

CHARTER SCHOOL SUPPORT INITIATIVE (CSSI)

What is the Colorado School Support Initiative (CSSI)?

CSSI is an evaluation service for self improvement provided by the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) Schools of Choice Unit. The service is voluntary and independent of other evaluations such as those required for charter renewal and accreditation. Participating schools receive a comprehensive review of the school's strengths and weaknesses based on the Standards and Indicators for School Improvement, a research-based rubric that covers curriculum, assessment, instruction, school culture, student, family and community support, professional development, leadership, organizational structure and resources, planning, and board leadership.

What is the CSSI process?

Charter schools must apply to the CDE to receive an evaluation. Once approved, a CDE-trained team spends up to a week at the school interviewing leadership, staff, parents and students, conducting classroom observations, and reviewing school documents. The team records its observations in a lengthy report that rates schools as "Exemplary," "Fully Functioning," "Limited Development," and "Little or No Development" on specific indicators of school performance. The report also includes recommendations. At the presentation of the report, the CSSI team leader provides professional contacts and research for charter schools to utilize in addressing their school improvement needs.

Who are CSSI team members?

CSSI team members have extensive experience in school governance, teaching, data analysis, assessment, education policy, and other aspects of education. Additionally, each member must attend CDE's intensive three-day training.

How is CSSI different from CDE's Colorado System of School Support - CS³?

While CSSI and CS³ use the same evaluation rubric and training, they have different purposes and serve different kinds of schools. CS³ is a required evaluation for underperforming Title I schools (both charter and traditional public schools). CSSI is a voluntary evaluation service for charter schools at all performance levels that are seeking to improve on their own initiative. Willingness to undergo an independent evaluation through CSSI shows a commitment to continuous improvement.

What is expected of staff, board and students during the CSSI site visit?

The CSSI team supports charter schools and wants to help each school as it pursues continuous improvement. To ensure that their report is as accurate as possible, staff should be honest and open with team members during interviews. The information provided will be completely confidential. Staff names are never used in the final report.

What kind of schools can benefit from a CSSI review?

Whether high performing or struggling, experienced or new, stable or growing, all schools can benefit from an external evaluation. The response to the program has been positive. Frontier Charter Academy, a "High" rated school, was one of the first schools to complete the CSSI process. Rebecca Dougherty, the elementary principal, is enthusiastic about the results. She believes, "The process helped us to set our direction and school improvement goals for the next five years, and created a common vision for our board, administration, staff and parents."

What Are People Who Have Been through the CSSI Process Saying?

The CSSI process allowed the board to establish a common vocabulary with the administration, teachers, and staff at the school. As we reviewed the CSSI report together, we were better able to define the improvement plan for the school, and to understand the framework of instruction, culture, and leadership necessary to be an outstanding and professional learning environment.

Jen Dauzvardis
Board President
Flagstaff Academy

The CSSI process was critical for a new school like Flagstaff Academy to evaluate current practices and set the direction for the strategic plan for the next five years. This process helped Flagstaff solidify common language and instructional practices so our norm of “Kids First” became a reality.

Kimberly Bloemen
Principal
Flagstaff Academy

The CSSI visit has been a critical part of the improvement of our school. The process was very eye-opening. Many of my thoughts as an administrator were confirmed by the report, plus it gave me additional ideas. Being an alternative high school, the CSSI team truly used their knowledge, expertise and team approach to generate meaningful suggestions for improvement.

Santiago López
Principal
Life Skills Center of Denver