

EQUITY-FOCUSED CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZING TOOLKIT

Prepared by *Research for Action* • November 2019



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Research for Action is a Philadelphia-based nonprofit organization. We seek to use research as the basis for improvement of educational opportunities and outcomes for traditionally underserved children and students. Our work is designed to strengthen early education, public schools, and post-secondary institutions; provide research-based recommendations to policymakers, practitioners, and the public; and enrich civic and community dialogue. For more information, please visit our website at www.researchforaction.org.

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Introduction

Providing high-quality and equitable learning opportunities should be a primary goal of all schools and school systems. Charter schools comprise the most steadily growing sector of Pennsylvania’s public education system. As with all public schools—given the right conditions—the charter sector can offer promise as a mechanism for reducing inequity.

Charter schools are public schools that function independently from existing school district structures. However, the Pennsylvania Charter School Law requires school districts to authorize the operation of brick-and-mortar charter schools and establish accountability systems to ensure that, among other requirements in the law, charter schools “serve as a model for other public schools” and increase learning opportunities for *all* students.¹ This Toolkit provides strategies to ensure that charter schools achieve these goals.

Compared to the PA state average, charter schools enroll high numbers of students who are historically underserved. However, compared to the district schools in their communities, many Pennsylvania charter schools are not equitably serving all kinds of students. For example, Pennsylvania charter schools tend to enroll higher shares of students with mild and moderate disabilities and lower shares of students with more significant and higher-cost support needs.² In addition, compared to their students’ districts of residence, Pennsylvania charter schools on average serve lower shares of English Learners,³ students

The Legislative Intent of Pennsylvania’s Charter School Law (24 P.S. § 17-1702-A)

1. Improve pupil learning.
2. Increase learning opportunities for all pupils.
3. Encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods.
4. Create new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be responsible for the learning program at the school site.
5. Provide parents and pupils with expanded choices in the types of educational opportunities that are available within the public school system.
6. Hold the schools established under this act accountable for meeting measurable academic standards and provide the school with a method to establish accountability systems.

¹ Pennsylvania General Assembly. Act 14 of 1949 (24 P.S. § 17-1717-A; 24 P.S. § 17-1702-A). Retrieved from <https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/LI/uconsCheck.cfm?txtType=HTM&yr=1949&sessInd=0&smthLwInd=0&act=014>

² Lapp, D and Lin, J. (April 2017). Charter school special education funding in Pennsylvania. Research for Action. Retrieved from <https://www.researchforaction.org/publications/charter-school-special-education-funding-pennsylvania/>

³ Staley, R and von Oehsen, T. (February 2019). Safeguarding educational equity: Protecting Philadelphia students’ civil rights through charter oversight. Education Law Center of Philadelphia. Retrieved from https://www.elc-pa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/ELC_report-Safeguarding-Civil-Rights.pdf

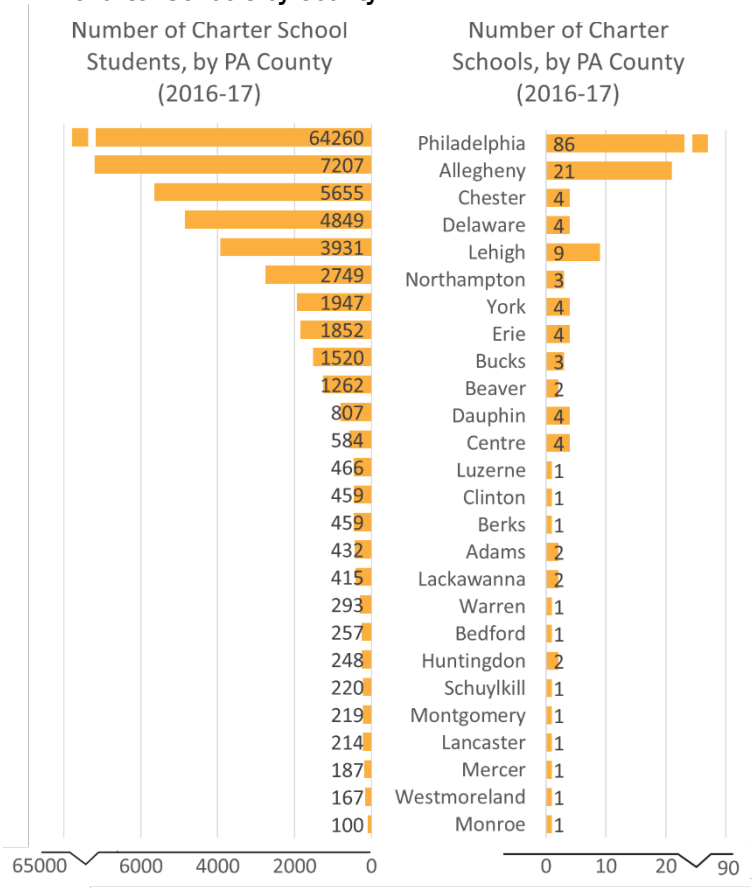
experiencing homelessness,⁴ and other students involved in the child welfare system.⁵ Research has found disparities by race⁶ and gender⁷ as well.

Ensuring that charter schools equitably serve students in their communities is a statewide concern. As of 2017, Pennsylvania was home to over 160 brick-and-mortar charter schools. While the majority of schools are in Philadelphia and Allegheny counties, 35% of brick-and-mortar charter schools, enrolling over 29,000 students, operate elsewhere in the state (see Figure 1).⁸

For the charter school sector to serve as a model for all public schools and provide opportunities for all students, authorizing practices of local districts and their school boards must ensure charter school enrollment is equitable and representative of the students in their communities.

Though certain aspects of charter authorizing are mandated by the state Charter School Law, school district authorizers have responsibility to design and implement oversight activities. As such, there are many opportunities to promote equity through authorizing practice.

Figure 1. Brick & Mortar Charter School Students and Charter Schools by County



⁴ Shaw-Amoah, A and Lapp, D. (December 2018). Students experiencing homelessness in Pennsylvania: Under-identification and inequitable enrollment. Research for Action. Retrieved from <https://www.researchforaction.org/publications/students-experiencing-homelessness-in-pennsylvania-under-identification-and-inequitable-enrollment/>

⁵ Hwang, S, et al. (June 2014). Supporting the needs of students involved with the child welfare and juvenile justice system in the School District of Philadelphia. The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia PolicyLab. Retrieved from http://policylab.chop.edu/sites/default/files/pdf/publications/PolicyLab_Report_Supporting_Students_Involved_with_Child_Welfare_June_2014.pdf

⁶ Frankenberg, E, et al. (March 2017). Exploring school choice and the consequences for student racial segregation within Pennsylvania’s charter school transfers. Education Policy Analysis Archives, 25(22). Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.14507/epaa.25.2601>

⁷ Corcoran, S and Jennings, J. (November 2016). The gender gap in charter school enrollment. Sage Journals. Retrieved from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0895904816673737?journalCode=epxa>

⁸ Research for Action. (2018). Pennsylvania school data project. Retrieved from <https://www.researchforaction.org/pa-school-data-project/>

Charter Equity Toolkit

This Toolkit provides strategies and considerations for how school district authorizers of brick-and-mortar charter schools can prioritize equity within each stage of the authorizing process.⁹ Resources include custom-made tools and examples of best practice from authorizers around the country. This is not a comprehensive set of tools to address all aspects of charter school authorization, though some of the external examples may also prove helpful in other areas of authorizing. **Ultimately, the goal of this Toolkit is to provide authorizers a menu of options that can either be adopted as is, or revised to align with individual community needs and priorities.**

Three principles inform the resources in this Toolkit:

1. Accountability and transparency are necessary to ensure that charter schools equitably serve students in their communities.
2. High-quality authorizing is time- and labor-intensive and requires active engagement from district staff, the local school board, and, often, outside partners.
3. The purpose of authorizing and oversight activities by district staff should be to inform the decision-making of the local school board which is responsible for administering the system of public education in their communities.

This Toolkit focuses on integrating equity across the **five stages of charter authorizing**, listed in Table 1 below. For each stage, this Toolkit includes an introduction that outlines key authorizing activities, considerations related to equity, a brief description of each tool, and additional external resources.

Table 1. Overview of Five Stages of Charter Authorization

| AUTHORIZING STAGE | HIGH-LEVEL CONSIDERATIONS |
|----------------------------|---|
| 1. Pre-Authorizing | What preliminary steps should authorizers take to position themselves to conduct oversight processes that effectively address equity? |
| 2. New Charter Application | What processes should be in place before an authorizer approves charters? |
| 3. Charter Agreement | How can authorizers review new charter applications through an equity lens? |
| 4. Annual Review | What language can be included in charter agreements to promote accountability for equitable access and practices? |
| 5. Renewal | How can authorizers monitor and hold charter schools accountable for equitable practices on an ongoing basis? |
| | How can renewal decisions consider evidence of equitable access? |

Defining Charter School Equity

For purposes of this Toolkit, charter school equity refers to equitable access to high-quality educational opportunities in charter schools for all kinds of students, specifically:

- Students with disabilities of all kinds;
- Students who are English Learners;
- Students of any race, ethnicity, or country of origin;
- Students living in poverty;
- Students experiencing homelessness;
- Students in foster care;
- Students in or returning from juvenile justice or other out of home placement; and
- Other students who may be highly mobile or historically underserved.

⁹ This Toolkit is focused on school district authorization of brick-and-mortar charter schools, but many of the strategies may also be relevant to state authorization of cyber charter schools. Likewise, while the tools are tailored toward charter schools, many reflect best practices that are also relevant to reducing inequity between and within traditional district schools.

The resources in this Toolkit were created and selected based on practices endorsed in the field of charter authorization and on their utility to address a documented equity need. In particular, due to the scale of their charter sectors, the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) and Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) have developed significant expertise in charter authorizing. These districts have offered critical guidance and resources that inform this Toolkit and can inform the work of districts throughout the Commonwealth. Resources are also drawn from the [National Association of Charter School Authorizers \(NACSA\)](#) and other nationally-respected authorizers such as [the State University of New York \(SUNY\) Charter Schools Institute](#), the [Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education](#), and the [Washington D.C. Public Charter School Board](#).

