



NATIONAL
CHARTER SCHOOL
RESOURCE CENTER

CSP State Entity Grantee Overviews

U.S. Department of Education
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The National Charter School Resource Center (NCSRC) provides technical assistance to federal grantees and resources supporting charter sector stakeholders working across the charter school life cycle. NCSRC is funded by the U.S. Department of Education and managed by Manhattan Strategy Group in partnership with WestEd.

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Introduction

The U.S. Department of Education Charter School Programs (CSP) awards grants to State Entities (SE) that enable them to award subgrants to eligible applicants in their State to open and prepare for the operation of new charter schools and to replicate and expand high-quality charter schools. Grant funds must also be used to provide technical assistance (TA) to eligible applicants and authorized public chartering agencies in opening and preparing for the operation of new charter schools, or replicating or expanding high-quality charter schools; and to work with authorized public chartering agencies to improve authorizing quality, including developing capacity for, and conducting, fiscal oversight and auditing of charter schools.¹

The following U.S. Department of Education CSP SE grantee overviews capture key elements of each grantee's project and disseminate lessons learned and project successes. Each overview includes key components of the grantee's project, a description of major grant activities with a general timeline, highlights of project successes and lessons learned, and quotes from grantees.

Sources for the grantee overviews include respective grantee's CSP application, completed project evaluation where available, public websites, and interviews with leaders of the grant-funded project. Grant activities described in these profiles are not exhaustive, but instead reflect the focus of project leaders at the time they were interviewed. Links to grantees' CSP applications and websites are provided throughout the document where applicable. Any data collected from external data sources is additionally cited. All statements of fact or causality are derived from grantee publications or interviews and have not been verified or vetted by NCSRC except where explicitly stated.

Further Reading

National Charter School Resource Center (2020). [SMART Objectives Toolkit](#).

National Charter School Resource Center (2020). [The SMART Approach: Strategies for Making Objectives SMART](#).

National Charter School Resource Center (2021). [State Entity Grantee Profiles](#).

National Charter School Resource Center (2021). [Logic Model Toolkit: A Resource for Current and Prospective Grantees of Charter School Programs](#).

Colorado Department of Education

Grantee Overview

The mission of the Schools of Choice Unit (SOC) of the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) is to “support high-quality educational choices for Colorado families and students and promote thoughtful innovations that will prepare Colorado students to be 21st-century adults.”² SOC works with partners across the sector to provide direct technical assistance (TA) to charter administrators, financial managers, boards, and authorizers. SOC also convenes discussions across stakeholder groups within the charter sector and disseminates promising practices on student access and equity.

CSP State Entities Grant

- Colorado Department of Education
- SE grant awarded in 2018
- Total expected funding over five years: \$55,171,335

Colorado Department of Education’s Schools of Choice Unit

Colorado’s state charter law was passed in



As of the 2020–21 school year,

Colorado has  **262** charter schools, enrolling approximately  **132,215** students

Charter students represent approximately **15%**  of Colorado public school students

36% of charter school students are eligible for free- and reduced-price meals



Grant Goals³

1. Increase the number of high-quality charter school options and the number of students who attend them
2. Raise educational outcomes for all charter school students by increasing capacity among authorizers and charter school leaders to increase quality charter school programs and to successfully address access and equity gaps among educationally disadvantaged students

Grant Activities

Administrator Learning Community and Induction Program

SOC oversees a learning community and induction program for charter school administrators known as the [Administrator Mentoring Cohort \(AMC\)](#) in collaboration with the Charter School Institute (CSI), a state authorizer. This program is required for charter schools receiving subgrants

and is also made available to established charter schools to receive free coaching and professional development for current or aspiring school leaders. The program provides training, mentorship, networking, site visits, and support for professional licensure for school principals, aspiring school leaders, and established school leaders transitioning into charter school leadership for the first time. SOC collaborated with CSI to establish the program's curriculum and standards, which rely on the Colorado School Support Initiative (CSSI) Standards of Quality and research on best practices in effective school leadership and building the foundation for strong schools.⁴

Charter School Board Training

The Schools of Choice Unit provides regular trainings and on-demand workshops for Colorado charter school boards in collaboration with CSI, the Colorado League of Charter Schools (the League), and the Colorado Association of Charter School Authorizers (CACSA). SOC provides live, in-person training for charter school boards at regular times throughout the year, and also has been collaborating with CSI, CACSA, and the League to develop new online board training modules that can be accessed on-demand. SOC partners with the League to administer the board member training modules, and CACSA incorporates these trainings into their work and monitoring processes.

