

For Immediate Release

February 23, 2022

Press Contact

Amanda Oberg
Communications Coordinator
720-985-1481
amandaoberg@csi.state.co.us

CSI School Food Authority Growing and Innovating

Denver, CO (February 23, 2022) – In its second year of operation, the [Colorado Charter School Institute](http://www.csi.state.co.us) (CSI) School Food Authority works with 22 charter school buildings, 2 of which are authorized by their geographic school districts and the remaining authorized by CSI.

Leading the effort to oversee school nutrition programs is Ilene Agustin, CSI School Nutrition Program Manager. With over fifteen years of school nutrition experience, Agustin has not let the gargantuan task of [establishing a School Food Authority](#) stop her from ensuring each participating charter school is able to implement a program that best meets the needs of its community.

Charter schools face many challenges—many of which have been cited by the National Association for Charter School Authorizers in its [Access and Equity in Education brief on Food Service](#)—when working to provide nutritional, affordable meals to students. The strict nutritional and safety requirements can be both confusing and costly, particularly for stand-alone schools whose size makes supporting a full-time food service and nutrition team of experts a challenge. Schools do not always have the facility space or the staff to provide an onsite meal program. Additionally, contracting with vendors may limit a school’s autonomy in decision-making around meals and staffing. For rural schools especially, these barriers can be even more heightened.

Embracing Innovation

Despite these challenges, the CSI School Food Authority (SFA) and its charter schools continue to find innovative ways to make healthy meals available for students.

As a charter school authorizer, CSI seeks to prioritize school autonomy in decision-making while monitoring compliance with all related requirements. CSI’s SFA, too, embraces a school’s autonomy in determining their food service program.

Agustin supports schools in determining the options available based on the resources they have (staffing, facilities, local vendors) and their specific goals (local sourcing, culturally relevant menus, scratch cooking). Importantly, Agustin empowers schools to make decisions that work for their communities and provides the technical assistance and resources to transform their visions into reality.

[Kwiyagat Community Academy](#) (KCA) is a small charter school that opened its doors this fall on the Ute Mountain Ute reservation in Towaoc, Colorado. The school seeks to offer an educational experience to elementary-aged students that is guided by native culture, language, and values.

KCA took advantage of its local resources when establishing its food service program. The school is partnering with the reservation casino to use its kitchen for food preparation.

Additionally, the school has worked to develop multiple culturally relevant menu items for its students, such as blue corn pancakes, beef stew, and corn bread.

Sixty miles away in Durango, [Animas High School](#) has found a way to offer nutritious meals despite its lack of facility space for a kitchen. The project-based high school has partnered with local restaurants to feed students. “We have worked with local restaurants to ensure meals are meeting National School Lunch nutritional requirements,” shares Agustin.



[Pagosa Peak Charter School](#), a project-based K-8 charter in Pagosa Springs, is not authorized by CSI but participates in CSI’s School Food Authority. The school does not have a functional kitchen, so they use the kitchen at the nearby Pagosa Brewery for meal preparation. Scratch meals are cooked and then transported back to the school for meal service. However, the school will be remodeling the kitchen this summer and hopes to offer a “farm to school” meal option for students next year.



The [Colorado Early Colleges](#) network of schools, with campuses up and down the Front Range, utilizes scratch kitchens at three of its campuses, which distribute out to other school sites. In a scratch kitchen, recipes and dishes are produced from raw ingredients. This means that food cost is lower, and the meals maintain a higher amount of nutrients. The Fort Collins campus also has a vegetable garden that produces fresh tomatoes, zucchini, and lettuce.

Several charter schools in the CSI SFA are also finding ways to source foods from within the state. Colorado Early Colleges, along with Pinnacle Charter School, The Academy, and

Community Leadership Academy, participate in a “Harvest of the Month” program. The schools receive a different locally sourced vegetable or fruit each month. In August, the item was fresh peaches from Colorado’s western slope.

Community Leadership Academy received a grant from the [Fresh Food and Vegetable Program](#), which introduces elementary students in high need areas to produce they may not otherwise encounter.

Dr. Terry Croy Lewis, Executive Director of the Charter School Institute shares, “We continue to explore ways we can leverage our role as a statewide charter authorizer to improve access to high-quality charter school options for all students. Without question, partnering with charter schools to think creatively about how they can offer a food service program is one way to achieve this—healthy food can set the foundation for positive student outcomes.”

###

About the CSI School Food Authority

For more information about the CSI School Food Authority, including how to join, please visit our website at <https://resources.csi.state.co.us/school-food-authority/>

About the Colorado Charter School Institute (CSI)

CSI is a statewide charter public school authorizer in Colorado, currently authorizing 42 schools from Towaoc to Steamboat Springs, Grand Junction to Colorado Springs and serving over 20,000 PK-12 students. As a charter authorizer, CSI focuses on the outputs—that is, the quantitative evaluation of academic, organizational, and financial school performance—providing schools the flexibility to focus on and make decisions about inputs like instructional strategies, educational programming, internal assessment system, facility selection, and staffing. The focus on outcomes rather than processes allows CSI to be neutral on educational model and maintain a diverse portfolio of school models, which include Classical, Early College, Alternative, and Montessori models. Learn more at www.csi.state.co.us and follow CSI on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).