



Colorado Charter School Institute
Annual Review of Schools (CARS) Report
2020-2021

The Academy of Charter Schools



Expanding Frontiers in Public Education

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COLORADO

CHARTER SCHOOL INSTITUTE

CSI HISTORY

In response to the growing desire for charter schools, the lack of school options for at-risk students, and the interest in an alternate mode of authorizing charter schools that could assist districts in implementing authorizing best practices, the State Legislature created the Charter School Institute (CSI) in 2004.

OUR MISSION

The mission of the Charter School Institute is to foster high-quality public school choices offered through Institute charter schools, including particularly schools that are focused on closing the achievement gap for at-risk students.

OUR VISION

The vision of the Charter School Institute is to be a national leader as a highly effective charter school authorizer by building a portfolio of high performing public charter schools through authorizing practices that promote a variety of successful and innovative educational designs, including an emphasis on schools that serve at-risk youth.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| CSI Annual Review of Schools (CARS) Summary | 4 |
| How to Use the CARS Report | 5 |
| CSI Performance Frameworks | 6 |
| CARS Accreditation Rating | 8 |
| 2020 Academic Performance - COVID Impact | 9 |
| Financial Performance | 10 |
| Organizational Performance | 12 |



COVID Impact

- CDE suspended state assessments during the 2019-2020 school year and paused the state and federal accountability systems.
- CSI can still evaluate financial and organizational performance for the 2019-2020 school year (included in this report).
- The base accreditation ratings from 2019, which were determined by academic performance during the 2018-2019 school year, will be maintained and will become the base accreditation rating for 2020.
- Following the same process used every year, if a subset of measures on the Financial or Organizational Framework are not met during the 2019-2020 school year, the school accreditation rating may be lowered.

CSI Annual Review of Schools (CARS) Summary

CARS was developed to fulfill statutory requirements and to align with best practice. CARS builds upon the evaluation lens utilized by the State—which evaluates academic achievement, academic growth, and postsecondary and workforce readiness—by including additional measures related to academic, financial, and organizational performance to provide a more comprehensive and robust evaluation that includes strong indicators of charter viability and sustainability. CARS will accomplish three primary objectives:

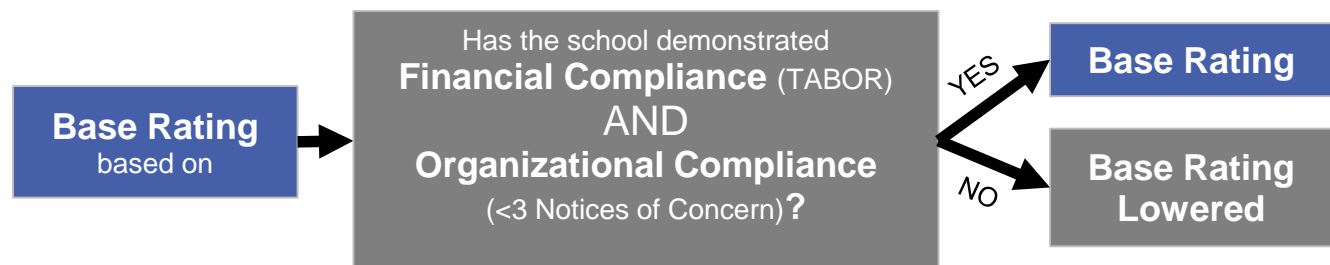
1. Add to the *body of evidence* that is used to make authorization decisions
2. Determine the school *accreditation rating* that is primarily used to inform authorization pathways
3. Determine the *level of support/intervention* to provide to the school

CSI Performance Framework

The CSI Performance Framework provides the basis for the CSI Annual Review of Schools. The Performance Framework explicitly defines the measures by which CSI holds schools accountable with regards to academic, financial, and organizational performance. The three areas of performance covered by the frameworks—academic, financial, and organizational— correspond directly with the three components of a strong charter school application, the three key areas of responsibility outlined in strong state charter laws and strong charter school contracts, and are the three areas on which a charter school's performance should be evaluated.

