



Department of Education

# Governance and Leadership

Charter Operator Toolkit | June 2026



Department of  
**Education**

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# Governing Board Operations

An effective charter governing board is one of the most critical drivers of success for a charter school in the planning year. An engaged, attentive, and supportive governing board is essential to ensure the school opens on time, is compliant, and has the necessary foundation to sustain efficient operations over time.

## Key Points

- Each charter school must be operated by a Tennessee-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.
- The charter application requires the identification of a charter governing board.
- Governing board members should collectively have a broad range of experience relevant to the school's mission and expertise in areas such as education, facilities, finance, law, and community engagement.
- Governing board size and composition are set by the charter bylaws, typically 5-15 voting members.
- Authorizers have the responsibility for reviewing governing board qualifications and conflicts of interest during the application process and should review again during the renewal process.

In forming a founding governing board, school leaders should consider the following:

- What areas of professional and lived experience does the school need to have on the governing board to achieve its mission?
- How can the governing board best represent the community the school serves?
- What will the expectations of the governing board members include?
- How will governing board members be vetted to ensure they are mission-aligned, have no conflicts of interest, have capacity to fulfill board responsibilities, and can operate ethically?

## Roles and Responsibilities

Every Tennessee charter school is governed by an independent nonprofit board of directors that holds the charter. The charter agreement is a binding agreement between the authorizer and the governing board. The governing board is the legal operator of the charter school and is accountable to the authorizer for performance, compliance, and fiscal integrity. It ensures the school fulfills its public mission, complies with laws, and uses public funds responsibly to achieve the mission. The core roles of the governing board are:

- **Governance:** Sets the mission, approves strategy, and ensures alignment with the

charter.

- **Oversight:** Monitors academic, financial, and organizational health; holds the school leader accountable for results.
- **Compliance:** Ensures adherence to state and federal laws, ethics standards, and authorizer requirements.
- **Stewardship:** Oversees the management of public funds to ensure funds are used responsibly and in alignment with the charter and safeguards long-term financial sustainability.
- **Advocacy:** Builds community trust and champions the school's mission publicly.

It is important to note that founding governing boards function differently from long-term governing boards. In the early years, governing boards often play a hands-on, problem-solving role alongside oversight. They support facilities progress, help build community trust, lay the groundwork for financial sustainability, and put in place the structures and processes required for oversight and transparency.

Once the school is launched, the day-to-day operations shift to the school leader with the governing board providing support. The [Governing Board Role Shifts from Planning to Launch](#) provides an overview of the potential changes. A plan should be in place for the transition into a governing body that governs and holds the leader accountable but is less directly involved in the day-to-day operations of the school.

## Formation and Composition

A well-composed governing board includes members with a mix of expertise, perspectives, and community connections to guide the charter school responsibly. The following chart identifies important areas in charter operation and provides examples of expertise that can be helpful on a governing board.

Area of Focus and Examples of Relevant Expertise	
Education/Instruction	Experience designing, implementing, or improving academic programs curriculum models, and/or accountability frameworks position the board member to interpret student achievement data and support school leader evaluation.
Finance/Accounting	Experience overseeing and managing complex budgets tied to per-pupil revenue; experience with financial modeling, cash-flow management, and audit readiness.

Area of Focus and Examples of Relevant Expertise	
Legal/Compliance	Legal background; understanding of applicable state and federal laws, rules and policies, public transparency requirements, and charter agreement obligations.
Human Resources/Talent	Experience with hiring structures, staff evaluation, licensure, and compensation models that align with charter autonomy and compliance.
Operations	Experience with policies and systems for transportation, food service, data reporting, and compliance calendars.
Facilities	Experience with facility acquisition, leasing, renovation, and safety readiness during pre-opening and growth phases; experience with facilities transactions and financing
Fundraising/Partnerships	Access to high-net-worth networks and willingness to fundraise; professional and/or volunteer fundraising experience.
Community/Parent Voice	Members of the parent and broader community, including prospective parents, local leaders, nearby business owners, etc.
Governance/Leadership	Nonprofit board experience, ideally charter school governing board experience.

Early challenges can be mitigated by an active, high-quality governing board. Many planning-year setbacks stem from governing boards that are unprepared to navigate facilities issues, delays, setbacks, and contingencies. Having governing board members with local facilities and financial expertise can help identify sites, assess feasibility, and navigate approval and funding hurdles.

Public charter schools are a unique kind of nonprofit, operating with public funding and public accountability. Governing board members coming from nonprofit or for-profit backgrounds will need resources and training to understand Tennessee’s charter-specific structures and requirements, as well as nuances in how key systems (e.g., finance, facilities, HR) operate in the charter school context.

Governing board members with prior charter school experience can help ensure that the full governing board understands the school’s performance, functioning, challenges, and successes.