Charter School Business Manager Networking, Mentoring, and Training

SOC has leveraged existing outreach and engagement efforts with charter school business and operations members to offer regular, SOC-supported training opportunities for these professional staff so that they have an opportunity to learn from SOC employees, finance professionals, authorizers, and other charter schools about sound financial practices and legal requirements. The goal is to strengthen the workforce of charter school leaders with financial expertise in the state. The training opportunities connect financial professionals and school leaders for training and networking to build capacity, to work through common challenges, and to share resources. SOC has also recently piloted a mentor program for first year subgrantees to ensure that new school business operations staff have access to regular coaching and support from seasoned charter practitioners. The financial professional mentors are creating a “playbook” on establishing a strong financial foundation from startup through operations to codify lessons learned and extend them to charter schools across the state.

Equity Convenings and Learning Communities

SOC serves as a convener to facilitate collaboration, knowledge sharing, and problem-solving to better understand and address equity and access challenges confronting Colorado charter schools. Equity convenings are organized around topics identified by an advisory board and include a commitment to identifying promising practices both for charter schools and charter authorizers. In addition, SOC features five topic-based webinars each year focused on diversity, equity, and inclusivity in charter schools. Webinars have included presentations by partners in Colorado around [multi-tiered system of supports \(MTSS\) and rightful presence](#) and [anti-racist policy development](#).^{5,6} In addition, SOC has furthered this equity work through an “Equal Access” webinar series developed in collaboration with CSI and facilitating authorizer-focused equity discussions in collaboration with CACSA.

Annual equity convenings provide a responsive forum for stakeholders across the charter sector to discuss intentional steps to closing opportunity gaps across the state. This work is overseen by an advisory panel that includes local authorizers, school leaders, state education stakeholders, and experts in diversity, equity, and inclusion. These convenings have been facilitated by partners across the sector, including CSI, University of Colorado Denver, and the League. Past convenings

have focused on equity in special education, including how charter school stakeholders can respond to the coronavirus pandemic in a way that supports delivering education to students with disabilities.^{7,8} CDE, in partnership with CSI, has produced [white papers](#) and [case studies](#) following the equity convenings to disseminate relevant research and detail the experiences of Colorado charter schools in successfully implementing best practices on the topic.

“Stakeholders want to ensure fairness, and everyone has their own perspective. Coming to the table together ended up being a beautiful thing. This gives them opportunities to make change.

-Peg McMillen, Charter School Support and Grant Supervisor at CDE

SOC also hosts school-driven professional learning communities (PLCs) that collectively identify a single barrier to equitable education and work collaboratively to generate solutions. Schools apply to start a PLC based on topics of interest. Examples of topics addressed include using inclusive and non-discriminatory language on school websites and overcoming equity challenges with school transportation. Through these PLCs, charter schools have implemented more inclusive messaging to their communities and worked through transportation issues with peers.

Grant Timeline

Year 1 (2018–2019): Hired new staff. Conducted studies around trends in the charter sector. Built and revamped new school development supports and training alongside CSI and CACSA.

2018–2019

2019–2020

2020–2021

2021–2022

Year 2 (2019–20): Awarded eight subgrants to schools with one still pending.

Next Steps: Award subgrantees. Expand equity work to include subgrantee trainings, PLCs, and collaborative work with SOC’s partners.

Project Successes

Equity Work

The Schools of Choice Unit’s equity work has brought together critical voices from across the educational landscape in Colorado, spurring an urgency in stakeholders to explore challenges and act on issues. These convenings have helped to de-escalate fear around such topics as opportunity gaps by prompting conversations around shared values, such as equity and fairness, to motivate change. This aspect of SOC’s technical assistance work will continue to grow, continually expanding to include a wide variety of stakeholder roles and perspectives in the Colorado education landscape.

Business Manager Communities

In creating and evolving the charter school business manager networking, mentoring, and training, SOC noticed that schools were lacking financial capacity for school sustainability. According to SOC, the business manager community has been a positive space for the business and education worlds to come together around a shared vision of improved financial capacity in charter schools. The community provided a space to connect charter school financial professionals who may not otherwise have a connection to colleagues doing similar work.

Mentoring for New School Developers

Following two years of planning, research, and site visits, as well as managed work from SOC staff, the Schools of Choice Unit established a contracted coaching and support program for new, expanding, and replicating charter schools. After assessing eligible charter schools using a readiness checklist, SOC, through its contractor, will support 15 charter developers per year by providing coaching in governance, finance, and operations and other recognized standards known to contribute to successful opening or expansion.