CARS Accreditation Ratings

Pursuant to the Colorado Revised Statutes and rules applicable to Colorado school districts and authorizers, CSI is responsible for accrediting its schools in a manner that emphasizes attainment on the four statewide performance indicators, and may, at CSI's discretion, include additional accreditation indicators and measures. CSI prioritizes academic performance in determining accreditation ratings. Specifically, a base accreditation rating is determined by academic performance on a subset of measures within the Academic Framework. Then, if a subset of measures on the Finance or Organizational Framework are missed, the accreditation rating is lowered.



Upon issuance of accreditation ratings, each school enters into an accreditation contract with CSI as required by state law. The accreditation contract describes the school's CARS accreditation rating, the school's performance plan type, assures compliance with the provisions of Title 22 and other applicable laws, and describes the consequences for noncompliance and Priority Improvement and Turnaround accreditation plan types. The accreditation contract is distinct from the charter contract, and may change from year-to-year or more frequently depending on the school's plan type and individual circumstances.

In accordance with the CSI Accreditation Policy, CSI schools accredited with a rating of Improvement, Priority Improvement, or Turnaround must re-execute the accreditation contract annually. For schools accredited Distinction or Performance, the accreditation contract will renew automatically, except all schools, regardless of plan type, will re-execute the accreditation contract upon renewal.

How to Use the CSI Annual Review of Schools (CARS) Report

This **CARS Report** summarizes the school's cumulative performance and compliance data from required and agreed-upon sources, as collected by CSI over the term of the school's charter. The data collected and presented within this report reflect outcomes along the academic, financial, and organizational measures outlined with the CSI Performance Framework.

In order to summarize each section, CSI will include a *brief* narrative providing feedback on the school's progress within the indicators and/or metrics where applicable. Schools have the opportunity to provide a brief narrative for each section as well. Any additional claims within the school narrative must be substantiated with supplemental evidence that can be verified by CSI. The school narrative should focus on outputs and outcomes. Factors such as culture, curriculum, and PD, for example are important in your internal evaluations and root cause analysis, but are not considered by CSI as a part of your annual evaluation.

Schools should look at trends in the data and use the feedback provided within the report as evidence of success, as well as to identify areas that may need the allocation of additional resources and attention. This can be a useful tool to use in conjunction with the **Unified Improvement Plan (UIP)**.

A majority of the metrics within this report will be collected by CSI on a yearly basis and presented to each school in **September**. Please review all data collected for accuracy. Should you find any incorrect or inaccurate data (as opposed to findings or conclusions you simply disagree with), please contact the appropriate director, listed below:

Academic Performance: Ryan Marks

Financial Performance: Amanda Karger

Organizational Performance: Clare Vickland - State/Federal Programs | Janet Dinnen - Compliance Monitoring

If you wish to supplement any area of your report with additional evidence, these proposed changes or additions must be returned to CSI (ryanmarks@csi.state.co.us) **no later than December 8**.

Once all data have been reviewed (and where applicable incorporated into the report), CSI will send each school a final report in **November**. This final version will also contain financial information that is unavailable during the preliminary drafting process. You may use the tables, graphs and narrative of this final report in your UIP.

Please note: Interim and formative assessment data submitted by schools as supplemental evidence should be presented in the form of official reports generated by the test vendor, or in the case of locally developed assessments, generated through the official reporting system (e.g., Edusoft). Where this is not possible, exported flat files must be provided. Criteria for submitting additional assessment data include:

- Testing administration date(s), total number of test takers, and total number of enrolled students at the time of administration should be noted with each report.
- Growth data should reflect gains made using the beginning of the year as baseline and the end of the academic year as compared to national, state or pre-approved norms. If seasonal gains are submitted, these must also be accompanied with norms recognized by the nation, state or pre-
- Regarding other supplemental evidence you wish to submit, any outputs or outcomes submitted that are not calculated and reported by CSI or the State must be accompanied by a Mission-Specific Measures Form, specifying how you quantify the measure (including methodology used to determine, document and calculate your measure).