## ***Considerations for Governing Board Members***

- Conflicts of Interest:
  - Anyone with a financial conflict of interest that has direct or indirect financial ties to the school cannot serve on the governing board, including vendors, contractors, or consultants.
  - Family members of the school leader, CFO, or similar roles should not serve if their relationship could create a conflict of interest
- Parents or guardians: Tennessee public charter schools are required to include a parent representative of a child who is currently enrolled on the governing body. Parents can bring valuable insight but must be prepared to uphold confidentiality and recuse themselves from matters directly affecting their child or child's teacher.
- Out-of-state members: Not prohibited, but governing boards should ensure a majority of members are able to attend meetings and remain connected to the local community.
- Shared service partners: Individuals associated with partner organizations (e.g., management companies, consultants, or facility lenders) should not serve if their organization contracts with or influences the school's operations.
- Former employees or vendors: Waiting periods or explicit recusal policies may be needed if recently employed or contracted with the school.
- Employees of the school: Employees cannot serve as voting members of the governing board. The school leader may participate as a non-voting, ex officio member if by-laws allow.
- Individuals barred from nonprofit service: Those ineligible under state or federal law, including individuals with certain felony convictions, cannot serve.

## **Required Governing Board Training**

Training ensures governing board members understand their legal duties, public accountability, and the unique responsibilities of governing a Tennessee charter school. All members of a charter school governing board, both new and returning, must complete annual training approved by the Tennessee State Board of Education (SBE). [T.C.A. § 49-13-111](#) and [SBE Rule 0520-14-01](#) set the requirements for the required governing board training.

### **This requirement applies to:**

- All authorized public charter schools
- Every voting governing board member

- Each year of service, not just onboarding

<b>Required Governing Board Training</b>		
<b>New Governing Board Member</b>	6 hours required	Completed within the first year of service
<b>Returning Governing Board Members</b>	4 hours required annually	Completed by June 30 each year
<b>Only training courses approved by SBE and listed in <u>policy 6.112</u> can earn credit toward the requirements.</b>		

The chart above identifies the minimum training requirements for new and returning board members. In alignment with SBE Rule 0520-14-01-.07, the following topics should be covered in the new governing board member training:

- Overview of responsibilities of non-profit governance, including but not limited to financial oversight and evaluation of school leadership
- State laws and rules governing charter school operations, including but not limited to student discipline and student discipline due process requirements, and requirements to comply with federal laws including, but not limited to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (“IDEA”), the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (“FERPA”), and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
- Tennessee open meetings and open records requirements
- Conflict of interest and ethics
- Education’s governance structure, including an overview of the roles and responsibilities of the State Board of Education, Department of Education, and the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission

Charter governing boards must maintain training certificates or attendance logs for each member, provide documentation to their authorizer upon request, and track training completion as part of their governance calendar. Training course providers are required to submit evidence of completion to authorizers on the charter governing board’s behalf.

## **Governing Board Policies**

Establishing clear, written governing board policies early helps ensure decisions are made consistently, transparently, and in alignment with Tennessee law and the school’s mission. These policies, along with others created and approved by the governing board, are a cornerstone of

charter school governance, reflecting one of the key freedoms of chartering: the ability to set your own policies that may differ from those of the district. However, there are some laws in Tennessee that require charters to develop policies, and that allow districts to require charters to adopt the district policy. The following chart outlines a few important policies that are or may be required.

<b>Governing Board Policies and Best Practices</b>	
Bylaws	<p><b>Purpose:</b> Define the governing board’s structure, size, membership, officer roles, and meeting procedures.</p> <p><b>Tennessee Requirement:</b> Tennessee Nonprofit Corporation Act T.C.A. Title 48, Chs. 51-58</p> <p><b>Best Practice Elements to Include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include term limits and rotation schedule.</li> <li>• Define quorum and voting clearly.</li> <li>• Outline process for filling vacancies.</li> <li>• Add procedure for remote meeting participation.</li> </ul>
Conflict of Interest & Ethics Policy	<p><b>Purpose:</b> Prevent personal or financial interests from influencing decisions and ensure transparency.</p> <p><b>Tennessee Requirement:</b> T.C.A. § 8-17-101 et seq. (Ethics in Government Act)</p> <p><b>Best Practice Elements to Include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Require annual disclosure forms.</li> <li>• Include recusal procedures and documentation steps.</li> <li>• Address potential conflicts for relatives and vendors.</li> <li>• Review policy annually with the governing board.</li> </ul>
Open Meetings Policy	<p><b>Purpose:</b> Ensure meetings are public, noticed, and properly documented.</p> <p><b>Tennessee Requirement:</b> T.C.A. § 8-44-101 et seq. (Open Meetings Act)</p> <p><b>Best Practice Elements to Include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post notices and agendas in advance.</li> <li>• Record minutes within a reasonable time.</li> <li>• Include procedure for executive sessions.</li> <li>• Maintain minutes permanently.</li> </ul>
Public Records & Retention Policy	<p><b>Purpose:</b> Guarantee public access to records and proper maintenance of documents.</p> <p><b>Tennessee Requirement:</b> T.C.A. § 10-7-508 et seq. (Public Records Act) - Public Records; Secretary of State Records Retention Schedule</p> <p><b>Best Practice Elements to Include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designate a Public Records Request Coordinator.</li> <li>• Define where and how records are stored.</li> </ul>

## Governing Board Policies and Best Practices

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow retention timelines for each document type.</li> <li>• Review retention practices annually.</li> </ul>
Code of Conduct	<p><b>Purpose:</b> Establish expectations for ethical behavior, professionalism, and confidentiality.</p> <p><b>Tennessee Requirement:</b> Not statutory but often required by authorizers</p> <p><b>Best Practice Elements to Include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cover respectful conduct, confidentiality, and communication protocols.</li> <li>• Include consequences for violations.</li> <li>• Review during onboarding and annually.</li> </ul>

### Reflection questions

- Which of these core policies are already in place, and which still need to be drafted or approved?
- How often does the governing board plan to review and update governance policies to ensure compliance and alignment with practice?
- Who on the governing board or staff is responsible for maintaining and organizing these policies for easy access and public transparency?