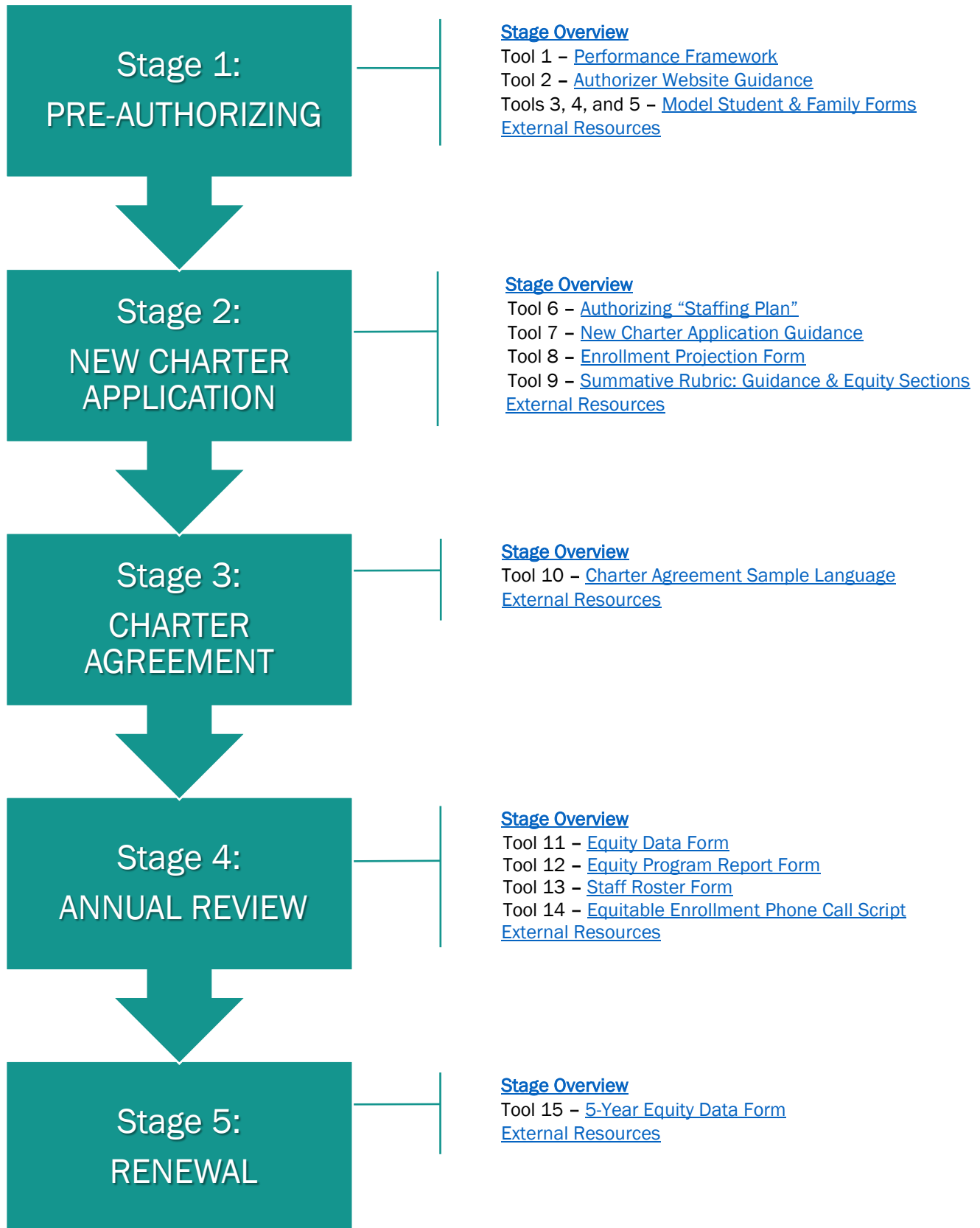
Disclaimer About the Need for Legal Counsel

Throughout this Toolkit we note the importance of consulting with legal counsel. In many instances, the law is not perfectly clear regarding the full extent of authorizers' authority and thus, authorizers should seek out legal advice at all stages before implementing specific tools and strategies of this Toolkit. Ensuring compliance with the Charter School Law will ultimately save time and resources.

How to Use the Toolkit

The flowchart below serves as a guide for the Toolkit. It contains hyperlinks to the five stages of charter school authorization and the specific tools provided for each stage. Users can navigate the Toolkit by scrolling through the document or can skip to specific stages or tools through the hyperlinks. Some of the individual tools are provided as Microsoft Excel documents and therefore the hyperlinks lead to an external download. Users are encouraged to review each "Stage Overview" to better understand how individual tools work together and fit into the larger strategy of designing charter authorization to increase equity.

Summary of Contents



1. Pre-Authorizing: Stage Overview

Successful charter school authorization and oversight requires that school districts establish authorizing processes and systems in advance of receiving and reviewing charter applications. The following considerations and tools can support authorizing work across stages, and should be in place before a district reviews new charter applications.

Considerations and Recommendations:

- **Establish clear expectations with school board:** A key activity for this stage is establishing alignment between district authorizing staff and the district school board, which will ultimately vote on all new charter applications and renewals. District staff who focus on charter authorizing should meet with board leadership and educate all board members about their responsibilities with regard to equity-focused charter authorization.
- **Finalize performance framework early:** Authorizers should collaborate with the school board to finalize the charter school performance framework, a document that establishes clear expectations and priorities for the charter schools authorized by the school board, well in advance of when new charter applications, renewals, and revocations occur. The performance framework tool below provides one sample framework that can be modified to fit the needs of districts.
- **Emphasize transparency and accountability:** Transparency and accountability are key to ensuring charter schools equitably serve all students and are thus a primary focus of these tools.

Table 2: Pre-Authorizing Stage: Tools and External Resources

| TOOLS | |
|---|----------------|
| Tool 1 – Performance Framework: | Page 9 |
| An authorizer’s performance framework establishes clear expectations and priorities for the charter schools that it authorizes. These expectations are the foundation of future authorizing activities and should be used in all other authorizing stages. This tool shows one way to create a framework that emphasizes equity. Many authorizers choose to make their framework public and include an overview of how the tool is used for accountability, as in the case of the Louisiana Charter School Performance Compact and School District of Philadelphia, included in the external resources section below. | |
| Tool 2 – Authorizer Website Guidance: | Page 13 |
| Transparent authorizing requires that the public have access to critical information. This tool includes recommendations for what authorizers should include on their websites to increase transparency in charter school authorization, operation, and oversight. | |
| Tools 3, 4, and 5 – Model Student & Family Forms: | Page 14 |
| When deployed inappropriately, mechanisms such as lottery and enrollment forms may violate students’ rights and create barriers to admission. It is recommended that authorizers establish model forms for charter school student applications (Tool 3) and student enrollment (Tool 4). There also must be a standard outlet for families and community members to register complaints (Tool 5) against charter schools that may be violating students’ rights, their charter agreement, or state or federal law. These tools provide forms and guidance that authorizers can adopt and, when appropriate, encourage their charter schools to adopt. | |

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

[School District of Philadelphia \(SDP\) Performance Framework Overview](#) – This site contains the full text of the SDP Performance Framework, outlines how SDP uses its Performance Framework, and includes links to subpages explaining each of the district’s three Framework domains in detail.

[SDP Calendar of Collections](#) – This calendar is released annually and provides due dates and descriptions for all documents and/or data that charter schools must submit to the authorizer.

[Pittsburgh Public Schools \(PPS\) Standard Complaint Form](#) – PPS includes this online parent complaint form on the charter schools section of the district website.

[Louisiana Charter School Performance Compact](#) – This document provides a comprehensive description of the Louisiana Department of Education’s approach to charter authorizing and their Performance Framework. This document also includes an overview and rubrics for annual and renewal evaluations.

[National Association of Charter School Authorizers \(NACSA\) Core Performance Framework](#) – This sample Framework provides detailed instructions for creating a performance framework and a sample framework, which is located in the document’s Appendix.

[Weighted Student Lotteries](#) – In some states/jurisdictions, authorizers and charter schools have developed weighted student lotteries to help charter schools target at-risk student populations. This report from the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS) provides analysis of state policies and information on how some states have enacted weighted student lotteries. [Commentators](#) have argued that weighted student lotteries and other strategies that reserve seats or give priority to particular groups of students based on diversity-related factors are an “area of untapped potential for individual charter schools and authorizers to promote integration.” Authorizers should consult with legal counsel to determine the viability of such an approach.

[Universal Enrollment Systems](#) – Universal or unified enrollment systems allow families to use one system to apply to any public school (district or charter) in their community. This report from NAPCS examines how these systems work in multiple jurisdictions and discusses potential pros and cons. When properly designed and implemented, these systems hold potential to increase access and equity. When poorly operated they have the potential to confuse and frustrate families. Notably, universal enrollment systems have generally been implemented in large school districts with significant charter school sectors. Authorizers should also consult with legal counsel to determine the viability of such a system.

[Teacher and Staff Diversity](#) – This report from Research for Action outlines promising strategies that education leaders can adopt to build a diverse teaching corps. Charter schools and authorizers could consider the strategies targeted at local education agencies and work with other policymakers to address teacher equity at other stages of the leaky teacher pipeline.

[Trauma-Informed Schools](#) – This report from Research for Action discusses recent momentum to develop trauma-informed education systems in Pennsylvania. The brief outlines the relationship between trauma and student learning and behavior, summarizes the evidence about the characteristics and impact of trauma-informed education, and highlights examples of trauma-informed approaches in Pennsylvania and elsewhere.

Tool 1: Performance Framework

High-quality authorizing begins with the establishment of a performance framework that will guide the authorizer’s oversight and accountability processes. A charter school performance framework articulates the district’s priorities and what is expected from charter schools. An authorizer’s performance framework should also be grounded in the intent of applicable laws, knowledge of best practices, and the needs of students in the community. This performance framework could inform performance rubrics used to evaluate new applications, annual reviews, and renewal applications from charter schools. For example, the categories, prompts, and statements in the performance framework can then become application prompts or rubric categories in future authorizing activities. Charter agreements may indicate that charter schools agree that oversight and accountability will be based on the framework.

Typically, a performance framework identifies the domains, or areas of performance, an authorizer will examine in evaluating charter school performance. Authorizers can then develop more detailed evaluation rubrics aligned to those domains. These rubrics can be used to make recommendations to the local school board, which will ultimately vote on applications and renewals. Annual reports highlight areas of deficiency or strength based on these rubrics and serve as written notice to charter schools and the community about schools’ performance.

Many authorizers choose to break their performance framework into three domains focusing on Academic, Financial, and Organizational practices (see SDP, NACSA, LDE frameworks in the [external resources](#) section). Some authorizers break their performance framework down further. For example, Pittsburgh’s Performance Framework has six categories: Mission, Purpose, and Needs; Marketing Data; Strategic Planning; Management Plan; Education Program; Operations; and Personnel/Leaders.

Tool 1 in the table below provides an example of a charter school performance framework with five main domains:

1. Access
2. Supporting All Students
3. Academics
4. Organizational
5. Financial

Tool 1 provides more detail on the first two domains (**Access** and **Supporting All Students**) as these inherently focus attention on aspects of school performance directly related to equitable practices. Complete performance frameworks should also consider equity when evaluating the other three domains of charter performance (**Academics**, **Organizational**, and **Financial**). Tool 1 below provides basic information about the content typically included in these domains as well as suggestions of relevant factors to support equity. However, as discussed above, this is not a comprehensive set of tools to address *all aspects* of charter school authorization. Authorizers should be sure to consult legal counsel and other resources to ensure they provide thorough accountability in all areas of authorizing.

TOOL 1: CHARTER AUTHORIZATION PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

1. Access

Charter schools are public schools and must protect the rights of all students. Charter schools should employ practices that ensure equitable access and eliminate any barriers for students enrolling or remaining in their charter school. The following policies and practices should be present in all charter schools:

Recruitment, Enrollment, and Retention:

- Recruitment practices actively seek a student body that reflects the diversity of students' communities of origin. Charter schools should develop detailed plans regarding how they will disseminate information to prospective students and families, including efforts to reach families with diverse racial, ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, families of students with disabilities, students in poverty, students experiencing homelessness, students who are English Learners, and students who are system-involved (including students in foster care or other out of home placements, students in or returning from juvenile justice placements, and other students receiving services from the child welfare system).
- Enrollment practices do not discriminate and are transparent, compliant with state and federal law, and follow best practices in admissions, lottery, waitlist, withdrawal, re-enrollment, and transfer policies, such that charter schools do not erect any improper preferences or barriers to admission.
- Plans and practices that demonstrate a clear commitment to retaining all enrolled students, including those students who may be struggling academically or otherwise. Plans also reflect the practice of backfilling (i.e., enrolling additional students when spots become open throughout the year).
- If permissible under the law, authorizers should consider incentivizing a unified enrollment system for all public schools in the community.
- If permissible under the law, authorizers should consider the benefits of a weighted student lottery to provide greater opportunity to historically underserved students.