Grantee Lessons Learned

Just go for it. Actions lead to progress. To address barriers to equity, SOC recognized that education stakeholders need to move beyond talking about the need for change into intentionally engaging stakeholders to act on solutions. Shifting from problem-based discussions, wherein stakeholders focus on the barriers that prevent the sector from making progress, to solutions-based discussions has motivated progress toward change. It was meaningful for SOC to enable stakeholders who felt limited by barriers to join conversations and identify common struggles in the charter school sector.

Be prepared for pushback. Build in feedback. SOC identified that many sensitive topics, especially those related to equity, will invite pushback. SOC prepares for resistance by involving key stakeholders early in the work to encourage discussion and buy-in before the efforts become public. Stakeholder involvement and investment are necessary for effecting meaningful change.

Cultivate relationships across the sector. Colorado is fortunate to have long-held, collaborative relationships with key organizations in the charter school sector, which increase the value and reach of SOC's program. Each entity brings their unique role and lens to the collaborative work, allowing for creativity in how the supports reach charter schools. Strong partnerships enrich the expertise of SOC and allow SOC to share their resources and expertise with a broader audience across the state.

Maryland State Department of Education

Grantee Overview

The mission of the Charter School Program of the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) is to “support, grow, and sustain the Maryland public charter school sector so that it will continue to provide high-quality education options for Maryland families; deliver strong outcomes for disadvantaged students; and contribute to the success of Maryland’s Public School Systems.”⁹ The Maryland Charter School Program works to strengthen the charter school sector in the state by providing technical assistance (TA) and subgrants to charter schools and working with authorizers to improve authorizing processes. MSDE prioritizes collaboration with partners across the sector to provide high-quality resources and TA and increase the dissemination and implementation of best practices.

CSP State Entities Grant

- Maryland State Department of Education
- SE grant awarded in 2017
- Total expected funding over five years: \$23,343,872

Maryland State Department of Education’s Charter School Program

Maryland’s state charter law was passed in



As of the 2020–21 school year,

Maryland has  **47** charter schools, enrolling approximately  **23,338** students

Charter students represent approximately **2.6%**  of Maryland public school students

49.7% of charter school students are eligible for free- and reduced-price meals



Grant Goals¹⁰

1. Create high-quality public charter schools
2. Strengthen authorizing and oversight
3. Share outcomes and lessons learned and increase collaboration

Grant Activities

Support for Start-Up and Existing Charter Schools

MSDE partners with the Maryland Alliance for Public Charter Schools (MAPCS) to provide TA on starting and operating charter schools through workshops, webinars, and resources.¹¹ As part of this effort, MAPCS runs an incubator in which a cohort of new school developers is provided one-

on-one and small group mentoring as well as targeted resources over the course of a year, designed to increase participants' knowledge and capacity around school start-up. MSDE also contracts with MAPCS to provide TA and training to existing charter schools through workshops on such topics as fostering diversity, addressing issues related to the coronavirus pandemic, and finance and operations.¹²

Authorizer Community of Practice

MSDE offers TA to authorizers in order to enrich the authorizing landscape and improve the collective quality of authorizing practices across the state. MSDE initiated TA with an assessment of Maryland authorizers' capacity, which was conducted by SchoolWorks. From there, MSDE created an interactive authorizer community of practice with the goal of creating a shared authorizer resource repository.

School-to-School Collaboration Program

MSDE created a School-to-School Collaboration Program to forge partnerships among charter schools and non-charter schools and promote problem-solving across the educational sector. This program allows schools to share resources and information about implementing successful practices and programs. One example of a partnership that emerged from this program is the City Neighbors Foundation's professional development mentorship with four schools (two charter and two traditional public schools) on implementing project-based learning.¹³ Another example of this work is a new collaboration led by the Baltimore Leadership School for Young Women in partnership with two other all-girls schools in Baltimore City, one charter and one traditional public school. Teams of teachers from the three schools are working together to document best practices and lessons learned in working with young Black and Hispanic women and underserved populations in Baltimore. Additionally, the schools co-create and co-lead professional development opportunities. See the [MAPCS website](#) for more examples of this work.

Charter School Profiles

In addition to Maryland's school performance report cards, MSDE has used grant funds to create robust [profiles](#) of Maryland charter schools that incorporate qualitative data on the schools related to their mission, community, and programming. These profiles provide a centralized hub for families and communities to find detailed information about charter schools in Maryland, including what makes each school unique, school programming, location, and enrollment lottery information.