**Note:** Many charter authorizers and support organizations provide sample policy templates for bylaws, ethics, and open meetings. Use these as references, but customize them to reflect your charter school’s structure, values, and operational approach. The [Tennessee School Board Association](#) also has model policies available.

## Governing Board Meetings

Effective governing board meetings create structure, transparency, and accountability. They ensure decisions are made in public view, with clear records and compliance with TN state requirements that uphold public trust in charter school governance.

### Compliance Practices

- **Open Meetings:** All charter governing board meetings must be publicly noticed, accessible, and documented according to the [Tennessee Open Meetings Act](#).
- **Public Notice:** Post meeting dates, times, and agendas in advance—typically at least 48 hours before the meeting. It should be clear in the materials how a member of the public can attend each board meeting and how the public can make a comment before the board.
- **Minutes:** Keep detailed minutes of all actions and votes; approve and maintain them

permanently.

- **Executive Sessions:** Only permitted when legally justified (e.g., to discuss pending litigation with counsel).
- **Decision Records:** Document decisions clearly to demonstrate compliance and accountability to authorizers.

## Accountability and Effectiveness Practices

Strong governing board meetings move beyond compliance to drive strategy and results. They keep the governing board focused on oversight, ensure decisions align with the school’s mission and charter goals, and create a consistent rhythm of reflection and improvement.

- Review academic and financial data at ***each meeting*** to monitor progress toward charter goals.
- Use a consistent agenda format to ensure governing board time is focused on monitoring: academics, finance, operations, and compliance.
- Align votes and decisions to the school’s charter agreement, mission, and annual priorities
- Maintain clear documentation of actions, follow-up items, and charter leader(s) evaluations.
- Establish an annual meeting calendar that includes key board milestones and activities.
- Ensure that board discussions and decisions are focused on advancing the charter’s mission and advancing student outcomes.

## Governing Board Committees

Effective governing boards get most of their work done at the committee level. Governing board committees help distribute the governing board’s workload, engage members with relevant experience more deeply in key areas, and ensure critical issues receive focused attention between full governing board meetings.

For new public charter schools, committees are also a way to build capacity, involve external advisors, and prepare for the more complex oversight required once the school opens. The following table outlines the core committees that may be established.

Core Charter Governing Board Committees	
<b>Finance</b>	Oversees budget development, cash flow, financial reporting, and audit requirements; ensures transparency/compliance.

Core Charter Governing Board Committees	
<b>Governance</b>	Recruits and develops governing board members, leads evaluation, and maintains bylaws and policies.
<b>Academic</b>	Monitors student outcomes, instructional quality, and program compliance (SPED, RTI, EL).
<b>Facilities/Operations</b>	Supports site selection, facility readiness, and operational planning/compliance.
<b>Engagement/Development</b>	Strengthens relationships with families, funders, and community partners.

### Tips for Developing Effective Governing Board Committees

- Start small and focused: Begin with 2-3 standing committees (Finance, Governance, and Academics) rather than building too many at once.
- Clarify purpose and decision-making: Each committee should have a written document defining its role, decision-making scope, and reporting expectations.
- Keep the governing board informed: Committees report to the full governing board regularly through written updates or brief summaries at full board meetings.
- Engage non-governing board experts: Committees can include external advisors to expand expertise.

## Policies and Procedures

Tennessee charter schools are required to adopt a comprehensive set of board-approved policies that align with state law, State Board rules, federal requirements, and authorizer expectations. While specific requirements vary by authorizer, the [Core Policies for Operation](#) reflect the policies schools must have in place to operate compliantly and responsibly.

Documented and board-approved policies and procedures are foundational to how a charter school operates. They set clear expectations, define decision-making authority, and establish agreements that guide daily practice across academics, operations, and student services. Developing these policies takes time and often requires contracted legal or compliance support, given the need to align state law, State Board rules, and authorizer requirements.

At the same time, policies should not be treated as a purely technical exercise. Many schools default to adopting another school's or LEA's policies wholesale, missing an important opportunity. While some requirements are fixed, policies can also be a meaningful tool to clarify how your school operates, how decisions are made, and how you live into your vision and

mission. When developed thoughtfully, policies help ensure compliance and mitigate risk while also reinforcing what makes your school distinct in service of the students and families you aim to serve.

When approaching policy development, first distinguish between what is required and where discretion exists. Some policies are prescribed by law or authorizer rules and must be adopted as written or with only limited flexibility. Others allow room to define how the school operates in practice. A strong approach is to use required policies as a foundation, then intentionally tailor language, procedures, and thresholds to reflect the school's model, student population, staffing structure, and community context. Policies should be written clearly enough to guide daily decisions, not just satisfy compliance. When developed thoughtfully, they become a shared reference point for leaders, staff, and families, supporting consistent implementation while allowing your school to operate with clarity, purpose, and integrity.

