please reference the specific Performance Framework measures to which the information applies, as appropriate.

C. Organizational Performance

1. Provide any organizational performance-related evidence, supplemental data, or contextual information that may not be captured in authorizer records. Submissions may include evidence of current compliance in areas for which the school was found previously to be non-compliant or other updates relevant to the Renewal Performance Report. Please reference the specific Performance Framework measures to which the information applies, as appropriate.
2. Provide evidence of outcomes related to any school-established organizational goals, as appropriate.