Grant Timeline

Year 1 (2017–18): Awarded six subgrants to eligible charter schools.

Year 3 (2019–20): Awarded four subgrants to eligible charter schools.

2017–2018

2018–2019

2019–2020

2020–2021

Year 2 (2018–19): Awarded six subgrants to eligible charter schools.

Next Steps: Working with MAPCS to launch a virtual charter school conference. Creation of a community of practice for authorizers. Conduct a fourth round of subgrant awards.

Project Successes

Awarding Subgrants in Year 1

MSDE made the decision to start the process of awarding subgrants to charter schools in the first year of the grant, rather than defining the first grant year as a planning year. Demand for the subgrants was high; MSDE exceeded their goal in the first year for number of subgrants awarded to schools. These early awards allowed MSDE the flexibility to apply for supplemental funding to conduct additional rounds of subgrant awards. Furthermore, this afforded MSDE additional time to plan for the closure of subgrants in the last grant award year.

Cross-Sector Partnerships

The School-to-School Collaboration Program has promoted engagement around and communication on best practices across schools within and outside the charter sector. The program has fostered partnerships between charter schools and traditional public schools facing similar challenges and allowed for larger convenings that impact the educational sector across the state.

Sustained Charter School Profiles

MSDE identified the Charter School Profiles as a successful outcome of their CSP SE grant. The grant allowed MSDE to create a process for the development of the profiles, and while it required time to develop, it is a resource that can be sustained beyond the grant period to extend transparency and foster information-sharing about charter schools in Maryland.

Grantee Lessons Learned

Find a high-capacity partner. MSDE chose to contract and partner with MAPCS for their TA work after a process of vetting bids from multiple organizations. By contracting with MAPCS, MSDE gains additional capacity to conduct activities while benefitting from MAPCS's roots in the community. MSDE's partnership with MAPCS also increases the post-grant sustainability of this work because of MAPCS's investment in supporting charter schools across the state long after the end of the grant.

Provide opportunities for communities of practice. As MSDE is not an authorizer, creating a forum for local education agency (LEA) authorizers through a community of practice provides a

“ The question in our state is often, ‘So what are the charter schools doing to share what they’ve learned with the broader education sector?’ Charter schools are so embedded in school systems that we wanted to foster their partnerships with other charter and traditional public schools to share these practices.

-Carol Beck, Director, Office of School Innovation at MSDE

structure for authorizers to collaborate and share high-quality practices. In Maryland, many LEAs do not have dedicated staff for authorizing and may be taking on authorizing activities as one of their many roles. Therefore, this community has been well received as a place for capacity building and resource sharing among colleagues. The group also allows MSDE to identify where they can further support authorizers and help foster high-quality work.

Drill down to the core of what drives success. In establishing programs for sharing best practices, MSDE referenced the WestEd framework for [Identifying Promising Practices in Charter Schools](#). MSDE encourages schools and participants in the communities of practice to think deeply about what precisely is making a difference for students in their schools. Identifying the key elements of success allows schools to sustain an impact on student outcomes, as well as extend their impact by collaborating with other schools and sharing promising practices.

¹ [Expanding Opportunities Through Quality Charter School Programs \(CSP\) Grants to State Entities](#)

² [Schools of Choice Unit](#)

³ Stated in [Colorado Department of Education's 2018 Grant Application](#)

⁴ Read more about Administrator Mentoring Cohort (AMC) and Induction Program [here](#).

⁵ MTSS focuses on “whole child” supports including behavior, social, and emotional needs as well as academic growth. Rightful presence goes beyond the idea of inclusion to establish belonging. The full recorded webinar is available [here](#).

⁶ Additional topic-based webinars, recorded sessions, and resources can be found [here](#).

⁷ This focus on special education was guided by a National Center for Special Education in Charter Schools [study](#) commissioned by CDE around enrollment of students with disabilities in Colorado charter schools.

⁸ Reports from the equity convenings can be found [here](#).

⁹ Maryland State Department of Education's 2017 SE Grant Application

¹⁰ As stated in [Maryland State Department of Education's 2017 SE Grant Application](#)

¹¹ On demand workshops, webinars, and resources about starting a charter school as well as other resources can be found on the [MAPCS website](#).

¹² Resources, webinars, and workshops from MAPCS around operating a school can be found [here](#).

¹³ City Neighbors operates three charter schools in Maryland.