Before drafting or adopting policies, have a conversation with your authorizer to clarify which policies are required, where templates are provided, and how your authorizer expects schools to demonstrate compliance. This early alignment helps avoid rework later and ensures your policies reflect both state requirements and authorizer expectations.

These guiding questions can help structure the work on policies. Approaching policy development with these questions in mind helps ensure policies are not only compliant, but usable, intentional, and aligned with the school's vision and operational reality.

- **What is required versus flexibility?** - Which policies are mandated by state law or authorizer rule, and where do we have discretion to define how the school operates?
- **Does this policy reflect how we intend to operate?** - Would staff and leaders be able to use this policy to guide real decisions, or is it purely technical?
- **Where should our model look different?** - Are there areas where our mission, student population, or program design warrant a different approach within allowable boundaries?
- **Is the policy clear, consistent, and implementable?** - Are roles, responsibilities, timelines, and decision points easy to understand and follow?
- **Who owns implementation and ongoing review?** - Do we know who is responsible for training staff, monitoring compliance, and updating policies as requirements change?

## Common Policy Development Pitfalls




Common Pitfalls and Potential Risks	
<b>Not tailoring</b>	<p>Policies are adopted from a partner, LEA, or another school without updating names, governance structures, or operating details.</p> <p>Potential Risk: Misalignment between written policy and actual practice creates confusion and compliance risk.</p>
<b>Compliance-only focus</b>	<p>Policies meet legal requirements but are difficult to understand or apply in day-to-day decisions.</p> <p>Potential Risk: Staff are less likely to follow policies they cannot use, increasing inconsistency and errors.</p>
<b>Operational mismatch</b>	<p>Policies assume staffing levels, roles, or systems the school does not actually have.</p> <p>Potential Risk: Schools rely on workarounds that undermine consistency and accountability.</p>
<b>No review cycle</b>	<p>Policies are approved once and not revisited as the school grows or requirements change.</p> <p>Potential Risk: Outdated policies increase legal and operational risk over time.</p>

While all the required policies will not be detailed in this toolkit, there are two policies which a school can choose to submit to the department in lieu of an independent lottery certification. The requirements for these two are outlined below, and the department uses the **Charter School Lottery Pre-Approval Review Form** to ensure that all the requirements are met.

### Enrollment Policy

Charter schools are public schools and open to any student residing within the geographic boundaries of the LEA in which the charter school is located. A public charter school authorized by the TPCSC is open to any student residing within the geographic boundaries of the LEA in which the charter school is located. A charter school may also enroll students residing outside the geographic district in which the school is located if permitted by the LEA's out-of-district enrollment policy.

The establishment of a strong enrollment system gives families a clear path to engage with the school and gives the school the information needed to plan confidently for the opening year. Thoughtful planning now sets a school up to launch with clarity, trust, and a solid foundation. Before finalizing the system or opening the application window, it's important to develop a clear sense of how enrollment will function in practice, who it serves, and what the team needs to operate confidently. Decisions about timelines, platforms, preferences, outreach, and documentation will influence the families reached and the demand generated.

<b>Planning for a Strong Enrollment System</b>	
<b>Keep the families at the center</b>	
	<p>The enrollment approach should start with the families expected to serve. Think about how they make school decisions, what information they need to navigate the process, and what barriers might make applying difficult. Designing with families in mind helps to communicate clearly, build early trust, and create an enrollment experience that reflects the school's values.</p>
<b>Build systems that support accuracy, clarity, and consistency</b>	
	<p>Internal routines are necessary to allow the team to manage enrollment confidently. Consider how to collect and track applications, who maintains your data, and how staff will communicate consistent messages to every family. The systems built now will reduce confusion, prevent errors, and make the first cycle predictable and manageable.</p>
<b>Connect enrollment decisions to the broader operational plan</b>	
	<p>Enrollment targets directly influence staffing, scheduling, budget assumptions, and the pace of the launch. Map enrollment milestones to the rest of the operational needs to plan realistically. The clearer picture of what enrollment means for the rest of the school, the smoother the transition into a stable, successful first year will be.</p>

## Common Enrollment Challenges

Common Enrollment Challenges	
<b>Unclear Targets</b>	<p><b>Challenge:</b> Targets exist but do not inform staffing, budgeting, or pacing.</p> <p><b>Focus:</b> Connect targets to when key decisions must be made across hiring, sectioning, and purchasing. Mistimed decisions create instability even when projections are accurate.</p>
<b>Mixed Communication</b>	<p><b>Challenge:</b> Staff and materials are not fully aligned or do not reflect charter commitments.</p> <p><b>Focus:</b> Ensure communication is precise, consistent, and grounded in confirmed elements of your model. Inconsistent messaging erodes trust and creates expectations you cannot meet.</p>
<b>Weak Data Systems</b>	<p><b>Challenge:</b> Tracking relies on basic spreadsheets or late-developed tools.</p> <p><b>Focus:</b> Maintain clean data, prevent duplicates, update contact info, and preserve an audit-ready trail. Data errors quickly spill into SIS setup, compliance, and funding.</p>
<b>Process Gaps</b>	<p><b>Challenge:</b> Staff know the basic steps but are unsure how to handle common situations.</p> <p><b>Focus:</b> Prepare the team for scenarios like incomplete applications, unclear eligibility, sibling verification, and family changes. Unclear processes cause confusion for families and inconsistent decision-making</p>

## Enrollment Requirements

Charter schools must offer an initial application period of at least thirty (30) days. During this period, all eligible students may apply. A charter school shall not exclude students from enrollment based on race, color, ethnicity, national origin, religion, income level, disability, proficiency in the English language, or academic ability. If a charter school's approved application limits enrollment to a single sex, then enrollment may be limited on that basis, if in compliance with Title IX. A charter school may refuse to admit any student who is expelled from another public school or district or who is in the process of being expelled from another public school or district.