Student Discipline/School Climate:

- A non-punitive code of conduct and/or discipline policy that provides clear notice of behavioral expectations and consequences that emphasize fairness, positive behavior, and are proportionate to behavioral infractions, ensures due process for students at all levels of infractions, and includes plans to prevent discipline disparities.
- Policies that clearly outline suspension and expulsion procedures, including procedures for students with disabilities, English Learners, and other historically underserved students.
- Disciplinary policies and practices do not exceed the authority legally granted to schools in that they are reasonable, not arbitrary or capricious, not unconstitutionally vague, are limited to regulating conduct that occurs when students are under school supervision, and do not violate students' civil rights to expression, religion, substantive due process, and equal protection.
- Data on student discipline should be accurate, disaggregated by student subgroups, regularly reported to the public, reviewed by charter schools, and used to drive improvement and reduce disparities.

2. Supporting All Students

Charter school should provide adequate and equitable supports to all students, including those who are historically marginalized. The following policies and practices should be present in all charter schools:

Supporting Students with Disabilities:

- Systems are in place to identify, serve, and monitor the progress of students with disabilities, including educating students with disabilities in the Least Restrictive Environment¹⁰.
- To ensure that all students receive a Free Appropriate Public Education,¹¹ programming is available for students with all types of disabilities, including specially designed instruction, accommodations and modifications, and a continuum of placements; systems are in place to modify curricula and instructional delivery in order to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities.
- Compliance with all legal requirements of IDEA, Section 504, ADA, and applicable state laws, including Chapter 711-Charter School Services and Programs for Children with Disabilities.

Supporting English Learners (ELs):

- Plans are in place to identify and appropriately place ELs into a Language Instruction Educational Program (LIEP), monitor their progress, and exit students from EL services when appropriate.
- Policies that ensure equitable access to the curriculum for ELs at all language proficiency levels, including plans to incorporate English language development into all classes.
- Plans are in place to ensure appropriate translation and interpretation services.
- Compliance with all legal requirements and civil rights protections.

Supporting Other Students Who Have Been Historically Underserved:

- Plans are in place to ensure that students in poverty, students experiencing homelessness, and students who are system-involved (including students in foster care, students in or returning from juvenile justice placements, and other students receiving services from the child welfare system) receive services and programming to ensure equal access to a Free Appropriate Public Education.
- Plans are in place to address the needs and monitor progress of students and comply with all legal mandates, including the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and Every Student Succeeds Acts.

3. Academics

Charter school should improve learning opportunities for all students and encourage new and innovative teaching methods. Accordingly, the following elements should be present in all charter schools:

Elements typically included in this domain:

Pedagogical Approach, Curriculum Scope and Sequence, Instructional Materials, Student Placement Procedures, Student Assessment and Testing, Professional Development

Academic domain elements to support equity:

- Plans and practices provide equitable and robust learning opportunities to all students, including equitable access to gifted and talented programming, advanced coursework, art, music, physical education, extracurricular activities, and other programming.
- Setting and making progress toward academic achievement and growth targets, aligned with state and federal accountability measures, for all students and student subgroups.
- Plans for assessment and grading that include provisions for students with disabilities and English Learners.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Education. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004). Retrieved from <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/b/300.114>

¹¹ U.S. Department of Education. Free Appropriate Public Education for students with disabilities: Requirements under Section 504 of The Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/edlite-FAPE504.html>

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- Professional development plans include training in cultural competency, trauma-informed practices, and in providing support to all learners, including students with disabilities, English Learners, and other students who have been historically underserved.
-

4. Organizational

Charter schools should be effective, viable organizations that adhere to their mission and vision, support program delivery, and establish appropriate systems and policies. In order to do so, the following elements should be present in all charter schools:

Elements typically included in this domain:

Mission, Vision, and Need; Organizational Structure, Strategic Planning/Goals, Board Governance, Staffing Plan, Service Providers/Contractors, Legal Compliance, Facilities Plans, Attendance Policies, Reporting, Transportation, Food, Safety, School Calendar, Parent and Community Engagement, Extracurricular Activities, Health Services, Insurance Coverage, Historical Performance/Outcomes (if applicable), Employee Evaluation, Recordkeeping and Confidentiality, Labor Relations (if applicable)

Organizational domain elements to support equity:

Mission, Vision, and Need:

- A mission and/or vision that defines the purpose, key design elements, and expanded educational opportunities offered by the school.
- A mission and/or vision that articulates the school's target community (geographic, demographic, grade level, etc.) and includes a commitment to equitably serving all students within that community.
- A mission and/or vision that responds to demonstrated needs of students' communities of origin and is informed by data and meaningful support from diverse constituencies.
- Alignment between school mission, vision, and all other school elements.

Parent, Family, and Community Engagement

- Active engagement with diverse students and families and the larger community in decision-making, including plans to actively disseminate information to families and the community.
- Transparency and access to board actions, meetings, and school governance.
- Processes for parent complaint review and dispute resolution.

Staffing:

- A staffing model that meets legal requirements for teacher and leader certification and includes sufficient numbers of certified special education teachers, certified ESL teachers, counselors, and nurses to support the student body.
 - Assignment and public identification of the charter school's McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Liaison.
 - Diversity among the charter school's board members, school leadership, and staff.
-

5. Financial

Charter schools should be fiscally sound organizations. In order to do so, the following elements should be present in all charter schools:

Elements typically included in this domain:

Budgeting and Long-Range Financial Planning, Internal Controls/Procedures, Financial Resources

Financial domain elements to support equity:

- Budgeting aligns with staffing model.
 - Adequate resources allotted for recruitment of historically underserved students and to effectively implement EL program, special education program, and any other supports for at-risk student populations.
-

Tool 2: Authorizer Website Guidance

As an authorizer, making information about current and prospective charter schools publicly available is essential for accountability and transparency. Furthermore, the PA School Code makes clear that it is the responsibility of authorizers under the “Sunshine Act” to provide notice of school board activities related to charter application and renewal decisions.¹²

Authorizers should maintain an up-to-date section of their website that contains the following information:

- New charter application information and timeline
- New charter applications received
- New charter application decisions
- Charter school annual reports
- Annual review findings, if appropriate
- Charter renewal notice of hearings and findings
- [Complaint procedure](#)
- [Model student application](#) and [enrollment forms](#)

When setting up a charter school section on the district’s website, consider the audience of each subpage, as different information will be relevant to different groups. Some authorizers choose to divide their site into sections that provide information for **families**, such as policies and school reports, and **charter operators**, which may include reporting requirements and application information. Because many families may not have access to computers, websites should also be accessible by mobile phones.

Screenshot of the homepage of the charter school section of the Pittsburgh Public Schools website:



¹² Pennsylvania General Assembly. Title 65 of 1998 (65 Pa.C.S. §§ 701-716). Retrieved from <https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/LI/consCheck.cfm?txtType=HTM&ttl=65&div=0&chpt=7>

Tools 3, 4, and 5: Model Student & Family Forms

Authorizers can emphasize equity by requiring or strongly encouraging charter schools to standardize equity-related processes. Three tools are provided below for examples of how **application**, **enrollment**, and **complaint** processes can be standardized.

Tool 3: [Model Student Application Form](#)

State and federal law prohibit charter schools from using discriminatory admissions policies. The first formal step in admissions is the student application form. Applications may not ask for information regarding a student's intellectual ability, disability status, English language proficiency, immigration status, or any other factor that would be illegal if used by a school district to grant or deny admission.¹³

Many authorizers provide a [Model Student Application Form](#), such as the one in this Toolkit. If more students apply for admission than the number of spots available, this form will be used to enter students into the lottery.

Tool 4: [Model Student Enrollment Form](#)

Once a student is accepted by a charter school, there is limited information that schools can require for enrollment, as such information requests can create considerable barriers. Enrollment processes can only include the following:

- Proof of residency (verifiable by mortgage statement, lease, bill, driver's license, etc.)
- Date of Birth (verifiable by birth certificate, passport, prior school records, baptismal certificate)
- Immunizations required by law (verifiable by immunization records, written or verbal statement from former school district or medical office)
- [Home Language Survey](#) as provided by PDE
- [Parent registration statement](#) (Act 26 Statement) as provided by PDE

For Tool 4, authorizers can use PDE's [Model Enrollment Form](#) that only asks for legally permissible information.

Tool 5: [Model Complaint Form](#)

Providing a mechanism to receive and address public complaints is an important accountability mechanism for any public school, including charter schools. This provides an opportunity for students, families, and other community members to raise concerns about potential violations of students' rights, financial impropriety, or other violations, including violations of a charter agreement. While charter schools should have processes to receive and resolve complaints, it is critical that authorizers receive information regarding complaints as well. In addition to protecting students' rights, complaint records may also provide critical evidence during annual review and charter renewal decisions.

Authorizers should develop a system to receive, track, and respond to community complaints against charter schools. Authorizers should dedicate a portion of their website on charter schools to the complaint

¹³ See PDE's Enrollment of Students Basic Education Circular (available at <https://www.education.pa.gov/Policy-Funding/BECS/Purdons/Pages/EnrollmentStudents.aspx>) and PDE's Student Enrollment FAQ (available at <https://www.education.pa.gov/Policy-Funding/BECS/Purdons/Pages/EnrollmentStudentsFAQ.aspx>).

process. Some authorizers set up a dedicated email address or online form to receive complaints, while others accept letters and provide an appropriate mailing address. Submission directions should be added to the sample form included in this Toolkit.

Response systems may be as simple as contacting the school to notify them of the complaint and providing guidance on the relevant policy. In the case of serious complaints, additional steps such as mediation, an informal investigation, or involvement of other public agencies may be warranted.

Tool 3: Model Student Application Form

| Student Information | |
|--|--|
| Student First Name | Student Last Name |
| Current Address | |
| Current School District | |
| Current School Name | |
| Current Grade Level | Date of Birth |
| Application Information | |
| Name of School You Wish to Attend | |
| School Year (Fall) You Wish to Enroll | Grade Applying To |
| Do you have siblings who attend this charter school? | Yes No If Yes, please list one sibling's information below: First Name: Last Name: Current Grade: Date of Birth: |
| Parent/Guardian Information | |
| First Name | Last Name |
| Relationship to Student | |
| Home Address | |
| Phone Number (if applicable) | Email address (if applicable) |
| Signature | Date |

Tool 5: Model Complaint Form

| Part A: To Be Completed by Person Bringing Complaint | |
|--|---|
| Name of person bringing complaint: | Today's date: |
| Person bringing the complaint is a: (check one) <input type="checkbox"/> Parent or Guardian <input type="checkbox"/> Staff <input type="checkbox"/> Community Member <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | Address: |
| Email address: | Telephone number: |
| Name of charter school: | Name of student involved, if applicable: |
| Grade of student involved, if applicable: | Date of incident, if applicable: |
| Have you met with or contacted charter school leadership? Y/N If yes, date of meeting/contact: _____ | Have you met with or contacted the charter school's Board of Trustees? Y/N If yes, date of meeting/contact: _____ |
| Please attach any correspondence between you and school leadership related to this complaint. | Please attach any correspondence between you and the board related to this complaint. |
| Please provide or attach a detailed statement of the nature of the complaint: | |
| Please describe the action or relief you are seeking: | |
| Part B: To Be Completed by Authorizer | |
| Date received: | Name of person completing initial review: |
| Date confirmation of receipt sent to person submitting complaint: | Date notification of complaint sent to charter school: |
| Resolution and/or actions taken: | |

2. New Charter Application Stage: Overview

A rigorous charter application process allows authorizers to hold prospective charter schools to high standards before their doors ever open. This set of tools is designed to help authorizers ensure that the charter schools they approve are prepared to equitably serve all students.