1. Academic Achievement

- a. How are students achieving on state assessments?
- b. How are students achieving on state assessments over time?
- c. How are students achieving on state assessments in comparison to other schools in their geographic home district or schools that students might otherwise attend?
- d. Have students demonstrated readiness for the next grade level/course, and, ultimately, are they on track for college and careers?
- e. How are students achieving in comparison to similar schools statewide?

2. Academic Growth

- a. Are students making sufficient growth on state assessments?
- b. Are students making sufficient growth on state assessments over time?
- c. How are students growing on state assessments in comparison to other schools in their geographic home district or schools that students might otherwise attend?
- d. How is student growth distributed across growth levels?
- e. How are students growing in comparison to similar schools statewide?

3. Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness

- a. How are students achieving on state assessments for postsecondary readiness?
- b. Are students graduating high school?
- c. Are students dropping out of high school?
- d. Are high school graduates adequately prepared for post-secondary academic success?
- e. What is the school's post-completion success rate?



COVID Impact

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- The base accreditation ratings from 2019, which were determined by academic performance during the 2018-19 school year, will be maintained and will become the base accreditation rating for 2021.

CSI Performance Framework

Financial Performance Framework

1. Near Term

- a. Has the school met the statutory TABOR emergency reserve requirement?
- b. What is the school's current ratio?
- c. What is the school's months of cash on hand?
- d. Is the school in default with any financial covenants they have with loan agreements?
- e. What is the school's funded pupil count variance?

2. Sustainability

- a. What is the school's aggregate 3-year total margin?
- b. What is the school's net asset position?
- c. What is the school's debt?
- d. What is the school's unassigned fund balance on hand?

Organizational Performance Framework

1. Education Program

- a. Is the school complying with applicable education requirements?

2. Diversity, Equity of Access, and Inclusion

- a. Is the school protecting the rights of all students?

3. Governance and Financial Management

- a. Is the school complying with governance requirements?
- b. Is the school satisfying financial reporting and compliance requirements?

4. School Operations and Environment

- a. Is the school complying with health and safety requirements?
- b. Is the school complying with facilities and transportation requirements?
- c. Is the school complying with employee credentialing and background check requirements?

5. Additional Obligations

- a. Is the school complying with all other obligations?



COVID Impact

- Following the same process used every year, if a subset of measures on the Financial or Organizational Framework are not met during the 2020-21 school year, the school accreditation rating may be lowered.

***Data Notes:**

- Data sources include achievement, growth, and postsecondary and workforce readiness state files from 2010 to 2019. To protect student privacy, achievement data N counts less than 16 and growth data N counts less than 20 have been hidden. For more information regarding data privacy, please consult:

<https://www.cde.state.co.us/dataprivacyandsecurity>

- Data symbols:

| Symbol | Meaning |
|--------|--|
| NA | Used when data is not reported by the state. |
| n<16 | Used for achievement measures. Indicates that student counts were too low to show the data publicly. |
| n<20 | Used for growth measures. Indicates that student counts were too low to show the data publicly. |
| -- | Used when data is not reportable due to low student counts. |

- Traditionally underserved populations include minority, special education, free or reduced price lunch, non-English proficient/limited English proficient (English learners), and gifted & talented students.

- The Math section of this report includes student math scores disaggregated by grade level. Scores before 2017-18 reflect all students in 7th, 8th, and 9th grades who took any type of CMAS math test. State reporting did not disaggregate by grade for the high school level math tests. Therefore, students in 8th grade who opt to take either Algebra I, II, or Geometry are not included in the 8th grade level results. CSI can release an additional report containing disaggregated math results by test by request.

