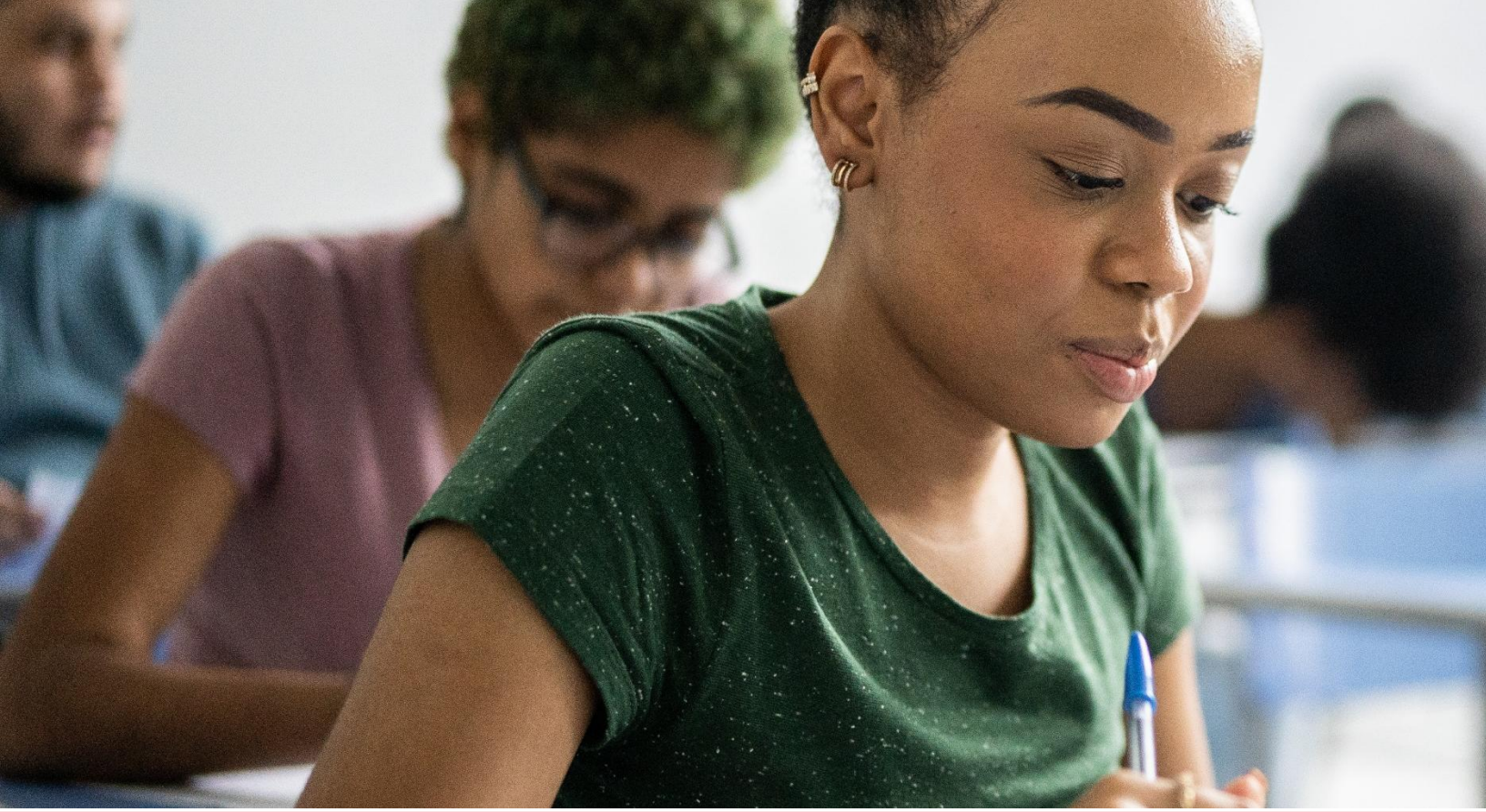




Tennessee Department of Education

Charter School Authorizer Toolkit

Guidance Document | August 2026



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Introduction

The Tennessee Charter School Authorizer Toolkit was developed by the Tennessee Department of Education (the department) in partnership with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) and the National Network for District Authorizing (NN4DA). This resource is designed to support Tennessee’s charter school authorizers by providing clear guidance and practical information for implementing high-quality authorizing practices. It aligns with state law, State Board of Education (SBE) rules, the [Quality Charter Authorizing Standards](#), and NACSA’s national Principles and Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing.