Considerations and Recommendations:

- **Prepare in advance of state November 15th deadline:** Section 1728 of the PA School Code requires a fast turnaround on all charter application decisions. To be prepared for the application review process, application submission and review materials should be ready and review teams should be familiar well in advance of the state's November 15th application deadline. To help with this, some authorizers require prospective charter operators to send a letter of intent in October.
- **Use tools for all stages of charter authorization process:** The rubrics used in this section can also be used for annual review and charter renewal procedures. Authorizers that spend time developing comprehensive evaluation tools during the new charter application phase will experience smoother processes during later authorizing activities.
- **Proactively develop a plan for cases of noncompliance:** In determining the weighting or evaluation systems for new applications, annual reviews, and renewal decisions, districts and their local school boards should discuss procedures to handle issues of noncompliance, especially those relating to students' civil rights. Are compliance violations automatic grounds for rejection? Could conditional approval be granted, pending the resolution of compliance issues?
- **Use public hearings as opportunities to probe for equity:** The PA School Code requires that the authorizing school board hold a public hearing within 45 days of receipt of a new charter application. This hearing is an opportunity to ask for clarification or probe potential equity concerns in the application. For existing charter school operators, public hearings are also an opportunity to publicly comment on any disparities or equity concerns in existing schools. The school board is required to vote on the application no later than 75 days after the first public hearing. Some authorizers, such as the School District of Philadelphia, hold a second hearing during this timeframe to further inquire about areas of concern.
- **Assign a district point person for each approved applicant:** To ensure smooth reporting and oversight activities, successful authorizers build a working relationship with charter schools. Authorizers should assign a point person who will be the key point of contact for any approved charter operator. This person will need to be in close communication with the charter school leadership for all five years of the approved charter and should strive to build a trusting professional relationship.

Table 3. New Charter Application Stage: Tools and External Resources

TOOLS

Tool 6 – [Authorizing “Staffing Plan”](#)

Page 21

Authorizers must assemble a team with sufficient expertise to thoroughly evaluate charter application materials. This tool will help ensure the right people have been engaged to prepare a comprehensive application evaluation, which will be presented to the school board.

Tool 7 – [New Charter Application Guidance](#)

Page 23

This guidance document provides an overview of common application structures and include recommendations for equity-focused application sections. Tool 7 also includes a table outlining the components included in the charter applications of authorizers from Pittsburgh Public Schools, the School District of Philadelphia, and the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Tool 8 – [Enrollment Projection Form](#)

Prospective charter operators should expect to serve students who represent the surrounding communities. This form asks prospective school operators to project student body enrollment by student group and compare these data to the demographics of the districts from which they expect to enroll students.

Tool 9 – [Summative Evaluation Rubric: Guidance & Equity Sections](#)

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This tool provides authorizers with a strategy to objectively evaluate the degree to which a New Charter Application aligns with the district’s performance framework. To ensure ongoing alignment and focus on equity, this rubric can be used in the [Annual Review](#) and [Renewal](#) stages with minimal adjustments. A [blank version](#) of this Evaluation Rubric without indicators is also available.

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

Applications:

- [SDP New Charter Information Page](#) – This page includes a new charter [application](#), submitted applications, and application evaluation reports.
- [Massachusetts New Charter Application Overview](#) – Includes full [application](#).
- [PPS New Charter Application Packet](#) – This application packet includes an overview of application processes and directions for aspiring operators and an example of how an authorizer has operationalized a staffing plan to evaluate applications, similar to the Staffing Plan approach included in [Tool 6](#).
- [NACSA Model Charter School Application](#) – Provides a sample form and directions for new charter applications.

Application Review Resources:

- [PPS Guidelines for Compliance Under Charter School Law](#) – This document outlines criteria from the Charter School Law against which new charter applications should be evaluated. PPS uses this checklist to track alignment to the Charter School Law.
- [PPS Comprehensive Scoring Rubric](#) – This document includes detailed performance descriptions at various levels of sufficiency. It is used to evaluate the degree to which a new charter application is aligned with PPS's Performance Framework.
- [NACSA New Charter Application Interview Guidance](#) – Most authorizers choose to interview the leadership of new charter applicants. This guide includes directions, sample interview questions, and note-taking templates.

School Opening Resources:

- [DC Public Charter School Board Sample Acceptance Letter](#) – This letter includes an agreement outlining pre-opening processes and responsibilities.
- [SUNY Pre-Opening Requirements for Approved Schools](#) – This page includes documents and checklists outlining steps that approved charter schools must take before opening a new school. The 2019-2020 Prior Action Memo and Checklist document includes materials that must be submitted to the authorizer before a school can open.
- [Sample Resolutions](#) – The Philadelphia School Reform Commission (SRC), which previously functioned as the governing body for the School District of Philadelphia, passed these five linked resolutions which includes sample language for resolutions denying new charter applications (Resolutions SRC-1-4) and an example (Resolution SRC-5) of a resolution that conditionally approves one new charter application, while outlining specific modifications that must be made to the [original application](#).

Tool 6: Authorizing “Staffing Plan”

High-quality charter authorizing requires expertise in a variety of areas. When reviewing new charter applications and charter renewals, authorizers should recruit a diverse review team that will evaluate relevant application materials. This team may include individuals from the district’s own schools, central office, or school board. Some districts include [external experts from the community](#). This team’s evaluation should be compiled into a report for the school board, and application approval and renewal votes should consider the findings of the review team. This tool, which was informed by PPS’s staffing plan, can be used to organize the team.

As authorizers compile staffing plans, diversity in background, race, gender, ability status, and other considerations should be addressed.

Authorizing Staffing Plan

| Area of Expertise and/or Role | Notes | Name | Title |
|---|---|------|-------|
| Lead | This person should have experience and expertise in promoting school equity and be a full-time district employee. Will coordinate the review process and compile the final report for the school board. Will review all materials with a dual focus on compliance with district policy and on validating the findings of other team members. | | |
| Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment | If possible, recruit two people with expertise in curriculum development, instructional practices (including differentiation and data-driven planning), professional development, formative and summative assessment, and PA Core Standards. | | |
| | | | |
| School Leadership | If possible, recruit two people. They should have experience as a successful school principal. They should have knowledge of best practices related to teacher support (including observation/feedback cycle, new teacher induction, and professional development); school operations (including scheduling, staffing, and safety); and student discipline. | | |
| | | | |

| | | | |
|--------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Special Education | This person should have expertise regarding legal mandates and the operational and instructional best practices required to serve students with disabilities of all kinds. | | |
| Facilities and Transportation | This person should have expertise to ensure that school facilities and transportation plans are safe, effective, and compliant. | | |
| Finance | One or two people who have experience with school budgeting and accounting practices. They should be able to evaluate the financial health and viability of a school. | | |
| Legal | This person should be versed in the PA School Code as well as federal student civil rights protections. Authorizers may want to engage outside counsel for this role. | | |
| Human Resources | This person should have expertise in compliance and best practices related to staff recruitment, hiring, evaluation, benefits administration, labor relations, etc. | | |
| Community Parent | A parent who has a student in the public school system can serve as an additional reviewer. They evaluate various school policies including enrollment, attendance, discipline, and parent/community outreach. | | |
| Governance and Board Oversight | This person should focus on ensuring that the school has robust internal oversight structures and has recruited board members with diverse, relevant expertise. | | |

Tool 7: New Charter Application Guidance

In creating a new charter school application, authorizers should consult section 1719-A of the PA School Code, which outlines information that must be included in any new charter application. Materials that authorizers request in a New Charter Application should also provide the review team with information to evaluate whether the proposed charter school will align with the district's performance framework. Most charter application forms also include a set of prompts that are used to create an "application narrative," a list of supplemental documents and/or forms applicants must submit, and a set of initial assurances to be signed. Some authorizers include an additional section or addendum specifically for existing charter schools in which applicants provide information on the performance of their existing charter schools.

The list below shows one way to organize the narrative portion of a charter application so that it aligns with the sample performance framework in this Toolkit.¹⁴ Each section of the application should have a list of prompts that applicants will use to create their application narrative. Below, we have only provided sample prompts for the equity sections of the application; however, district staff, school board members, and legal counsel should collaborate on creating prompts for the remaining sections. Topics may be reorganized. Each category and prompt in the application should map to a component of the performance framework.

Application Narrative Outline

I. Educational program design and capacity

Subsections: *Authorizers should create specific prompts for each subsection.*

- Mission, Vision, and Program Overview
- Curriculum and Instruction Design
- Student Performance Standards
- High School Graduation Requirements (High School Only)
- School Calendar and Schedule
- Supplemental Programming
- Parent, Family, and Community Engagement

II. Equity

Subsections

- Supporting All Students

Possible Prompts:

1. Describe the proposed charter school's methods and strategies for identifying and serving students with disabilities (both low and high incidence), including but not limited to students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) or Section 504 plans, in compliance with all applicable laws and regulations. Include proposed processes for identification, providing a continuum of services, and assessment and progress monitoring.
2. Explain why the proposed curriculum is likely to successfully differentiate education for students with disabilities. Cite research or evidence that supports the appropriateness of the school's approach to serving students with disabilities.
3. Describe the processes and procedures that the proposed school will employ to identify, assess, and serve students who are English Learners, including a description of the Language Instruction Educational Program (LIEP), rationale for the LIEP choice, progress monitoring processes, and exit criteria.

¹⁴ This tool is based on the [NACSA Model Charter School Application](https://www.qualitycharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/NACSA_Core_Resources_Charter_School_Application.pdf). National Association of Charter School Authorizers. (2018). Core resource: Charter school application. Retrieved from https://www.qualitycharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/NACSA_Core_Resources_Charter_School_Application.pdf

4. Describe how the charter school will meet the needs of at-risk students, including students experiencing homelessness and system-involved students, as well as students who struggle academically. Include school-based supports, potential alternative placements, electronic support, and any other means by which at-risk or academically struggling students' needs will be met. Include a description of how students will be assessed.
 5. Identify school staff and external/contracted professionals and the responsibilities each will carry out related to special education, ELs, and other at-risk students.
 6. Explain how this section of the application was developed, including the relevant experience of current members of the applicant group in this area and the use of third-party expertise if applicable.
- Student Recruitment, Enrollment, and Retention

Possible Prompts:

 1. Provide the enrollment capacity of the school, including grade distribution.
 2. Describe the student population that the proposed charter school would serve and the needs of that population.
 3. Discuss the reason for selecting the community(ies), the charter applicant's ability to serve this community, and its current connections to the community.
 4. Address the charter school's anticipated racial and ethnic composition, special education, EL, and free/reduced lunch eligibility rates, and explain how these rates compare to those of the district(s) located in the area that the school plans to serve. Explain the types of recruitment efforts that will be employed to ensure that the proposed charter school's enrollment of at-risk populations will mirror that of the district(s) located in the area that the school plans to serve.
 5. Provide data to support enrollment projections and evidence that the school will be able to meet and sustain them over the term of the charter.
 6. Describe how the school will publicize and market its program to a broad cross-section of prospective students throughout the district(s) located in the area that the school plans to serve, including families that may be less informed about options. Include specific outreach strategies such as partnerships with nonprofits, community organizations, parent groups, other educational institutions/providers, mass media outlets, translation services, etc.
 7. Describe the application, enrollment, and admission processes at the charter school, both prior to the beginning of the school year and throughout the academic year.
 - Student Discipline

Possible Prompts:

 1. Explain the proposed charter school's guiding philosophy around discipline.
 2. Describe the creation of the school's Code of Conduct and the steps that were taken to develop it, including input gathered from stakeholders in the proposed community and how the Code of Conduct aligns with the proposed charter school's mission and state and federal law.
 3. Explain whether the charter school's disciplinary policies and practices are limited to the authority legally granted to schools and protect students' rights under state and federal law.
 4. Explain what due process schools will provide prior to the administration of any exclusionary discipline.
 5. Describe how the school will consider the needs and rights of students with disabilities in disciplinary actions and proceedings, as well as who will be responsible for ensuring compliance with federal laws and regulations governing the discipline of students with disabilities, including conducting and documenting manifestation determination reviews.
 6. Discuss how the schools will advise parents/guardians of students struggling with academic, social, or behavioral performance.
 7. Describe alternative placement procedures for students. Include a description of alternative placement procedures for students with disabilities and other needs.
 8. Describe how the school will assess and systematically address any disparities in implementation of discipline practices among student groups.