A charter school must enroll any eligible student who submits a timely application, unless the number of applications exceeds the capacity of a program, class, grade level, or building. If the charter school is over capacity after the application period ends, then the school must conduct a lottery. The enrollment preferences used in the lottery process and the order of priority are addressed below.

If, at the end of the initial application period, the number of eligible students seeking to be enrolled does not exceed the school's capacity or the capacity of a program, class, grade level or building, then the enrollment of eligible students may proceed on a first-come, first-served basis.

## Enrollment Lottery

If, at the end of the initial application period, the number of applications exceeds the planned capacity of a program, class, grade level, or building, then the enrollment of eligible students must be determined on the basis of a lottery. [T.C.A. § 49-13-113](#) and [SBE Rule 0520-14-01-.04](#) set the requirements for the enrollment lottery. Any lottery must be conducted within thirty (30) calendar days of the close of the initial application period, and is designed to ensure fairness, transparency, and equal access. While many schools may not reach this threshold in their first year, leaders should still understand the expectations and be prepared to execute a lottery correctly if demand exceeds capacity. Clear procedures, accurate records, and consistent communication protect families, the school, and the integrity of the enrollment process. The section that follows highlights what leaders need to know to plan responsibly and remain aligned with state requirements.

### Key Points

- **A lottery is only required if demand exceeds available seats:** If you have more applications than seats at the close of your application window, you must conduct a lottery. If not, you can enroll students directly following your published process.
- **Enrollment preferences are identified in state law:** You are allowed to use specific preferences (e.g., siblings, articulation partners) allowed in T. C. A. § 49-13-113 and SBE Rule 0520-14-01-.04. These preferences must match your charter agreement and be applied as specified. If any of the enrollment preferences do not apply (e.g., no pre-K program is operated), the preference should not be included in the policy.
- **Some students do not participate in the lottery:** Returning students and eligible children of staff or board members (within allowable limits) are placed before the lottery is run.
- **Your lottery must follow a defined timeline and process:** You are expected to run the lottery within 30 days of the application window closing, using a transparent and random method, and maintaining complete documentation.

- **Certification or pre-approval is required:** You must have the lottery certified by an independent accounting or law firm or seek prior approval from the department. Submissions to the department for pre-approval must be received no fewer than thirty (30) days prior to the opening of the initial application window. Charter schools that choose to participate in the enrollment process of their authorizer may use certification from the authorizer to satisfy this requirement. Lottery certification should be submitted via the [Tennessee Charter School Upload Form](#) within thirty (30) calendar days of the date the lottery was conducted.
- **Student information must be protected:** You are responsible for ensuring the process complies with [Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act \(FERPA\)](#) and protects personally identifiable student data.

### **Prior to the Lottery**

Before conducting a lottery, the charter school should first make the following enrollment placements:

1. Students who attended the charter school during the previous school year shall be given first enrollment preference and excluded from entering into a lottery. Students that attended the charter school during the previous school year shall not be required to re-apply.
2. Charter schools may give an enrollment preference to children of the charter school's employees or to the children of a member of the charter school's governing body, not to exceed ten percent (10%) of the charter school's total enrollment or twenty-five (25) students, whichever is less.
3. Conversion Charter Schools Only: Students who reside within the former school zone of a converted public school.

### **Certification of Lottery Process**

Following the completion of the lottery, a charter school must provide to the department of education certification by an independent accounting or law firm that each lottery conducted for enrollment purposes complied with the requirements of T.C.A. § 49-13-113. Charter schools that choose to participate in the enrollment process of their authorizer may use certification from the authorizer to satisfy this requirement. Lottery certification should be submitted via the [Tennessee Charter School Upload Form](#) thirty (30) calendar days of the date the lottery was conducted.

In lieu of an independent accounting firm or law firm, charter schools may request that the department of education review and pre-approve the school's lottery process. For the lottery pre-approval process, the charter school must do the following:

1. Submit the charter school's written policy for enrollment and lottery practices via the [Tennessee Charter School Upload Form](#).

2. Provide documentation to support the preferences identified in the lottery practices. For example, if relying upon the preference related to articulation agreements, provide a copy of the articulation agreement along with evidence of the authorizer’s approval. Documentation should also explain how residential addresses are verified and correlated with the geographic boundaries of the LEA. If a preference is inapplicable, the preference may be omitted. For example, if the charter sponsor does not operate a pre-K program, that preference may be omitted
3. Identify a timeline for posting the lottery policy, accepting applications, conducting a lottery, and communicating results
4. Ensure all materials are submitted to the department of education for pre-approval no fewer than thirty (30) days prior to the opening of the initial application window. Department representatives will review the policies and procedures to ensure their compliance with statute and regulation. Approvals or requests for further clarification will be communicated within ten (10) business days of receipt of all materials. Policies that are pre-approved by the department do not need to be certified.

