

AUTHORIZER EVALUATION EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

State Charter School Commission of Georgia | September 6, 2024

OVERVIEW

Georgia law requires an annual review of all charter school authorizers, to assess their “adherence to the principles and standards of charter school authorizing practices” approved by the State Board of Education (SBOE) (O.C.G.A. § 20-2-2063.3). The Georgia State Charter School Commission developed an evaluation tool based on the 15 standards of quality practices in the [Georgia Principles and Standards for Charter School Authorizing](#) approved in December 2021. This evaluation assesses the authorizer’s core responsibilities in the following areas:

1. Authorizer Commitment & Capacity
2. The Petition Process
3. Performance Contracting
4. Oversight and Evaluation
5. Renewal and Termination

The [National Association of Charter School Authorizers](#) conducted the authorizer evaluation for the Georgia State Charter School Commission July – September 2024. The attached evaluation is the culmination of a process, which included an extensive document review, data analysis, surveys, multiple conversations and discussions with the authorizing staff, and a two-day site visit, during which the evaluation team interviewed authorizing staff, leadership, and board members.

This evaluation is designed to provide the Commission with a reflective, formative analysis of its primary strengths, priorities for improvement, and recommendations. Use of this critical feedback is intended to strengthen existing practices and accelerate the adoption of others that will lead to stronger outcomes for students and communities.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The State Charter Schools Commission of Georgia (Commission) is a quality authorizer, with a strong culture of commitment, leadership, and judgment. The Commission was rated **Exemplary**. With strengths in a significant number of basic standards. A majority of the growth areas identified relate to the advanced criteria, which signals an existing authorizing approach that is strong and thorough.

At the time of evaluation, the Commission was in the midst of an organizational restructure that was both growing the staff and capacity of the Commission, as well as redefining and clarifying roles and responsibilities. In general, the transitions have been made in an intentional way to preserve the strong practices already in place and build on areas of growth from a previous evaluation. As a result of this evaluation, the following strengths,

areas of growth, and recommendations were identified. Please note, that additional information, feedback, and recommendations can be found in the evaluation rubric.

Strengths:

- There is a clear intentionality of reflection and spirit of continuous improvement at the Commission, which was evident in conversations with staff and leadership.
- There is a very positive relationship between Commission staff and the board. The board of Commissioners has great confidence in what the staff produces.
- The Commission's documentation of processes and procedures as well as its availability of resources is very strong. For example, one recommendation noted during the evaluation was related to updating the renewal criteria guidance, something the staff has already started doing.
- As part of the organizational restructure, the Commission has expanded its capacity and expertise in multiple ways; for example, adding new staff, particularly the finance expertise of Carmen Freemire and district monitoring expertise of Allen Mueller. The addition of the COO position and integration of the Foundation will impact the operations and impact of the Commission in meaningful ways.
- School survey responses throughout the evaluation were strong and positive, underscoring the positive relationship the Commission has established with schools in its portfolio.

Looking Forward:

- As the Commission continues to navigate through the restructure, it is important to be mindful of the line where support and oversight can get blurred. This is particularly important with the addition of the State Charter Schools Foundation. The Commission should identify where and when gray areas could emerge with the Commission serving as a support organization (e.g. providing technical assistance as a CSP grantee) and an oversight body (e.g. conducting ongoing monitoring and oversight). While not very prevalent nationally, it is not unusual for an agency to act in both capacities. In addition, the office of charter school compliance that was recently created provides an opportunity for the Commission to connect with district-authorized schools but also some complexity in resources and relationships. It will be critical for the Commission to be clear with staff and schools on how they will work through this as an agency.
- Given the desire to grow their portfolio, the Commission would benefit from a centralized data management system to track historical compliance and monitoring data. Not only would this help build the capacity of staff and ensure efficient compliance monitoring, but it would also build the capacity of the Commission,
- Beyond policies and guidance documents, the Commission would benefit from ensuring consistent understanding and implementation of practices and policies across the portfolio, especially as new staff are brought on board. Specifically related to evaluation criteria around school autonomy, having greater clarity internally about the systems to support monitoring and oversight may help alleviate some perceptions of overreach indicated in the school feedback survey.
- The Comprehensive Performance Framework provides a robust set of metrics to assess school performance. However, some sections, particularly the Operational

Performance section, rely heavily on “compliance” measures. While these are important to include, the Commission could also benefit from including additional “quality” measures that address the degree to which certain operational indicators are effectively executed, not just that a school is in compliance. NACSA’s Guide to Performance Frameworks provides examples of both compliance measures and quality measures. Additionally, the academic data received by the Georgia Department of Education, while robust, does leave room for additional analysis related to subgroup performance. There is opportunity to further disaggregate and analyze all subgroups, specifically – students with special needs, multilingual learners, gifted and talented students, and students experiencing homelessness.

- While the Commission has wide expertise represented on staff, one notable area of experience lacking was school-based experience, specifically in school leadership. This was noted by schools in survey responses. The Commission was already aware of this need and demonstrated a desire to bring on school leadership expertise with future hires.

Updating the Georgia Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing: Authorizer Evaluation Rubric

It is recommended that Category II, Standard 5: Petition Decisions be updated to better reflect the flexibility needed for the Commission’s petition review timeline. Currently, the fourth criteria states:

“Recommendations are shared with petitioners at least one week prior to the authorizing board meeting and within 90 days of receiving the complete application.”

Given that much of the Commission’s petition review work and ability to act can be dependent on a local district’s completion of certain tasks, the 90-window is not always a reasonable timeline to adhere to. The Commission does aim to complete petition reviews in a reasonable amount of time and ensure a sufficient pre-opening period exists to set new schools up for success. For future evaluations, the rubric should reflect the flexibility needed for different Georgia authorizers to complete the petition review process.

Additional Resources

The following resources are available to support the Commission in implementing some of the recommendations above.

- NACSA’s [Guide to Performance Frameworks](#) provides suggestions for academic, operational, and financial metrics that the Commission might consider including in the Comprehensive Performance Framework. See page 95 in NACSA’s linked resource above for other authorizer examples.
- The work being done in Texas could serve as a reference for the Commission as they seek to support the state of Georgia’s capacity to authorize quality options. More information on Texas’s Partnerships approach can be found [here](#).
- For collaboration related to managing technical assistance where the authorizer is also the CSB grantee, the following authorizers may be useful resources:
 - [Louisiana Department of Education](#)
 - [Texas Education Agency](#)
 - [Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education](#)