III. Operations and Capacity

Subsections: *Authorizers should create specific prompts for each subsection.*

- Governance
- Staffing
- Facilities and Transportation – Charter school applicants should be prompted to explain the accessibility of their facilities, regarding both location in the community, including access to the school via public or other form of transportation, and whether there are facilities issues that may create barriers to any students with disabilities.

IV. Finances and Capacity

Subsections: *Authorizers should create specific prompts for each subsection.*

- Financial Plan
- Financial Management Capacity

Charter Applications: Examples

Table 7.1 shows how three authorizers embed equity throughout the narrative of their charter applications. Areas that align to the equity-focused domains in the sample performance framework are highlighted in **red and** marked with a star(*). This section [overview](#) includes links to the full applications among the external examples.

Table 7.1: Examples of Components in a Charter Application Narrative (equity-focused areas highlighted in red and indicated with *)

| PITTSBURGH PUBLIC SCHOOLS | SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA | MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION |
|--|--|---|
| <p>I. Mission, Purpose and Needs, Marketing Data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Mission B. Purpose and Needs* C. Marketing Data* <p>II. Strategic Planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Annual Measurable Goals & Strategies B. Best Practices and Habits of Practice C. School Improvement Planning <p>III. Management Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Admissions Policy and Criteria* B. Student Discipline Policy and Expulsion Criteria* C. Governance (Board) D. Plan for Staff, Parent and Community Involvement and the General Public Life of the School E. Description of How Charter Will Manage and Administer the School F. Descriptions of Staff Conditions, Work, and Professional Development <p>IV. Education Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Education Program B. Accountability, Student Assessment and Evaluation C. Meeting the Needs of At-Risk Students, Bilingual Students, and Students with Disabilities* <p>V. Operations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Budget and Fiscal Operations B. Facilities, Transportation, and Food Service C. Liabilities, Insurance, and Risk Management D. Legal Issues* <p>VI. Personnel/Leaders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Information on Key Personnel | <p>I. Academic Program</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Educational Philosophy B. Curriculum & Educational Plan C. Diverse Learners* D. Extracurricular Activities E. Student Supports & Services* <p>II. Organizational Capacity and Compliance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Founding Applicant/Coalition B. Governance C. CMO and Third Party Service Providers D. Dissolution Plan E. School Leadership F. Talent Acquisition, Development, and Evaluation G. Staff Benefits H. School Operations I. Student Discipline, Code of Conduct, and Due Process* J. Charter School Safety Plan K. Insurance Coverage <p>III. Community Engagement, Support, and Impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Targeted Community* B. Recruitment, Admissions, & Enrollment* C. Parent/Guardian/Family Engagement <p>IV. Finance and Operations</p> <p>V. Facilities</p> <p>VI. Existing Charter School Operators (if Applicable)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Track Record of Successful Outcomes & Compliance B. Current Capacity for Replication C. Closed, Non-Renewed, Revoked, and Surrendered Schools; Terminated Contracts; Expired Charters D. Curriculum, Instruction, and Programming Adaptations for New Local Content E. Long-Term Growth F. Serving as a Model for Replication | <p>I. Faithfulness to Charter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Mission B. Key Design Elements C. Description of the Community(ies) to Be Served* D. Enrollment and Recruitment* <p>II. Academic Success</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Overview of Program Delivery B. Curriculum and Instruction C. Student Performance, Assessment, and Program Evaluation D. Supports for Diverse Learners* E. Culture and Family Engagement <p>III. Organizational Viability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Capacity B. Governance C. Management D. Facilities and Student Transportation E. School Finances F. Action Plan |

Tool 9: Summative Evaluation Rubric: Guidance & Equity Sections

This tool creates a snapshot of the degree to which a charter application adheres to the authorizer’s performance framework. The sample rubric below is aligned with the equity sections (Access and Supporting All Students) in the sample performance framework provided in this Toolkit. Authorizers should also align the criteria in their evaluation rubric with the academic, organizational, and financial domains of their performance frameworks.

Authorizers should complete the rubric based on the category evaluations completed by the review team. It can be provided to the school board to inform their decisions on new charter applications and charter renewals. It can also be used to provide written feedback to existing charters during the annual review process. In this sample evaluation rubric, each member of the review team would recommend ratings for each category.

Authorizers can design a rating system that works best for them. Below is one option:

- “Meets” Standards
- “Approaches” Standards
- “Does not Meet” Standards

Authorizers should then determine how to calculate an **overall domain rating**. Below is one potential system:

- A domain with all “Meets” standards ratings will receive an overall domain rating of “Meets” standards .
- A domain with some combination of “Approaches” standards and “Meets” standards category ratings will receive an overall domain rating of “Approaches” standards.
- A domain with one or more “Does not Meet” standards rating will receive an overall domain rating of “Approaches” standards or “Does not Meet” standards.

Authorizers should establish **outcomes** based on ratings. Below is one potential system:

- Applications with “Meets Standards” ratings in all five domains will receive an approval recommendation to be considered by the school board.
- Applications with “Approaches Standards” ratings in one or two domains and “Meets Standards” ratings in all other domains will receive an “Approval with Conditions” recommendation to be considered by the school board.
- Applications with one or more “Does Not Meet Standards” rating will receive a rejection recommendation to be considered by the school board.
- Applications with other ratings will be presented to the school board without approval or rejection recommendations.

Charter Application Summative Evaluation Rubric

| | |
|---|---|
| <p style="text-align: center;">Access</p> <p><i>Charter schools are public schools and must protect the rights of all students. Charter schools should employ practices that ensure equitable access and eliminate any barriers for students enrolling or remaining in their charter school. The following policies and practices should be present in all charter schools:</i></p> | <p>Overall Domain Rating:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Meets <input type="checkbox"/> Approaches <input type="checkbox"/> Does not Meet</p> |
| <p>Recruitment, Enrollment, and Retention:</p> | <p>Rating:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Meets <input type="checkbox"/> Approaches <input type="checkbox"/> Does not Meet</p> |
| <p>Recruitment practices should actively seek a student body that reflects the diversity of students' communities of origin. Charter schools should develop detailed plans regarding how they will disseminate information to prospective students and families, including efforts to reach families with diverse racial, ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds and students with disabilities. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enrollment targets and, ultimately, enrollment levels should reflect the needs and diversity of the local community. • Make all enrollment materials publicly accessible and available in the community's most commonly spoken languages. • Receive new applications at any time of the year, regardless of the date of the lottery or the length of the waitlist. • Prominently post and timely update on the school's public website the school's enrollment capacity, current enrollment numbers, and length of the waitlist by grade. • Never charge any application or enrollment fees or condition student enrollment on any other fees owed by parents/guardians. • Never require mandatory parent volunteer hours. • Never request that parents/guardians provide social security numbers. • Never inquire into the immigration status of a student or their family. • Never discriminate against families from seeking enrollment due to race, ethnicity, religion, gender, disability, language, country of origin, socioeconomic status, or any other basis that would be illegal for a traditional public school. This includes never discouraging enrollment or indicating that the school would not be equipped to provide a student services that they are legally entitled to. • Compliance with lottery guidelines and, if applicable, use of lottery weights to enroll a diverse student body. | <p><i>Notes, Comments, or Evidence:</i></p> |
| <p>Enrollment practices should comply with state and federal law and follow best practices with regard to admissions, lottery, waitlist, withdrawal, re-enrollment, and transfer policies. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school's application for enrollment requires only the following fields: student name, address, date of birth and/or age, gender, grade applying for, current school and grade, parent or legal guardian name, relationship to student, relationship to school if applicable, contact information, sibling name(s), school, and grade. • Enrollment materials only require proof of age and address, home language survey, immunization record, and parent registration statements. The school accepts at least two forms of documentation to demonstrate proof of age and residency. | <p><i>Notes, Comments, or Evidence:</i></p> |

| | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Backfill” – i.e., Regardless of the time of year or grade level, when students leave, the school promptly enrolls new students, either from new applications or from the enrollment waitlist. • Participate in the federal free and reduced-price lunch program (or provide a comparable free meals program). • Request student records from previous schools, but never condition enrollment upon receipt of those records. • If permissible under the law and available for public schools in the community, charter schools should participate in a unified enrollment system. • Never encourage current students/families to withdraw from the school due to academic or behavioral performance (i.e., do not counsel out students). • Regularly report data on retention rates and make this data available to the public. | |
| <p>Student Discipline/School Culture:</p> | <p>Rating</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Meets <input type="checkbox"/> Approaches <input type="checkbox"/> Does not Meet</p> |
| <p>Code of conduct and/or discipline policy should align with the school’s mission, provides due process for students at all levels of infractions, and includes plans to prevent discipline disparities. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students may not be subject to disciplinary action due to race, sex, color, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, or disability. • School has adopted a non-punitive code of conduct and/or discipline policy that emphasizes positive behavior and includes plans to prevent discipline disparities. • Disciplinary policies and practices do not exceed the authority legally granted to schools in that they are reasonable, not unconstitutionally vague, are limited to regulating conduct that occurs when students are under school supervision, provide due process, and do not violate students’ civil rights to expression, religion, and equal protection. • The student Code of Conduct is differentiated for early childhood students and does not allow suspension of early childhood students for minor offenses. • Describes compulsory attendance and truancy policy; student Code of Conduct requires an attendance conference before referral of truancy matters to a legal entity and prohibits suspension, expulsion, or transfer due to truant behavior. • Assurances that students will not be counseled out, or advised to voluntarily withdraw from the school, due to disciplinary or academic issues. • Description of alternative placement procedures for students, including students with disabilities. • Training for school staff on discipline, including preventing disparities, handling violence, crisis management, trauma-informed responses to discipline, and drug/alcohol incidents. | <p><i>Notes, Comments, or Evidence:</i></p> |
| <p>Policies clearly outline suspension and expulsion procedures, including separate procedures for students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and other at-risk students. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student behavior expectations and discipline policy are documented and in compliance with Chapter 12 of the PA School Code. | <p><i>Notes, Comments, or Evidence:</i></p> |

| | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A student may not receive an in-school or out-of-school suspension unless the student has been informed of the reasons for the suspension and has been given an opportunity to respond before the suspension becomes effective. • When suspension exceeds three school days, the student and parent shall be given the opportunity for an informal hearing. • Formal hearing policy is in place for all expulsion decisions. Parents or guardians will be given at least three days' notice of the time and place of a hearing conducted by the school board or an independent hearing officer. • Code of Conduct references manifestation determination or due process in disciplinary hearings for special education students. • The parents or guardians and the authorizer shall be notified immediately in writing when a student is expelled. | |
| <p>While observing cell size protections in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), disaggregated data on student discipline should be regularly reported to the public.</p> | <p>Notes, Comments, or Evidence:</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Supporting All Students</p> <p><i>Charter schools should serve all students equitably and protect the civil rights of historically marginalized students.</i></p> | <p>Overall Domain Rating:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Meets <input type="checkbox"/> Approaches <input type="checkbox"/> Does not Meet</p> |
| <p>Supporting Students with Disabilities</p> | <p>Rating:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Meets <input type="checkbox"/> Approaches <input type="checkbox"/> Does not Meet</p> |
| <p>Systems should identify, serve, and monitor the progress of students with disabilities, including educating students with disabilities in the Least Restrictive Environment. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies and practices are in place to identify and assess students who may be eligible to receive special education and related services. • Policies and practices are in place to develop, review, and revise IEPs. • Policies and practices are in place to reevaluate students in compliance with applicable federal and state law. • Policies and practices are in place to integrate special education into the general education program. • Policies and practices are in place to enroll students with disabilities and obtain all special education documents from the previous school attended, including IEPs, evaluations, and reevaluations. | <p>Notes, Comments, or Evidence:</p> |
| <p>Programming should ensure that all students receive a Free Appropriate Public Education, including specially designed instruction, accommodations and modifications, and a continuum of placements available for students with all types of disabilities; systems are in place to modify curricula and instructional delivery in order to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School has written description of instructional strategies used for educating special education students and gifted students. • An alternative curriculum is available to students as necessary. • Modified assessments are available. | <p>Notes, Comments, or Evidence:</p> |

| | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of how the school will account for students by disability category in accordance with Chapter 711. | |
| <p>Compliance with all legal requirements of IDEA, Section 504, ADA, and applicable state laws, including Chapter 711-Charter School Services and Programs for Children with Disabilities. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Find Notice is posted to the charter school’s website. • School is in compliance with IDEA and FAPE requirements for special education. • All of the school’s special education teachers are certified. • Facilities meet the legal requirements of ADA and Section 504. • Transportation accommodations are being met. • School engages in timely reporting on the usage of restraints on students to Pennsylvania Department of Education’s Bureau of Special Education Restraint Information System Collection (“RISC”) • School provides parents/guardians or teachers of a child with a disability the right to request a re-evaluation at any time. • Provisions are in place to ensure confidentiality and recordkeeping practices consistent with FERPA. | <p><i>Notes, Comments, or Evidence:</i></p> |
| <p>Supporting English Learners (ELs)</p> | <p>Category Rating:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Meets</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Approaches</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Does not Meet</p> |
| <p>Plans are in place to identify and appropriately place ELs into a Language Instruction Educational Program (LIEP), monitor their progress, and exit students from EL services when appropriate. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A plan to identify ELs at the time of enrollment, notify parents/guardians of the identification and programming options, and appropriately place students into a LIEP. • School provides timely and accessible notices to families who are Limited English Proficient (LEP) in their preferred language and in their preferred mode of communication. • The school administered the ACCESS for ELs evaluation to each student identified as needing English language support. • The school establishes LIEP program exit criteria and exits students appropriately. | <p><i>Notes, Comments, or Evidence:</i></p> |
| <p>Policies that ensure equitable access to the curriculum for ELs at all language proficiency levels, including plans to incorporate English language development into all classes. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies that ensure equitable access for ELs at all language proficiency levels by offering research-based sheltered or bilingual instruction. • For schools with at least one EL student enrolled, all ESL teachers are appropriately certified. • Plan for incorporating English language development into all classes, including how teachers will offer supports, modifications, and accommodations that allow ELs to access course standards. • School materials are available in multiple languages, and responsive to regional demographics. • Evidence of professional development for general education teachers in supporting ELs. | <p><i>Notes, Comments, or Evidence:</i></p> |

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Compliance with all legal requirements and civil rights protections. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school ensures the right to enrollment by developing a clear policy and delivering training to staff about unlawful questions including a student or parent’s immigration status and country of birth. • The school implements a compliant process for identifying English Learners, including submission of a home language survey and WIDA. • The school notifies parents/guardians in writing of placement in a WIDA program and screening outcomes in their preferred language. • The school provides supports needed to ensure ELs can participate in all programs including vocational-tech classes, advanced courses, and extracurricular activities. | <p><i>Notes, Comments, or Evidence:</i></p> |
| <p>Supporting Other Students Who Have Been Historically Underserved</p> | <p>Category <input type="checkbox"/> Meets Rating: <input type="checkbox"/> Approaches <input type="checkbox"/> Does not Meet</p> |
| <p>Plans are in place to ensure that students in poverty, students experiencing homelessness, and students who are system-involved (including students in foster care or other out of home placement, students in or returning from juvenile justice placement, and other students receiving services from the child welfare system) receive services and programming to ensure equal access. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plans are in place to identify, assess, and monitor the progress of general education students in need of targeted academic interventions. • School implements effective strategies to boost academic achievement, retention, and graduation of at-risk pupils. • Partnerships and other outside resources are utilized to meet the academic and developmental needs of students • Counseling services are provided either by certified staff or outside agencies. • Progress has been made towards eliminating gaps in student outcomes (including academic achievement, attendance retention, discipline, and graduation rates). | <p><i>Notes, Comments, or Evidence:</i></p> |
| <p>Plans are in place to address the needs and monitor progress of students and comply with all legal mandates, including the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and Every Student Succeeds Act. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least 70% of low-income students accessing school lunch are also served breakfast. • Student enrollment status is never lost due to loss of residence or other out-of-home placement, such as foster care or juvenile justice placement. If students are temporarily unable to attend school due to out-of-home placement, their enrollment seat should be reserved for them upon return from placement. • To ensure compliance with the mandates of the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, charter schools should reserve an appropriate number of enrollment slots each year to ensure automatic enrollment of students experiencing homelessness as required by the law. • Policies and practices are in place to ensure that McKinney-Vento-eligible students have equal access to classes and extracurricular activities, uniforms, and transportation (including specialized transportation, where required). | <p><i>Notes, Comments, or Evidence:</i></p> |

Complete Rubrics should also include Academic, Organizational, and Financial criteria. Authorizers can use the blank template below to complete the applicable evaluation criteria below aligned to the [performance framework](#).

| | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|--|
| <p style="text-align: center;">Access</p> <p><i>Charter schools are public schools and must protect the rights of all students. Charter schools should employ practices that ensure equitable access and eliminate any barriers for students enrolling or remaining in their charter school. See recommended indicators above.</i></p> | <p>Overall Domain Rating:</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> Meets <input type="checkbox"/> Approaches <input type="checkbox"/> Does not Meet</p> |
| | | |
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| | | |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Supporting All Students</p> <p><i>Charter schools should serve all students equitably and protect the civil rights of historically marginalized students. See recommended indicators above.</i></p> | <p>Overall Domain Rating:</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> Meets <input type="checkbox"/> Approaches <input type="checkbox"/> Does not Meet</p> |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Academic</p> <p><i>Charter schools should improve learning opportunities for all students and encourage new and innovative teaching methods.</i></p> | <p>Overall Domain Rating:</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> Meets <input type="checkbox"/> Approaches <input type="checkbox"/> Does not Meet</p> |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Organizational</p> <p><i>Charter schools should be effective, viable organizations that adhere to their mission and vision, support program delivery, and establish appropriate systems and policies.</i></p> | <p>Overall Domain Rating:</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> Meets <input type="checkbox"/> Approaches <input type="checkbox"/> Does not Meet</p> |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Financial</p> <p><i>Charter schools should be fiscally sound organizations.</i></p> | <p>Overall Domain Rating:</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> Meets <input type="checkbox"/> Approaches <input type="checkbox"/> Does not Meet</p> |
| | | |
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| | | |

3. Charter Agreement Stage: Overview

Once a charter application has been approved, a charter agreement is executed—often referred to simply as the charter. This legally binding agreement between the charter school operator and local school board, or school boards in the case of regional charter schools, outlines expectations for school operation, autonomy, performance, and accountability. The External Resources listed below provide examples of charter agreements developed by other authorizers. In addition, Tool 10 provides guidance and examples of language that may be included in a charter agreement to incorporate an authorizer’s accountability framework and promote equity.

Considerations and Recommendations:

- **Engage legal counsel:** This stage should be led by the district’s solicitor or outside counsel with expertise in Charter School Law.
- **Refer directly to the performance framework and embed other equity-focused tools in the language of the charter:** Charter agreements should indicate that charter schools and authorizers agree that oversight and accountability will be based on the district’s performance framework and other evaluation tools.

Table 4: Charter Agreement Stage: Tools and External Resources

| TOOLS | |
|---|----------------|
| Tool 10 – Charter Agreement Sample Language | Page 35 |
| This tool includes sample language related to equity provisions that can be included in charter agreements. This tool is not intended to cover every provision of a full charter agreement; rather, this tool provides a list of key provisions to ensure that authorizers and charter schools agree to oversight and accountability with regard to equitably serving all students. | |
| EXTERNAL RESOURCES | |
| NACSA Charter School Model Contract – A charter school contract designed for customization by authorizers. | |
| DC Public Charter School Board: Listing of all Charter Agreements and Amendments – A page containing all current charter school agreements and amendments for DC public charter schools. | |

Tool 10: Charter Agreement Sample Language

* The language below offers examples of equity-related provisions that authorizers can include in charter agreements. Much of the language below has been adapted from various charter agreements in Pennsylvania and from the NACSA Charter School Model Contract (see External Resources section). Any language included in the charter agreement should be reviewed and approved by legal counsel for both the authorizer and the charter school.

Incorporation by Reference – To ensure accountability for equitably serving students, the charter agreement should incorporate the provisions included in an operator’s charter application materials, the authorizer’s performance framework, and other related documents. By incorporating the authorizer’s performance framework, other tools in this Toolkit, or other charter policies adopted by the school district authorizer, charters agree to be held accountable for performance, including for policies and practices related to student discipline, special education, English Learners, and enrollment policies.

Sample language:

The original charter application and any renewal application or amendments, and the representations, certifications, and assurances set forth therein, are hereby incorporated in this Charter.

The Charter School Board of Trustees agree that the Charter School shall participate in the School District’s Performance Framework, which is hereby incorporated in this Charter. The Performance Framework includes, but is not limited to, an annual assessment of the Charter School’s performance in the Access, Supporting All Students, Academic, Financial, and Organizational domains as well as compliance with Applicable Laws. Access performance includes, but is not limited to, a review of the Charter School’s student discipline practices and admissions, enrollment, and retention policies and practices. Supporting all students’ performance includes, but is not limited to a review of the Charter School’s special education programming, EL programming, and programming to support other historically underserved populations, as outlined in the Performance Framework. Academic performance includes, but is not limited to, a review of the Charter School’s practices related to curriculum, assessment, and instruction. Organizational performance includes, but is not limited to, a review of the Charter School’s organizational structure and Board of Trustees governance in order to assess compliance with the Charter and Applicable Laws, federal, state and local guidance, policies, and School District procedures. Financial performance includes, but is not limited to, a review of the Charter School’s financial health and long-term sustainability and generally accepted standards of fiscal management.

A list of School District policies applicable to charter schools is found at [Exhibit X](#) and is made a part hereof. The Charter School agrees to comply with any applicable amended, revised, or changed policies duly adopted by the School District’s School Board.

Data Sharing and Access to Charter Schools – An authorizer’s ability to access to data and to visit their charter schools is a crucial aspect of charter school oversight and accountability. The charter agreement should ensure that, consistent with student privacy laws, charter schools provide authorizers with access to data and meaningful access to the school’s facilities. Some authorizers also enter into data sharing MOUs with their charters, particularly if data sharing involves a third party, such as the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

Sample language:

The Charter School agrees to timely provide or allow to be provided to the School District all records, including student level records, necessary to properly assess the academic success, enrollment accessibility, organizational compliance and viability, and financial health and sustainability of the Charter School under the Charter School Performance Framework, this charter, and state and federal law.