- Dropout rates contain 7th and 8th grade dropouts. The state files contain all students who dropped out of school from 7th to 12th grade. Schools have an option of requesting an additional report containing only dropout rates for 9th-12th grade.

| Symbol | Meaning |
|--------|---|
| NA | Not reported by the state. |
| -- | Not reportable due to low student counts. |

| |
|---------|
| Exceeds |
| Meets |

| |
|---------------|
| Approaching |
| Does Not Meet |

CSI Annual Review of Schools (CARS) Rating

The CSI School Performance Framework serves to hold schools accountable for performance on the same, single set of indicators. The CSI Framework builds upon the evaluation lens by the State to include measures that may provide a more detailed and comprehensive summary of charter school performance. CSI's frameworks align with the state frameworks in that they also evaluate schools across the four key performance indicators of academic achievement, academic growth, academic growth gaps, and postsecondary and workforce readiness. The distinguishing feature between the CDE School Performance Framework (SPF) and CSI's Academic Framework is the incorporation of trend data and a comparison to the geographic district, as it is important to ask how a school is performing over time as well as whether the school is better serving the needs of students than area schools. Additionally, the CSI frameworks also include measures outside of the academic realm that are strong predictors of charter viability such as financial health and organizational sustainability.

Calculating your CARS Academic Rating

To determine your rating, CSI uses the CSI Academic Performance Framework to determine the percent of points earned overall and by level. The following are the cut score points that determine each rating:

Performance with Distinction: Greater than 71.3% Points Earned

Performance: Between 53% to 71.3% Points Earned

Improvement: Between 42% to 52.9% Points Earned

Priority Improvement: Between 34% and 41.9% Points Earned

Turnaround: Below 34% Points Earned

| Framework | CARS Rating |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Academic (2018-2019) | Performance with Distinction: Low Participation |
| Elementary School Rating | Performance with Distinction (Points Earned: 80.3%) |
| Middle School Rating | Performance (Points Earned: 60%) |
| High School Rating | Performance with Distinction (Points Earned: 72.5%) |
| Financial (2020-2021) | Financial performance does not impact the school accreditation rating |
| Organizational (2020-2021) | Organizational performance does not impact the school accreditation rating |
| Overall CARS Rating | Performance with Distinction: Low Participation |



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- Following the same process used every year, if a subset of measures on the Financial or Organizational Framework are not met during the 2020-2021 school year, the school accreditation rating may be lowered.



COVID Impact

- CDE suspended state assessments during the 2019-2020 school year and paused the state and federal accountability systems.
- To access prior year academic data, go to <https://www.csi.state.co.us/school-accountability/>. This page hosts prior year CARS reports as well as the CARS Dashboard.

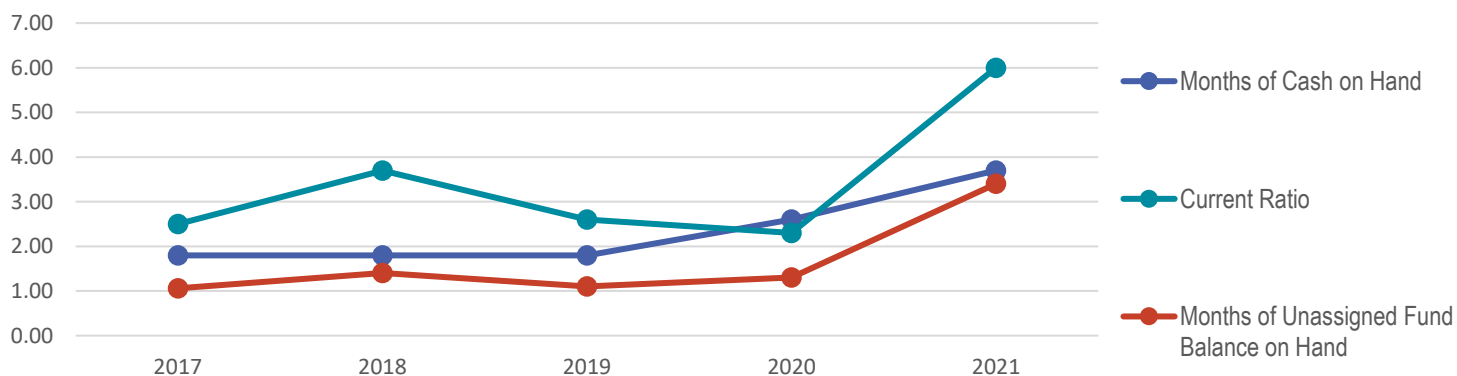
Fiscal Years 2017-2021 Financial Results

Governmental Funds Financial Statement Metrics

- Has the school met the statutory TABOR emergency reserve requirement?
- What is the school's months of cash on hand?
- What is the school's unassigned fund balance on hand?
- What is the school's current ratio?
- What is the school's aggregate 3-year total margin?

