



THEORY OF ACTION FOR TIERED SUPPORTS & INTERVENTIONS

Who We Are



The Colorado Charter School Institute (CSI) is a statewide charter public school authorizer. Our mission is to foster high-quality charter public school options for **all** students. CSI oversees schools across the state of Colorado.

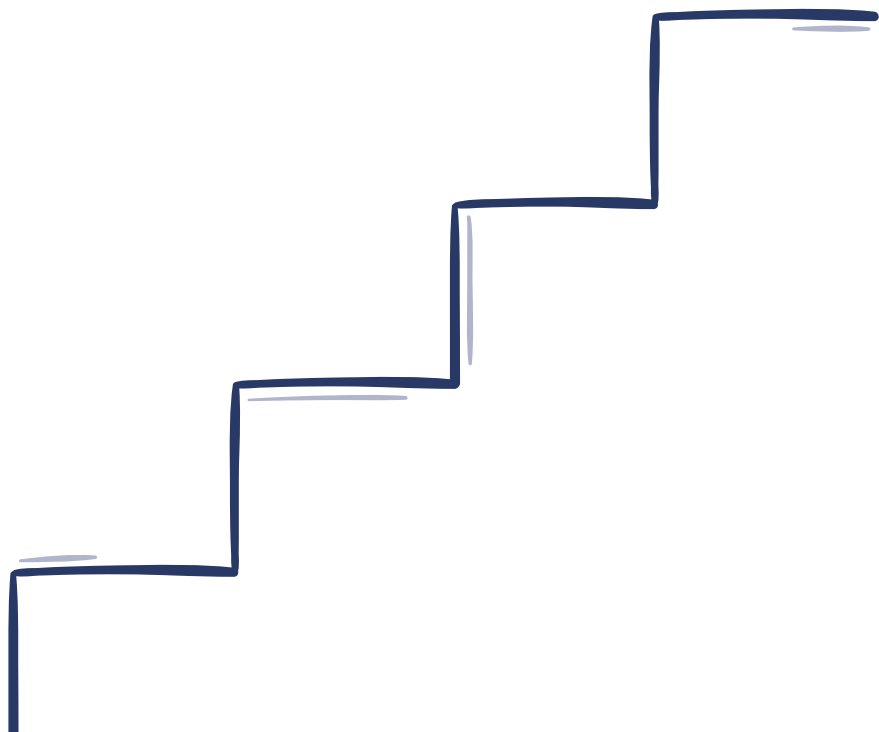
We believe that every child should have access to high-performing school choices. Accordingly, we seek to foster a portfolio of high-quality charter public school options that offer diverse educational models to meet the needs of every child.

Our approach to authorizing balances autonomy and accountability. As such, we offer our schools flexibility to choose the methods to best meet the needs of their students. In return, we hold them accountable to clear expectations for performance.



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Introduction

Across Colorado, charter public schools operate in diverse communities, serve students with a wide range of needs, and navigate complex compliance and accountability requirements. To ensure that every school—regardless of geography, size, or model—has access to the support it needs to serve students well, the Colorado Charter School Institute (CSI) has developed a comprehensive tiered supports and interventions framework.

CSI's theory of action is grounded in a simple principle: equitable oversight requires differentiated support. When schools with greater needs receive targeted support—and universal supports help prevent issues across schools—both performance and experiences for students, staff, and leaders improve. This approach allows CSI to honor the autonomy of high-performing charter schools while ensuring strong accountability and consistent support where it is most needed.

Importantly, CSI's tiered model has been shaped through continuous learning. Over several years of implementation, CSI has strengthened the framework by studying what has worked well, identifying where earlier strategies fell short, and refining supports based on evidence, feedback, and outcomes across the portfolio. Embedding an ongoing cycle of improvement ensures that CSI remains responsive, effective, and aligned to the evolving needs of schools and students.

**CSI's theory of action is grounded in a simple principle:
equitable oversight requires differentiated support.**

CSI's Theory of Action

CSI's theory of action framework is built on five interconnected assumptions that guide how we differentiate support for schools, promote continuous improvement, and manage risk.



*Strong Universal
Supports Form the
Foundation*

Every CSI school should have access to clear expectations, transparent timelines, high-quality resources, and accessible technical assistance. When universal supports are well designed and user-friendly, they prevent errors, streamline processes, and reduce unnecessary workload. These supports benefit both schools and CSI staff. Examples include annual handbooks, training modules, calendars, and standardized communication cadences.



*Early Identification
and Early Intervention
Improve Outcomes*

Many challenges that arise in charter school performance—whether academic, financial, or operational—begin as small, detectable signals. CSI's approach starts with the proactive identification and careful interpretation of early warning indicators, recognizing that not every signal reflects a true risk requiring intervention. Some indicators may reflect normal variation, timing issues, or contextual factors best understood in partnership with the school.