The Charter School shall provide ongoing access to its records and facilities to ensure compliance with this Charter and Applicable Laws including requirements related to student assessment and testing, civil rights, and health and safety. The School District reserves the right to audit the Charter School's books, records, facilities and operations at any time.

English Learners and Students with Disabilities: Including provisions that highlight charter schools' responsibilities to comply with federal, state, and local provisions that protect the rights of English Learners and Students with Disabilities allows an authorizer to hold schools accountable for such compliance.

Sample language, English Learners:

In accordance with the Performance Framework, the Charter School shall at all times comply with all state and federal law applicable to the education of English Learners, including but not limited to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 (EEOA). The Charter School shall provide resources and support to English Learners to enable them to acquire sufficient English language proficiency to participate in the mainstream English language instructional program. The Charter School shall employ and train teachers and other staff to provide appropriate services to English Learners.

Sample language, Students with Disabilities:

The Charter School shall provide services and accommodations to students with disabilities in accordance with the Performance Framework and any relevant policies thereafter adopted, as well as with all applicable provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504), and all applicable regulations promulgated pursuant to such federal laws. This includes providing services to attending students with disabilities in accordance with the individualized education program (IEP) recommended by a student's IEP team. The Charter School shall comply with all applicable requirements of Pennsylvania Law concerning the provision of services to students with disabilities.

Admissions, Backfilling, and Enrollment Caps – Ensuring charter admissions policies and practices are fully transparent and free of barriers can help achieve equitable access to charter schools. As such, the charter agreement should include provisions providing detail regarding admissions, enrollment, and retention policies and practices. For example, when charter schools backfill, or ensure that new students are enrolled whenever current students withdraw, it can provide better access to students who are highly mobile. In addition, when authorizers and charters agree on enrollment caps, it provides system-wide predictability. Meanwhile, agreements on conditional enrollment expansion can increase accountability and equity. In addition, some jurisdictions provide for system-wide universal enrollment for all charter and district schools, and some permit charters to use weighted lotteries or other preferences for at-risk students. If authorizers and charter schools use such strategies, they should be outlined in the charter agreement.

Sample language:

1. *The School District and the Charter School acknowledge and agree that the Charter School will only enroll students in **grades [#]** through **[#]** and that the total enrollment will not exceed **[###]** students during the Term of the Charter, unless the parties agree in writing to other terms.*
2. *The Charter School shall enroll students in accordance with Applicable Laws and shall not exclude, recruit, or discourage enrollment of students based on, or the perception of, race, color, familial status, religious creed, ancestry, gender, national origin, disability, or sexual orientation.*
3. *The Charter School shall implement an admissions policy that conforms to its Application, this Charter, the Charter School Performance Framework, and Applicable Laws. The Charter School is responsible to*

ensure that the application and enrollment forms request only information which is permissible to request under Applicable Laws and that the required forms for enrollment are consistent with Applicable Laws.

4. The Charter School acknowledges and agrees that it will not charge any parent or family, any student or any other person or entity with any fees or costs associated with or in connection to student admissions or enrollment to the School District. The Charter School further acknowledges and agrees that it cannot create any barriers to enrollment, daily attendance or full and equitable participation in the stated educational program, including but not limited to barriers due to fees, for example, for uniforms, student activity fees, or academic course field trips.
5. When a student is unable to enroll because the school is at its maximum enrollment, the Charter School must provide the student with documentation of his/her attempted registration, date of placement on the waiting list, and number on the waiting list.
6. Students who enroll in the Charter School shall have the right to remain enrolled in the Charter School, absent expulsion for school-based misconduct, graduation, promotion beyond grades offered by the charter school, or aging out of public education. Students shall not be required to reapply to the charter school each year. When a student is temporarily removed from the Charter School due to a court-ordered placement, such as foster care or a delinquency adjudication, the Charter School shall permit that student to return to the Charter School upon return from placement.
7. The Charter School shall provide the School District notice of the date, time, and location of any and all admissions lotteries at least thirty (30) days prior to the scheduled date of each admissions lottery. If the Charter School maintains a website, the date, time, and location of the lottery shall be posted on the website in a manner that is accessible to the general public no fewer than thirty (30) days prior to the date of the lottery and until the lottery is concluded. The lottery must be held in a location that is generally accessible to the public and, if not at the primary location of the Charter School, at a location that is accessible without barriers including that of distance or transportation to a majority of the applicants. The School District reserves the right to observe the admissions lottery process.
8. Additionally, the Admissions Policy and Process:
 - a. shall include provisions on: (i) application deadlines; (ii) policies on enrollment preferences shall delineate the order and allocation of preferences, and methods by which preferences would be identified; (iii) student recruitment procedures and communications, including details on methods to be used to recruit students districtwide or in an applicable attendance zone and to monitor any specified enrollment targets; (iv) lottery dates; and (v) communication of lottery results, in a form and with provisions that are acceptable to the Charter Schools Office;
 - b. shall provide that the application will be made clearly and plainly available on the Charter School's website in English, Spanish, and any additional language the Charter School deems appropriate and without any barriers to enrollment requiring technology;
 - c. shall provide that families have at least four (4) weeks to complete and return enrollment packets post-lottery acceptance; with exceptions made for extenuating circumstances for families with language barriers;
 - d. shall provide that an ordered, up-to-date waitlist be continuously maintained, reflecting at any given time the next eligible student to be offered admission in each grade served by the Charter School, identifying any applicable preference(s) for each student, and indicating the date any student is removed from the waitlist with the reason for removal;
 - e. shall provide that if seats open during the school year for any grade served by the school or between school years for grades served other than the initial grade, the Charter School shall back-fill the enrollment seat, i.e., accept new students from the waiting list in appropriate order for particular grades or new applicants if there are no applicants for that grade on the waiting list; and
 - f. shall provide that the Charter School shall provide a copy of its current waiting list at any time during the Term of the Charter within ten (10) business days after request by the Charter Schools Office.

g. Student Transfers and Exits. Any student exit out of the School shall be documented by an exit form signed by the student's parent or guardian, which affirmatively states that the student's transfer or exit is voluntary. The School shall collect and report to the Authorizer, in a format required or approved by the Authorizer, exit data on all students transferring from or otherwise exiting the school for any reason (other than graduation), voluntary or involuntary. Such exit data shall identify each departing student by name and shall document the date of and reason(s) for the departure. In the event that the School is unable to document the reasons for a voluntary withdrawal, the School shall notify the Authorizer and provide evidence that it made reasonable efforts to obtain documentation.

Additional Provisions: Most charter agreements also include provisions related to Governance, Open Meetings, Public Records, Transportation, Child Accounting and Attendance Procedures, Health Services, Food Services, Management Contracts, School Facilities, Personnel, Student Assessment, and Curriculum. See External Resources for sample language related to these topics.

4. Annual Review Stage: Overview

Charter schools are legally required to submit an annual report on their progress. Authorizers should take this opportunity to evaluate the degree to which a charter operates in accordance with its charter application and agreement, and how the school's practices and outcomes align with the performance framework. Further, annual review processes clearly document areas of improvement and strengths, helping charter schools and authorizers prepare for the renewal decision processes every five years.

Considerations and Recommendations:

- **Design charter school accountability tools to facilitate collection of equity-related performance data from charter schools:** The tools below enable the charter school operator to submit the data to the authorizer.
- **Use tools for all stages of charter authorization process:** The rubrics used in the New Charter Application Stage can also be used for annual reviews and charter renewal.
- **Encourage collaboration and transparency:** Provide opportunities for district authorizers and charter school leaders to communicate about ways to both improve the review process and advance equity in charter school access.
- **Make feedback available:** Provide charter schools with written feedback based on the rubric review and determine how feedback will be made publicly available. See the 'Authorizer created reports and evaluations' in the External Resources section.
- **Consider annual site visits:** Rather than limiting site visits to the 5-year renewal process, some authorizers, including Pittsburgh Public Schools, conduct annual site visits as part of annual reviews. For an example of the renewal processes used to evaluate the performance and progress, see the [MA Charter School Renewal Inspection Protocol](#) used for MA charter schools.
- **Post annual reviews on school district website:** Authorizers should post charter schools' annual reports on their website. Many authorizers supplement these reports with findings from their own annual reviews. See "Authorizer-Created Reports and Evaluations" in the External Resources section below for examples from Pittsburgh Public Schools, the School District of Philadelphia, and the DC Public Charter School Board.

Table 5: Annual Review Stage: Tools and External Resources

TOOLS

Tool 11 – [Equity Data Form](#)

This form is to be completed by the charter school operator each year as part of their annual reporting responsibilities. It asks them to report on student group data from the prior academic year. While much of the data in this spreadsheet should be available to the authorizing school district, it is often not broken down by student group and is spread across various reports. This consolidation should streamline the charter annual review by consolidating the data and focusing attention on student group outcomes. It is recommended to check this self-reported data against other available data files, when possible.

Tool 12 – [Equity Program Report Form](#)

This form should be completed by charter schools and submitted during the annual review process. Charter schools should use the form to provide a narrative update on the school's programs supporting students with disabilities, English Learners, and other students receiving additional academic support. This report can be evaluated against the charter application, agreement, and the performance framework and rubric.

Tool 13 – [Staff Roster Form](#)

All public schools, including charter schools, are required to have 100% of their special education teachers certified. Also, the school should have at least one certified ESL teacher. Charter schools submit this form during annual review so authorizers can ensure that charters are meeting legal requirements regarding certification and that they are employing sufficient staff to support their enrollment, particularly of students receiving special education and English Learners.

Tool 14 – [Equitable Enrollment Phone Call Script](#)

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This tool provides a script, modeled on the “mystery shopper” approach utilized by the DC PCSB and the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, that authorizers can use to validate equitable and legal enrollment practices in the charter schools they authorize.

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

Submission Materials Resources

- [State University of New York \(SUNY\) Application and Admission Summary](#) – SUNY requires all charters in New York to complete and submit this spreadsheet as part of the annual review process. It asks charter schools to provide information about enrollment including available seats, backfilling/waitlist, and projected enrollment.
- [MA Annual Report Guidelines](#) – This document provides submission directions and forms for charter schools to complete as part of MA’s annual review process.
- [PPS Site Visit Resources](#) – This document lists the resources that Review Team members will need to access and review during a site visit.

Evaluation Resources

- [SDP Performance Framework Rubric](#) – This rubric explains how SDP evaluates charter schools based on the district’s Performance Framework, including point allocation formulas.
- [SDP Annual Charter Evaluation \(ACE\) User Guide](#) – This document outlines the ACE reports that SDP creates for each charter school during the annual review process and includes definitions of compliance and equity-related standards that authorizers can incorporate into evaluation processes.
- [PPS Annual Review Team Rubrics](#) – Each of these forms is used by a member of the PPS review team to document findings of the annual review. Rubrics are used by the following review team members: Special Education, School Administration, Parent, Finance, Facilities, Curriculum & Instruction, Charter School Office, and Assessment. For more information about the PPS Review Team structure, see the PPS New Charter Application Packet.
- [MA Annual Site Visit Classroom Observation Form](#) – A classroom observation form used in annual reviews of Massachusetts charter schools.

Authorizer-Created Reports and Evaluations

- [PPS Annual Review Reports](#) – Annual reports on charter schools authorized by Pittsburgh Public Schools.
- [SDP Annual Charter Evaluations \(ACEs\)](#) and [Notices of Deficiency](#) (i.e., written feedback) – Annual reports on charter schools authorized by the School District of Philadelphia.
- [DC PCSB Annual Equity Reports](#) – Annual equity reports on charter schools authorized by the DC Public Charter School Board.