Scope and Purpose of This Toolkit

This toolkit is designed to support authorizers in Tennessee in carrying out their responsibilities ***after a charter school has been approved***, helping both new and experienced authorizers provide support, oversight, and accountability to their charter schools. It begins with planning for quality authorizing at the local education agency (LEA) level, then moves to the support provided to new charter schools in the pre-opening year, which is the critical period between approval and the school’s first day of instruction, and continues through effective oversight and high-stakes decisions.

While authorizers play a critical role in reviewing and making decisions on new charter applications, **this toolkit does not provide guidance on the application process or decision-making**. The SBE has developed comprehensive guidance, forms, and resources to support authorizers through those earlier stages. Authorizers seeking information related to the charter application process should visit the [SBE’s website](#).

Use of the Toolkit

Keep in mind that authorizing is both a technical and adaptive practice. The tools provided here are meant to guide—not prescribe—an approach. Successful authorizers continuously reflect, refine, and collaborate with partners to ensure Tennessee’s charter sector remains accountable, innovative, and student-centered.

Strong authorizing = Strong schools = Strong Student Outcomes

Phases of the Authorizing Cycle

In Tennessee, the authorizing cycle consists of five phases. Each phase builds on the one before it, ensuring a coherent system of planning, accountability, and improvement.

Phases of the Authorizing Cycle		
Planning for Quality Authorizing	Focus: Establish policies and systems that reflect community needs and statutory responsibilities.	Outcome: Clear purpose and foundation for authorizing.
Application Process and Decision-Making	Focus: Conduct rigorous, transparent, and evidence-based evaluations of applicants.	Outcome: Only high-capacity, high-quality operators are approved.
Pre-Opening Year Support	Focus: Ensure approved schools are prepared to operate successfully before opening day.	Outcome: Schools meet readiness benchmarks and can serve students well.
Effective Support and Oversight	Focus: Maintain ongoing oversight focused on outcomes and compliance.	Outcome: Timely data informs interventions and support.
High-Stakes Decision Making	Focus: Make merit-based decisions using cumulative performance data.	Outcome: Quality portfolios grow; low-performing schools exit responsibly.

Overview of State Agencies

In Tennessee, three state agencies work with charter sponsors, operators, and authorizers. Each agency serves a different function. See the tables below for explanations of each agency and the role of support they provide for charter stakeholders. Please know this is not an exhaustive list of functions for the agencies.

Tennessee Department of Education
Supports charter schools and charter authorizers in the implementation of rules and policies
Supports charter schools and charter authorizers through the provision of resources and professional development.
Maintains a record of charter authorizer decisions for charter schools (initial application, renewal, and revocation)
Monitors state reporting requirements for charter schools

Charter School Authorizer Toolkit

Tennessee Department of Education

Oversees and monitors the Charter School Facilities (CSF) grant and the Charter Schools Program (CSP) grant

Tennessee Board of Education

Sets rules and policies for K-12 public education, including charter schools and charter authorizers

Develops and publishes charter school applications

Ensures the effective operation of charter authorizers and evaluates authorizer quality

Tennessee Public Charter School Commission

Sets rules and policies for the charter school appeals processes

Appellate body responsible for hearing appeals of charter authorizer decisions on charter school applications; may also receive applications directly in specific instances outlined in law

Can authorize charter schools upon appeal and in specific instances outlined in law

Oversees and evaluates the charter schools it authorizes

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