When potential signals emerge—such as data quality questions, enrollment fluctuations, grant spenddown concerns, or gaps in compliance submissions—CSI first engages with school staff to understand the underlying circumstances. In many cases, this early communication is sufficient to clarify the issue or support a course correction without further action. When indicators suggest a higher likelihood of escalation, CSI is positioned to respond early and proportionately, providing targeted support before challenges intensify. This graduated approach allows CSI to distinguish routing variation from meaningful risk and intervene at the right time, helping schools stabilize and sustain strong performance.

CSI's approach starts with the **proactive identification** and **careful interpretation** of early warning indicators.

CSI's Theory of Action

Not all schools—and not all aspects of a school's operations—require the same level of interaction or monitoring. CSI uses objective criteria to identify when specific areas within a school may benefit from Tier II (targeted) or Tier III (intensive) support, rather than applying a single designation across the entire organization. As a result, a school may receive targeted support in one area (for example, multilingual learner services) while remaining Tier I in others (such as nutrition, finance, or governance).



*Differentiated
Support Promotes
Equity and Reduces
Inefficiency*

This differentiated, area-specific approach provides multiple benefits:

- Schools with strong systems retain autonomy where it is warranted.
- Schools with emerging needs receive timely, targeted assistance.
- Schools facing significant challenges gain access to hands-on, intensive interventions.

By tailoring supports to discrete areas of need, CSI avoids one-size-fits-all oversight and directs time, expertise, and resources where they will have the greatest impact. This approach promotes equity by meeting schools where they are—while also increasing system efficiency by focusing intervention precisely where it is most needed.

CSI's tiered model balances supportive partnership with rigorous accountability. Clear expectations, collaborative problem-solving, and ongoing communication build trust with schools. At the same time, consistent monitoring, benchmarks, and defined tier criteria maintain high standards for student outcomes, fiscal responsibility, and operational quality.



*Relationships and
Accountability Work
Together*

CSI's tiered support model is built on replicable, documented practices—such as communication templates, milestone structures, checklists, and office hours. By codifying what works and sharing it across teams, CSI increases institutional consistency and reduces risk associated with staff transitions. It also accelerates improvement across departments by enabling teams to learn from one another's successes.



*Replicable Systems
Strengthen
Organizational
Learning*

How CSI's Tiered Model Works

Tier I: Universal Supports (All Schools)

Universal supports focus on prevention, clarity, and access. These resources help schools navigate requirements efficiently and confidently. Examples include:

- Annual handbooks outlining expectations and timelines
- Standardized resources, templates, and guides
- Online training modules and video tutorials
- Transparent calendars with key deadlines
- Automated or regularly scheduled reminders
- Public reporting tools and dashboards

Tier II: Targeted Supports (Emerging Needs)

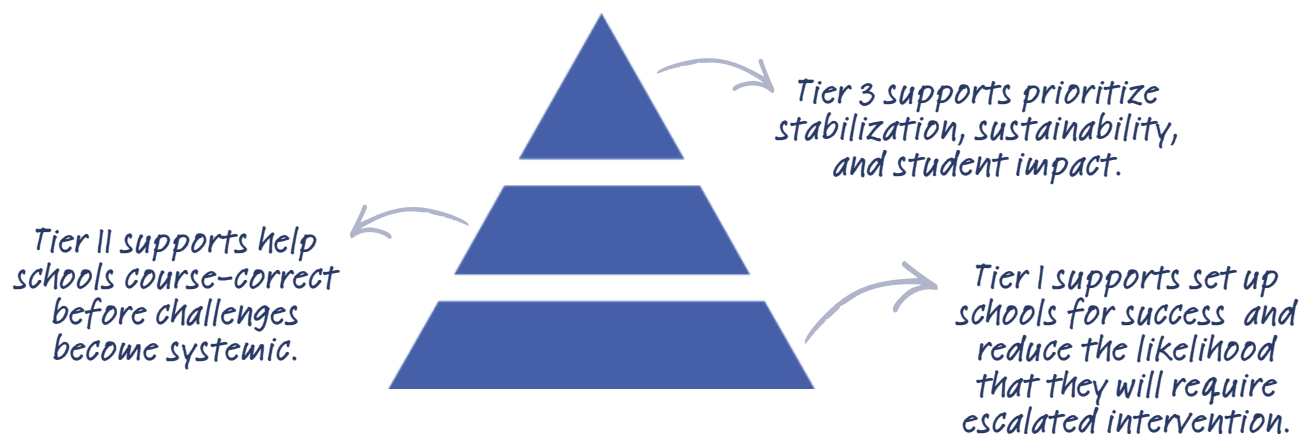
Schools demonstrating early-stage risk or capacity needs receive targeted support. Examples include:

- Proactive check-in emails ahead of deadlines
- Structured support calls with CSI staff
- Progress checkpoints and early submission review
- Advanced workshops tailored to specific needs
- Additional reviews of plans or documentation
- Collaborative troubleshooting with program specialists

Tier III: Intensive Interventions (Significant or Persistent Concerns)

When schools face more serious issues, CSI supports intensify and become more customized. Examples include:

- Dedicated support teams
- On-site or virtual coaching
- Individualized improvement plans
- Frequent monitoring cycles
- Leadership engagement and follow-up meetings
- Tailored training and capacity-building plans



Why CSI's Approach Works

CSI's approach has produced measurable improvements across key areas, including compliance rates, grant spenddown, data quality, and successful renewal outcomes.