## Waivers

Generally, charter schools are expected to adhere to the school requirements set by Tennessee law, rule, and policy. However, if any State Board Rule or statute inhibits or hinders the proposed charter school’s ability to meet its goals or comply with its mission statement, [T.C.A. § 49-13-111](#) allows a sponsor of a proposed charter school to apply to either the authorizer or to the Commissioner of Education for a waiver. The [Local Education Agency and Public Charter School Waiver Guidance](#) document provides information on waivers that may not be granted to public charter schools according to state law and the process by which a charter sponsor may request allowable waivers.

Authorizers and the Commissioner of Education have discretion to approve or deny a waiver request. While approval decisions may vary among authorizers, the list below includes commonly requested waivers by charter school sponsors and operators. Statute references are current as of the publication of this document and are subject to change.

<b>Commonly Waived Requirements</b>	
<b><u>T.C.A. §§ 49-5-408-409</u></b>	Employment contracts, renewal, termination timelines, and at-will employment
<b><u>T.C.A. § 49-1-302(e)</u></b>	Duty-free lunch requirement for teachers

## Commonly Waived Requirements

<p><b><u>State Board Policy 5.106 and 5.201</u></b></p>	<p>State-prescribed administrator evaluation model</p>
<p><b><u>T.C.A. § 49-3-359(a)</u></b></p>	<p>Required distribution of instructional materials funds directly to teachers</p>
<p><b><u>T.C.A. §§ 49-5-702-716 and §§ 49-5-801-811</u></b></p>	<p>Statutory leave structures and timelines</p>
<p><b><u>SBE Rule 0520-01-02-.07</u></b></p>	<p>Library Information Center staffing and physical library requirements</p>
<p><b><u>T.C.A. § 49-3-306(a); SBE Rule 0520-01-02-.02; SBE Policy 5.600</u></b></p>	<p>State-mandated licensed personnel salary schedules</p>
<p><b><u>T.C.A. § 49-5-101(a); SBE Rule 0520-02-03-.10</u></b></p>	<p>Principal or school leader licensure requirements</p>
<p><b><u>T.C.A. § 49-5-401</u></b></p>	<p>Teacher assignment timelines and statutory staffing rules</p>
<p><b><u>T.C.A. §§ 49-5-501-515</u></b></p>	<p>Teacher tenure protections</p>
<p><b><u>T.C.A. §§ 49-6-2206-2207</u></b></p>	<p>Requirement to use only state-approved textbooks</p>
<p><b><u>T.C.A. § 49-6-303(a)(1); SBE Policy 5.103; SBE Rule 0520-02-03-.05</u></b></p>	<p>School counselor staffing model and licensure requirements</p>

# Accountability

## Federal and State Accountability

Tennessee uses two parallel accountability systems, each serving a different purpose. New and growing charter schools should understand both, because they shape how your school is evaluated and supported. More information on accountability can be found on the department's [District and School Accountability webpage](#) and in the current year Federal Accountability Protocol. Reach out to [TNED.Accountability@tn.gov](mailto:TNED.Accountability@tn.gov) with accountability questions, and [Report.Card@tn.gov](mailto:Report.Card@tn.gov) with report card related questions.

### Federal Accountability

Focus: School improvement

- Tennessee's federal accountability system evaluates schools using a *comprehensive* set of measures and identifies schools that need additional support to improve student outcomes.
- It examines overall performance **and** how well specific student groups are doing, with an emphasis on closing achievement gaps.
- Schools that are identified for support receive **interventions, resources, and improvement planning requirements** from the state.
- The primary goal is to ensure that *every student group* is making progress and that schools with persistent challenges get the help they need.

### State Accountability (A-F Letter Grades)

Focus: Transparency for families & public

- Tennessee's A-F letter grade system, required in state law, provides families with an **easy-to-understand snapshot** of each school's performance.
- It uses a **smaller set of prioritized indicators** to show overall quality and achievement in a format familiar to the public.
- The system is designed to **communicate quickly and clearly, not** to provide the full diagnostic detail found in federal accountability.
- Schools earning a D or F may be subject to additional state or authorizer review, but the primary function is **public transparency**.

A note on language: In Tennessee, "**Priority**" is the state accountability designation for the lowest-performing schools, while "**CSI (Comprehensive Support and Improvement)**" is the aligned federal designation under ESSA; most Priority schools are also CSI, but the labels

originate from different accountability systems and carry different compliance requirements. Charter status does not exempt schools from Priority or CSI identification.

## A-F Letter Grades

The department assesses school quality using four indicators, which are weighted as follows. Information on how to determine letter grades can be found on the [TN State Report Card webpage](#). The School Letter Grade Protocol, which is updated each year, can be found on that page.