[Future Ready PA Index](#) – The Future Ready PA Index is a collection of school progress measures related to school and student success that is published annually by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. The Index includes a range of assessment, on-track, and readiness indicators of student learning, growth, and success in the classroom and beyond. In addition, the Index provides basic demographic data on each school and LEA in PA. Authorizers and charter operators can consider the indicators in Future Ready PA Index to both inform and potentially complete portions of the Equity Data Form provided in Tool 11.

Tool 12: Equity Program Report Form¹⁵

Authorizers can instruct their charter schools to complete the following tables with details of how the school is supporting at-risk student populations.

| General Education Students Receiving Targeted Academic Interventions | |
|--|--|
| <p>Identification Describe how the school identifies students that require targeted academic interventions.</p> | |
| <p>Program Describe the targeted academic intervention program(s) at the school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the school uses a tiered intervention system, describe each tier. • If the school uses specific commercial programs, list each program and evidence in support. | |
| <p>Staff List the name and title of staff members who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversee the program • Deliver the interventions | |
| <p>Progress Monitoring Describe how the school monitors the ongoing progress of students receiving targeted academic interventions.</p> | |
| <p>Coordination Describe how the general education teachers and those providing academic interventions coordinate their efforts.</p> | |
| <p>Professional Development Describe the professional development staff members receive related to targeted academic interventions.</p> | |
| <p>Outcomes Describe the academic outcomes of general education students receiving academic interventions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe any performance disparities between these students and the general population, in particular, whether these gaps are widening or narrowing. • Describe priorities and/or adjustments that will be made in this programming moving forward in order to narrow or close performance gaps. | |

¹⁵ This tool is based off of the [SUNY Charter Schools Institute At-Risk Programs Chart form](http://www.newyorkcharters.org/wp-content/uploads/At-Risk-Program-Chart_2019-20.docx). Charter Schools Institute. (August 2019). Programs for at-risk students. Retrieved from http://www.newyorkcharters.org/wp-content/uploads/At-Risk-Program-Chart_2019-20.docx

| Students with Disabilities | |
|--|--|
| <p><u>Identification</u> Describe how the school identifies students with disabilities.</p> <p>Comment on the population of students receiving special education services described in the Equity Data Form. In comparison to the local school district(s) of residence, are any groups over- or under-represented in disability identification? Are any disability types over- or under-represented? If yes, comment on why this disparity may exist and what steps will be taken to eliminate it.</p> | |
| <p><u>Program</u> Describe the special education program(s) at the school including the types of services the school provides.</p> | |
| <p><u>Staff</u> List the name and title of staff members who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversee the program • Provide mandated services • Note if services are provided by the school, the district, or external providers | |
| <p><u>Progress Monitoring</u> Describe how the school monitors the ongoing progress of students with disabilities.</p> | |
| <p><u>Coordination</u> Describe how the general education teachers and special education providers coordinate their efforts.</p> | |
| <p><u>Professional Development</u> Describe the professional development staff members receive related to the special education program.</p> | |
| <p><u>Data Reflection</u> Comment on the data you submitted via the Equity Data Form. Based on these data, what are your school's successes and challenges in serving students with disabilities?</p> <p>Comment on any disparities between students with disabilities and the general population in your data (academic, retention, discipline, graduation rates, etc.). Provide commentary on root causes of these disparities and what steps the school will take to address them.</p> | |

| English Learners (ELs) | |
|--|--|
| <p><u>Identification</u> Describe how the school identifies ELs.</p> <p><i>In comparison to the local school district(s) of residence, are English Learners over- or under-represented?</i></p> | |
| <p><u>Program</u> Describe the English Language Development program(s) at the school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If specific commercial programs are used, describe each program and evidence in support. | |
| <p><u>Staff</u> List the name and title of staff members who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversee the program • Provide mandated services • Note if services are provided by the school, the district, or external providers | |
| <p><u>Progress Monitoring</u> Describe how the school monitors the ongoing progress of ELs.</p> | |
| <p><u>Coordination</u> Describe how the general education teachers and ELD providers coordinate their efforts.</p> | |
| <p><u>Professional Development</u> Describe the professional development staff members receive related to the ELD program.</p> | |
| <p><u>Data Reflection</u> Comment on the data you submitted via the Equity Data Form. Based on these data, what are your school's successes and challenges in serving English Learners?</p> <p>Comment on any disparities between English Learners and the general population in your data (academic, retention, discipline, graduation rates, etc.). Provide commentary on root causes of these disparities and what steps the school will take to address them.</p> | |

| Other Historically Underserved Students (e.g., Economically Disadvantaged Students, Students of Color, Students in Foster Care, Students Experiencing Homelessness, Students returning from Delinquency or other Court-Ordered Placement, Military Connected Students) | |
|--|--|
| <p><u>Enrollment and Identification</u> Comment on the population of historically underserved students described in the Equity Data Form. Are any groups over- or under-represented?</p> | |

| | |
|--|--|
| <p><i>If yes, comment on why this disparity may exist and what steps will be taken to eliminate it.</i></p> <p><i>Describe how the school identifies historically underserved students for support services.</i></p> | |
| <p>Program <i>Describe the program(s) at the school to support historically underserved students.</i></p> | |
| <p>Staff <i>List the name and title of staff members who:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Oversee the program</i> • <i>Deliver services</i> • <i>Note if services are provided by the school, the district, or external providers</i> | |
| <p>Progress Monitoring <i>Describe how the school monitors the ongoing progress of historically underserved students.</i></p> | |
| <p>Coordination <i>Describe how the general education teachers and service providers coordinate their efforts.</i></p> | |
| <p>Professional Development <i>Describe the professional development staff members receive related to supporting historically underserved students.</i></p> | |
| <p>Data Reflection <i>Comment on the data you submitted via the Equity Data Form. Based on these data, what are your school's successes and challenges in supporting historically underserved students?</i></p> <p><i>Comment on any disparities between historically underserved students and the general population in your data (academic, retention, discipline, graduation rates, etc.). Provide commentary on root causes of these disparities and what steps the school will take to address them.</i></p> | |

Tool 14: Equitable Enrollment Phone Call Script¹⁶

Certain practices—which may be found in any public school setting—may discriminate against students with disabilities, English Learners, or other students with additional learning needs during the application and enrollment process. For example, families have reported being told that a school does not offer services for, or is not a “good fit,” or erects other improper barriers for students with disabilities, ELs, or other students with additional learning needs. See [Standard Student & Family Forms](#).

Below is a scenario and sample phone call script that authorizers can use to validate charter schools’ enrollment practices. Authorizers can customize the scenario and script to fit their specific needs, such as to indicate that the child does not speak English or to change ages/grades as appropriate. The charter schools that you call may ask to call you back with more information. If possible, authorizers should have a callback number ready that is not easily identifiable as the authorizer.

Scenario:

In this scenario, you are the guardian (aunt/uncle) of a 5th-grade (10-year-old) boy who has recently come to live with you. He is your sister’s son and your sister is going through a hard time, so you agreed to care for your nephew. You think he has an IEP or some sort of disability, but you’re not sure what exactly. You think that the school he is in currently isn’t doing enough to serve him, because it seems like his issues (poor grades and disruptive behavior) are getting worse. He is getting counseling at his school, but it doesn’t seem to help. You want to enroll him in the charter school for the next school year.

Script:

“Hello, my name is _____ and I am trying to find out how to get my nephew into your school next year. Who am I speaking to?”

“He is not doing well at his current school. He has a disability and they’re not helping him learn.”

“Does your charter school provide special education? What do I need to do to apply to your school? Do I need to submit anything else with the application? How will I find out if he gets in?”

| Equitable Enrollment Phone Call Notes | Notes on Content of the Call/Possible Violation: |
|---|--|
| Charter School Name: _____ _____ | |
| Date of Call: _____ | |
| Name of Caller (real): _____ | |
| Name of Charter School Staff on call: _____ | |
| Possible Violation? <u>Yes / No</u> | |

¹⁶ This tool is based on the Washington DC Public Charter School Board [Mystery Shopping Script](#). Pearson, S. (March 2014). Best practices and resources. DC Public Charter School Board. Retrieved from https://dcpcsb.org/sites/default/files/media/file/CCSA%20Best%20Practices%20Booklet_FINAL.pdf

5. Renewal Stage: Overview

Charter school authorizers in Pennsylvania decide whether to renew a charter agreement. If annual review processes are implemented with fidelity, charter operators and the public will have received written notification of the charter school's strengths and weaknesses each year. This process should focus on the degree to which they continue to operate in accordance with the performance framework, have addressed concerns that were raised through the annual review process, and how their proposed future plans align with the performance framework.

Considerations and Recommendations:

- **Visit the school during renewal stage:** Most authorizers conduct at least one comprehensive site visit during the renewal process. These visits typically involve inspection of the physical site; classroom observations; and focus groups with teachers, students, and school leadership. This is a key opportunity to confirm whether the equitable practices described in the application, agreed to in the charter agreement, and reported annually are being implemented with fidelity. See External Resources: [MA Charter School Renewal Inspection Protocol](#)
- **Use tools for all stages of charter authorization process:** The rubrics used in the New Charter Application Stage can also be used for annual review and charter renewal.
- **Understand the State-Mandated Nonrenewal/Revocation Process:** In the case of a nonrenewal vote from the school board, state law outlines specific steps authorizers must take. For an overview of the nonrenewal/revocation process and examples of legally required Public Notice of Nonrenewal Hearings, see the [Philadelphia Charter Schools Office Renewal Website](#).

Table 6: Charter Renewal Stage: Tools and External Resource

TOOLS

Only one new tool is provided for this stage and it should look familiar as it is a modified version of Tool 11 used in the Annual Review Stage.

Tool 15 – [5-Year Equity Data Form](#)

This form is to be completed by the charter school operator applying for a renewal. It asks them to report on student subgroup data over the course of their charter. It also requires them to project enrollment for the next 5 years of their charter. While much of the data in this spreadsheet should be available to the authorizing school district, it is often not broken down by subgroup and is spread across various reports. This consolidation should streamline the review by consolidating the data and focusing attention on subgroup outcomes. It is recommended to check this self-reported data against other available data files, when possible.

In addition, authorizers can reuse the following tools from earlier stages during the renewal stage:

- Tools from the [New Charter Application](#) Stage:
 - Tool 6 – [Authorizing “Staffing Plan”](#) **Page 21**
 - Tool 7 – [New Charter Application Guidance](#) **Page 23**
 - Tool 9 – [Summative Rubric: Guidance & Equity Sections](#) **Page 27**

Most authorizers use a modified version of their New Charter [Application](#) and [Rubric](#). They often add a section to rubric about future plans but keep the remaining categories the same, as in the case of SUNY.

- Tools from the [Annual Review](#) Stage can also be used with little or no modification:
 - Tool 12 – [Equity Program Report form](#) **Page 41**
 - Tool 13 – [Staff Roster Form](#)
 - Tool 14 – [Equitable Enrollment Phone Call Script](#) **Page 45**

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- [SDP Renewal Application](#) and [Guidelines](#) – SDP's renewal application components and guidelines for charter schools seeking renewal in the 2019-20 year.
- [SDP Performance Framework Rubric](#) – This document is used to evaluate renewal applications for charter schools authorized by SDP.
- [PPS Site Visit Resources](#) – This document lists the resources that Review Team members will need to access and review during a site visit.
- [SUNY Renewal Overview](#) including [Application](#) and [Rubric](#) – Documents used to evaluate renewal applications of New York charter schools.
- [MA Renewal Overview](#) including [Renewal Application](#) – Documents used to evaluate renewal applications of Massachusetts charter schools.
- [NACSA Renewal Guidance and Model Application](#) – Sample documents that authorizers may use to evaluate charter renewal applications.