For example, CSI saw:

- ✓ *100% deadline compliance*
in key data collections after implementing a structured reminder cadence and individualized outreach
- ✓ *Significant reduction in unrecoverable grant funding*
from over \$550,000 to under \$125,000 after implementing milestone pacing and tiered financial monitoring
- ✓ *Increased identification of Gifted students*
after programmatic tiering and targeted support for schools with historically low identification rates
- ✓ *Higher-quality renewal submissions*
with more schools engaging in optional check-ins and coaching

These outcomes reinforce the value of combining universal supports, differentiated intervention, and early monitoring with **strong relationships and clear expectations.**

Successes and Lessons Learned

CSI's tiered support model has generated measurable improvements—but it has also evolved through trial, reflection, and adaptation. The following lessons highlight what we learned when strategies did not initially work as intended and how refinements strengthened the model.

Lesson 1

Clarity Matters More Than Volume

What We Learned

Early versions of CSI's handbooks, templates, and process guides were comprehensive but overly detailed and difficult to navigate. Instead of reducing errors, these lengthy resources sometimes created confusion and stress—particularly for new leaders or schools with limited staffing. Key requirements were occasionally missed simply because essential information was buried within long documents.

How We Adapted

CSI shifted its approach to developing resources to emphasize clarity, usability, and consistency. This included redesigning handbooks for easier navigation, creating shorter modular guidance, incorporating examples and annotated templates, and aligning formatting and communication cadences across teams.

Impact

After simplifying and standardizing core resources, CSI saw fewer resubmissions, higher on-time submission rates, increased school satisfaction with resource usability, and reduced staff time spent troubleshooting preventable errors.

Lesson 2

Standardization Helps - But Only When Paired With Training and Feedback Loops

What We Learned

Initial efforts to standardize tools such as checklists, dashboards, pacing guides, and office hours models increased consistency but did not immediately translate into widespread adoption. Schools needed clearer training, more examples, and opportunities to provide feedback.

How We Adapted

CSI paired each major tool rollout with onboarding modules, live or recorded walkthroughs, user testing, and school feedback cycles. Departments now routinely use school input to refine tools after each submission season.

Impact

Standardized tools became more intuitive and widely used, reducing errors, strengthening cross-team alignment, and increasing school confidence in CSI's systems and expectations.



Lesson 3

Differentiated Support Requires School Context

What We Learned

Evidence-based interventions are not always effective when applied uniformly. Some early targeted supports were technically sound but misaligned with a school's leadership capacity, culture, or local constraints—reducing their impact and, in some cases, creating frustration.

How We Adapted

CSI introduced structured pre-intervention conversations with school staff, strengthened cross-team relationships within CSI and across school teams, and tailored pacing, communication, and support plans to better match school needs. Strong relationships and consistent communication became essential components of every tiered support.

Impact

Schools experienced more relevant, responsive support, and CSI saw improved engagement, clearer problem-solving partnerships, and more durable progress in Tier II and Tier III contexts.



LESSON 4

Early Signals Must Be Actionable

What We Learned

CSI's early-warning system initially surfaced a mix of meaningful risk indicators and normal variation. Some signals reflected timing issues, context-specific circumstances, or temporary fluctuations that did not ultimately require CSI intervention, while in other cases, developing concerns were not identified early enough to prompt timely support. This reinforced the importance of distinguishing true risk from normal variation before escalating a response.

How We Adapted

CSI refined indicator thresholds, weighting, and definitions and intentionally strengthened the bridge between identification and intervention. Teams incorporated early touchpoints with schools to better understand context before tiering decisions were made. Pre-tiering conversations, paired with cross-team calibration routines, helped ensure that quantitative signals were interpreted consistently and supplemented with qualitative insight—allowing CSI to determine when monitoring alone was sufficient and when early intervention was warranted.

Impact

By improving both the accuracy of early-warning indicators and the decision-making process that follows their detection, CSI reduced unnecessary escalations while strengthening its ability to intervene early when risks were real. Schools benefited from clearer communication, more timely and targeted support, and a graduated response that addressed challenges before they intensified—reinforcing stability without over-intervention.

Conclusion



CSI's tiered supports and interventions model is a comprehensive, proactive, equity-driven, and continually evolving approach to charter school oversight.

By grounding decision-making in early indicators, matching support to need, and using consistent, replicable practices, CSI ensures that every school receives the right level of support at the right time.





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