Weighted Indicators	
<b>Achievement (ACH): Proficiency success rate on TCAP and EOC exams</b>	<b>K-8: 50%</b> <b>High School: 50%</b>
<b>Growth (GTH): Schoolwide TVAAS</b>	<b>K-8: 40%</b> <b>High School: 30%</b>
<b>Highest Need Students: Lowest performing 25% of students</b>	<b>K-8: 10%</b> <b>High School: 10%</b>
<b>College and Career Readiness (CCR): Percent of the graduating class with one of the following:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>ACT score of 21+ or SAT score of 1060+</b></li> <li>• <b>Postsecondary credit-earning score</b></li> <li>• <b>Industry credential</b></li> <li>• <b>ASVAB qualifying score</b></li> </ul>	<b>K-8: N/A</b> <b>High School: 10%</b>

### Key Points:

- Know which indicators apply to the school and how the grade span shapes the calculation.
- Maintain accurate rosters and meet the 95 % testing requirement to avoid score impacts.
- Growth carries significant weight. Monitor progress for all students, including specific subgroups.

- Set up the student information system (SIS) to collect necessary data on a regular cadence and share the data with the authorizer during the data verification window.
- High school charter schools should plan for the provision of programs to support CCR. The College and Career Readiness Guide can help support.
- Letter grades are a public accountability measure. Have a clear plan to share results with stakeholders.

## School Leadership

One of the first things a governing board will do is hire the charter school leader (head of school/principal). While the governing board exercises oversight of management to ensure school success and sustainability, the school leader manages day-to-day operations and staff, including the hiring of other school leadership positions. Strong governing boards set vision and hold the school leader accountable for school and student success. The other sections of the toolkit provide information and guidance to the school leader on the topics central to effective operation of the school.

### Tennessee Academy for School Leaders (TASL)

An essential priority of the department is ensuring that all schools in Tennessee have effective teachers and leaders who receive the feedback and support needed to continually improve student outcomes. Tennessee is transforming what it means to be an effective leader at all phases of a leader's career by setting high standards for effective leadership based on research and best practice, supporting leaders to reach those standards, and empowering districts to build a network of exceptional instructional leaders who get results.

School leaders are required to earn TASL credits if they spend 50% or more of their time in direct delivery of instructional services to the following: teachers, principals, and/or other educators in administrative or supervisory positions. All principals and assistant principals are TASL mandated, as are most district staff in instructional supervisor roles.

Administrators must earn 14 TASL credit hours during each one-year cycle from July 1 to June 30. To advance or renew an instructional leader licenses, a leader must have earned all required TASL credits in the current cycle and must have all previous cycle requirements met during the validity period of the license. Any cycle for which a leader has not met the TASL requirements will prevent a renewal or advancement request from being approved.

More information on TASL can be found on the department's TASL webpage. Contact [TASL.Information@tn.gov](mailto:TASL.Information@tn.gov) with any questions.

# Appendices

## A: Governing Board Role Shifts from Planning to Launch

Governing Board Role Shifts from Planning to Launch			
<i>Where gaps cause delays</i>	<b>Facilities</b>	<b>Planning Year: Secure</b> a compliant, mission-aligned facility; <b>negotiate</b> lease or construction terms; <b>monitor</b> progress to ensure occupancy approval and safety clearances on time.	<b>First Year of Operation: Support</b> facility operations, maintenance, and safety; <b>plan</b> for space growth and long-term capital needs.
	<b>Enrollment</b>	<b>Planning Year: Support</b> outreach to families and community partners; <b>host</b> enrollment events; <b>build</b> trust and visibility around the school’s mission.	<b>First Year of Operation: Support</b> efforts to spread the word about the school; <b>gather</b> and act on feedback to improve the school experience.
	<b>Finance</b>	<b>Planning Year: Approve</b> start-up and operating budgets; <b>track</b> cash flow; <b>confirm</b> state and federal funding schedules; <b>pursue</b> bridge or philanthropic funding to close gaps.	<b>First Year of Operation: Review</b> monthly financials and audits; <b>monitor</b> financial management and performance against budget; <b>ensure</b> compliance with public-funding rules; <b>adjust</b> budgets as enrollment and needs evolve.
	<b>Philanthropy</b>	<b>Planning Year: Engage</b> local and national funders and partners to secure start-up funding and/or in-kind support	<b>First Year of Operation: Sustain</b> and <b>expand</b> partner relationships; <b>report</b> outcomes and financial stewardship to donors.
	<b>Talent</b>	<b>Planning Year: Hire</b> the school leader; <b>review</b> staffing and compensation plans for compliance; <b>support</b> teacher recruitment and early HR systems.	<b>First Year of Operation: Evaluate</b> the leader’s performance; <b>monitor</b> HR systems and retention; <b>address</b> staffing or licensure issues.

## Governing Board Role Shifts from Planning to Launch

<b>Governance</b>	<p><b>Planning Year: Adopt</b> bylaws, ethics, open meetings, and records policies; <b>complete</b> required governing board training; <b>codify board structures and processes</b> (i.e., expectations &amp; norms, committees, board calendar) that will enable the board to operate smoothly; <b>document</b> all pre-opening actions.</p>	<p><b>First Year of Operation: Maintain</b> compliance and training records; <b>update</b> policies annually to reflect growth and lessons learned.</p>
<b>Governing Board Capacity</b>	<p><b>Planning Year: Complete</b> training beyond the minimum; <b>identify</b> skill gaps (e.g., SPED, facilities, fundraising); <b>recruit</b> new members with needed expertise; <b>assign</b> clear roles for launch support.</p>	<p><b>First Year of Operation: Onboard</b> new members; <b>build</b> deeper data and oversight capacity; <b>plan</b> for long-term sustainability and succession; <b>complete</b> annual training</p>
<b>Academic Program</b>	<p><b>Planning Year: Confirm</b> that the instructional model aligns with the approved charter and state requirements; <b>review student support</b> plans for legal compliance.</p>	<p><b>First Year of Operation: Monitor</b> early academic and compliance data; <b>ensure</b> fidelity to the instructional model and required interventions.</p>
<b>Authorizer Partnership</b>	<p><b>Planning Year: Build</b> an active relationship with authorizer; <b>attend</b> check-ins; <b>share</b> progress openly to bridge information gaps.</p>	<p><b>First Year of Operation: Maintain</b> ongoing communication; <b>collaborate</b> on performance monitoring and renewal.</p>