Governmental Funds Financial Statement Metrics

| Metric | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
|---|------|------|-------|------|-------|
| Operating Margin | 1.8% | 3.1% | -1.1% | 1.6% | 14.2% |
| Months of Cash on Hand | 1.80 | 1.80 | 1.80 | 2.60 | 3.70 |
| Current Ratio | 2.50 | 3.70 | 2.60 | 2.30 | 6.00 |
| Months of Unassigned Fund Balance on Hand | 1.06 | 1.40 | 1.10 | 1.30 | 3.40 |
| Positive Unassigned Fund Balance (TABOR) | YES | YES | YES | YES | YES |



Enrollment

- What is the school's funded pupil count variance?

Enrollment

| Metric | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
|--|------|------|------|-------|------|
| Funded Pupil Count (FPC) Current-Year Variance | 0.6% | 1.0% | 0.3% | -0.3% | 1.1% |
| Change in FPC from Prior-Year | 0.5% | 0.4% | 0.0% | 3.1% | 1.1% |

Proprietary Funds Financial Statement Metrics

- What is the school's months of cash on hand?
- What is the school's current ratio?
- What is the school's debt?
- What is the school's net asset position?

Proprietary Funds Financial Statement Metrics

| Metric | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
|------------------------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------------|
| Months of Cash on Hand | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Current Ratio | 3.30 | 3.30 | 3.20 | 8.70 | 1.20 |
| Debt to Asset Ratio | 1.08 | 1.10 | 1.10 | 1.10 | 1.10 |
| Change in Net Position | \$61,401 | \$142,427 | \$135,925 | \$321,145 | (\$520,612) |

Government-Wide Financial Statement Metrics

- What is the school's debt?
- What is the school's net asset position?
- Is the school in default with any financial covenants they have with loan agreements?

Government-Wide Financial Statement Metrics

| Metric | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
|------------------------|----------------|----------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|
| Debt to Asset Ratio | 1.50 | 1.80 | 1.92 | 1.96 | 1.67 |
| Change in Net Position | (\$10,178,686) | (\$11,743,269) | \$1,336,309 | \$213,045 | \$7,127,182 |
| Default | No | NO | No | No | No |

| Symbol | Meaning |
|--------|---|
| NA | Not reported by the state. |
| -- | Not reportable due to low student counts. |

| | |
|---------|---------------|
| Exceeds | Approaching |
| Meets | Does Not Meet |

Fiscal Years 2017-2021 Financial Results

Financial Performance Narrative

The Academy of Charter Schools ended the year with sufficient reserves to satisfy the TABOR reserve requirement, an increase in net position, and reported no statutory violations in their Assurances for Financial Accreditation. The school's funded-pupil count came in higher than budget by 21 pupils (1 percent), and 21 pupils (1 percent) higher than the prior year. As expected of all PERA employers, the school has a high debt to asset ratio due to the inclusion of the PERA Net Pension Liability per GASB No. 68. The school's governmental funds ended the year with 3.7 months of cash on hand and sufficient current assets to cover current liabilities. The school experienced a positive operating margin of 14 percent and an increase in their unassigned fund balance.

School Observations

OPTIONAL To be populated by the school and provided to CSI for review and possible inclusion prior to the distribution of the final CARS Report.

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|--------|---|
| NA | Not reported by the state. |
| -- | Not reportable due to low student counts. |

| | |
|---------|---------------|
| Exceeds | Approaching |
| Meets | Does Not Meet |

Organizational Performance Metrics

Education Program

-Is the school complying with applicable education requirements?

The essential delivery of the education program in all material respects and operation reflects the essential terms of the program as defined in the charter agreement. Includes:

- *Instructional days or minutes requirements*
- *Graduation and promotion requirements*
- *Alignment with content standards, including Common Core*
- *State-required assessments*
- *Implementation of mandated programming as a result of state or federal funding*

CSI Review

CSI was not made aware of any issues relating to applicable education requirements for the 2020-21 school year.

