



Overview

Colorado has been at the forefront of the charter school movement since 1994, when its first charter law was adopted. Supporting the state's charter sector for nearly two decades, the Colorado League of Charter Schools (the League) spearheaded the Building Charter School Quality (BCSQ) initiative to address the challenge of quality in the nation's charter schools. In 2006, the League convened a national charter coalition, partners including CREDO at Stanford University, the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools and the National Association of Charter School Authorizers, which developed quality standards that can apply across the nation's charter sector.

Building Charter School Quality in Colorado

As one of BCSQ's target states, Colorado has made great strides in implementing quality measures and attainable goals for other states to replicate. The BCSQ partnership released its report, *Building Charter School Quality in Colorado*, in January, 2011. The report provides an overview of the state's charter school landscape and offers gap analyses of the charter school policies, charter school authorizer practices, support services for public charter schools, and the public education data system policies in Colorado.

According to the report, Colorado provides its charter school sector:

- ✓ A policy environment that allows for positive charter school growth
- ✓ Effective charter authorizer practices
- ✓ A strong charter school support organization with stable and consistent leadership
- ✓ Good state technical and data support
- ✓ A strong charter law that is currently ranked fourth in the nation by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools

The report makes the following recommendations on how Colorado can continue to improve:

- ✓ More transparency in the charter application, review and decision-making processes
- ✓ Improved performance-based contracts for schools
- ✓ A more comprehensive way to monitor and collect charter school data
- ✓ A clearer process for renewal, nonrenewal and revocation decisions

Results & Outcomes in Colorado of the BCSQ Initiative

Over the past four years, the BCSQ project's activities in Colorado have included the development of the **Colorado Growth Model**, appropriate **Benchmarks for Alternative Education Campuses**, the **Denver Public Schools Accreditation Model**, and a number of tools that charter schools and authorizers can use to improve their practices such as the **Performance Management Institute** and a **Model Charter Application**.

1. Colorado Growth Model

Colorado was the first state to implement a new longitudinal growth measure that tracks a student's growth over time. Since 2009, five additional states have adopted the model, and nine more are near adopting it.

2. Benchmarks for Alternative Education Campuses

Colorado adopted an accountability framework for the state's alternative education campuses. This new framework helps schools who cater to high-risk students by holding the schools accountable to a rigorous, yet relevant standard.

3. Denver Public Schools Accreditation Model

BCSQ worked with Denver Public Schools to develop a renewal framework for charters that was consistent with BCSQ's *A Framework for Academic Quality*. In 2009, DPS adopted the framework for all the district's public schools.

4. Authorizer Tools

The Performance Management Institute (PMI) is a two-day workshop to help schools, authorizers, charter school organizations, and policymakers put both frameworks into action. The Model Charter Application includes language and tools for founding groups and authorizers, aligning school and authorizer practices with the quality frameworks.