## B. Governing Board Strengths Map

Use this chart to capture where your governing board is strong, who brings each strength, and where you may need to build capacity.

Area	Strong Governing Boards Often...	Who Brings This Strength	How Strong Are We (1-5)	Next Steps
<b>Education / Instruction</b>	Review academic results, support instructional quality, and monitor compliance for student services			
<b>Finance/Accounting</b>	Oversee budgets tied to per-pupil funding, monitor cash flow, and ensure audit readiness.			
<b>Legal / Compliance</b>	Understand state laws, funding, compliance, and how Tennessee's charter systems operate.			
<b>Human Resources/Talent</b>	Guide hiring structures, compensation models, and staff development plans			
<b>Operations</b>	Understand compliance calendars, reporting, transportation, and food service systems.			
<b>Facilities</b>	Bring local knowledge of real estate/ construction, help source sites, and assess financial feasibility			
<b>Fund Raising/Partnerships</b>	Cultivate grants, philanthropy, and local partnerships to sustain growth.			
<b>Community/Parent Voice</b>	Build relationships with families, communicate the mission, and stay connected to community priorities.			
<b>Governance/Leadership</b>	Run effective meetings, maintain clear oversight, and uphold compliance with laws and policies.			

### **Guiding Questions**

- Given the goals of the school this year, where do we need to add skills, experience, and/or perspective to the governing board?
- How will our governing board's strengths need to evolve as the school moves from founding to full operation?

### **Rating Guide (1-5)**

1 = No experience

2 = Limited knowledge

3 = Some expertise developing

4 = Strength centered in one key member

5 = Multiple members bring strong expertise

## C. Core Policies for Operation

Core Policies for Operation	
<b>Governance, Transparency, and Complaints</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board governance and ethics policy</li> <li>• Open meetings and public records policy</li> <li>• Records retention policy</li> <li>• Grievance and complaint policy</li> <li>• Civil rights grievance procedures (ADA, Section 504, Title VI, Title IX)</li> <li>• Sexual harassment / Title IX policy</li> <li>• Registered sex offender policy</li> </ul>
<b>Enrollment, Attendance, and Student Rights</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Admissions and enrollment policy</li> <li>• Enrollment lottery policy</li> <li>• Attendance and truancy policy</li> <li>• Promotion, retention, and grading policy</li> <li>• Student records and FERPA policy</li> </ul>
<b>Student Discipline and School Climate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student code of conduct / discipline policy</li> <li>• Bullying, harassment, and cyberbullying policy</li> <li>• Zero tolerance and weapons policy</li> <li>• Substance use and prohibited items policy</li> <li>• Safe relocation and de-escalation procedures</li> </ul>
<b>Special Populations and Student Services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special education and Child Find policy</li> <li>• Section 504 policy and procedures</li> <li>• English learner identification and services policy</li> <li>• Students experiencing homelessness policy</li> <li>• Foster care and migrant student policies</li> <li>• Surrogate parent policy</li> </ul>

## Core Policies for Operation

<b>Health, Wellness, and Student Safety</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student health services policy (medication, health plans, privacy)</li> <li>• Immunization and physical examination policy</li> <li>• Child abuse and neglect reporting policy</li> <li>• Suicide prevention policy</li> <li>• Student wellness / Coordinated School Health policy</li> </ul>
<b>School Safety and Facilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emergency operations and school safety policy</li> <li>• Threat assessment team policy</li> <li>• Fire safety and building safety policy</li> </ul>
<b>Transportation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student transportation policy</li> <li>• Transportation safety complaint procedures</li> <li>• Field trip transportation policy</li> </ul>
<b>Personnel and Human Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equal employment opportunity policy</li> <li>• Employee Code of conduct and ethics policy</li> <li>• Background checks and fingerprinting policy</li> <li>• Mandatory reporter policy</li> <li>• Employee grievance policy</li> <li>• Substitute teacher policy</li> </ul>
<b>Finance, Procurement, and Assets</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial management and internal controls policy</li> <li>• Budget development and amendment policy</li> <li>• Procurement and purchasing policy</li> <li>• Travel and expense reimbursement policy</li> <li>• Grants and federal funds management policy</li> <li>• Inventory and asset management policy</li> <li>• Student activity funds policy</li> </ul>
<b>Technology, Data, and Privacy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acceptable use and internet safety policy</li> <li>• Student data privacy and security policy</li> <li>• Artificial intelligence policy (annual submission to TDOE)</li> <li>• Confidentiality of employee information policy</li> </ul>

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