Diversity, Equity of Access, and Inclusion

-Is the school protecting the rights of all students?

Protecting student rights pursuant to:

- *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Americans with Disabilities Act relating to the treatment of students with identified disabilities and those suspected of having a disability, consistent with the school's status and responsibilities as a school in a district LEA*
- *Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and US Department of Education authorities relating to English Language Learner requirements*
- *Law, policies and practices related to admissions, lottery, waiting lists, fair and open recruitment, enrollment, the collection and protection of student information*
- *Conduct of discipline procedures, including discipline hearings and suspension and expulsion policies and practices, in compliance with CRS 22-33-105 and 22-33-106*
- *Recognition of due process protections, privacy, civil rights and student liberties requirements, including 1st Amendment protections and the Establishment Clause restrictions prohibiting public schools from engaging in religious instruction*

CSI Review

CSI was not made aware of any issues related to protecting the rights of all students in the 2020-21 school year.

Governance Management

-Is the school complying with governance requirements?

Includes:

- *Adequate Board policies and by laws, including those related to oversight of an education service provider, if applicable (CRS 22-30.5-509(s)), and those regarding conflicts of interest, anti-nepotism, excessive compensation, and board composition*
- *Compliance with State open meetings law*
- *Maintaining authority over management, holding it accountable for performance as agreed under a written performance*
- *Requiring annual financial reports of the education service provider (CRS 22-30.5-509(s)), if applicable*

CSI Review

CSI was not made aware of any issues relating to governance requirements for the 2020-21 school year.

Organizational Performance Metrics

Financial Management

-Is the school satisfying financial reporting and compliance requirements?

Includes:

- *Compliance with the Financial Transparency Act (CRS 22-44-301)*
- *Complete and on-time submission of financial reports, including financial audit, corrective action plans, annual budget, revised budgets (if applicable), periodic financial reports as required by the authorizer, and any reporting requirements if the board contracts with an education service provider*
- *Meeting all reporting requirements related to the use of public funds*
- *The school's audit is an unqualified audit opinion and devoid of significant findings and conditions, material weaknesses, or significant internal control weaknesses*

CSI Review

CSI was not made aware of any significant issues relating to financial reporting and compliance requirements for the 2020-21 school year.

School Operations and Environment

-Is the school complying with health and safety requirements?

Includes:

- *Up to date fire inspections and related records*
- *Documentation of requisite insurance coverage*
- *Provision of appropriate nursing services and dispensing of pharmaceuticals, including compliance with 1 CCR 301-68*
- *Compliance with food services requirements, if applicable*
- *Maintaining the security of and provide access to student records under the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act*
- *Access to documents maintained by the school protected under the state's freedom of information law*
- *Timely transfer of student records*
- *Proper and secure maintenance of testing materials*
- *Up to date emergency response plan, including compliance with NIMS requirements*

-Is the school complying with facilities and transportation requirements?

Includes:

- *Viable certificate of occupancy or other required building use authorization*
- *Student transportation safety requirements, if applicable*

-Is the school complying with employee credentialing and background check requirements?

Includes:

- *Highly Qualified Teacher and Paraprofessional requirements within Title II of the ESEA relating to state certification*
- *Performing background checks of all applicable individuals*
- *Complying with state employment requirements*

CSI Review

CSI was not made aware of any issues relating to health and safety requirements for the 2020-21 school year. CSI was not made aware of any issues relating to facilities and transportation requirements for the 2020-21 school year. CSI was not made aware of any issues relating to employee credentialing and background check requirements for the 2020-21 school year.

Additional Obligations

-Is the school complying with all other obligations?

CSI Review

CSI was not made aware of any other issues of noncompliance for the 2020-21 school year.

Organizational Performance Metrics

Organizational Performance Additional Narrative

The school leader was especially conscientious in their collaboration with CSI to promote the health and safety of their school community through the implementation of strategies to mitigate the impact of COVID-19.

School Observations

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