Authorizers Role in Continuous Improvement

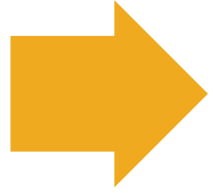Colorado Charter School Institute

Introduction

Ryan Marks

Colorado Charter School Institute

Director of Evaluation and Assessment
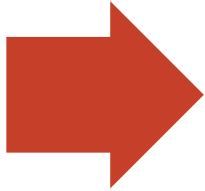
ryanmarks@csi.state.co.us

(he/him/his)

Jessica Welch

Colorado Charter School Institute

Assessment and Improvement Planning Specialist
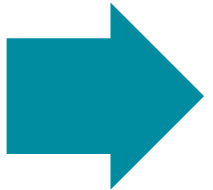
jessicawelch@csi.state.co.us

(she/her/hers/ella)
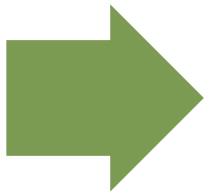
Overview: Authorizing and Continuous Improvement

Authorizer: Align Processes
- Unified Improvement Plan
- Renewal
- Annual Report
- Equity Screener

School: Build Capacity
- CSI's Approach
- Cohort Model

Resources

Authorizer's Role

Authorizer historically employed limited levers to improve school quality - open new high-quality schools and close or non-renew lower performing schools.

However, while this strategy had some success, the authorizer's most "powerful" tools for improving student outcomes were not working.
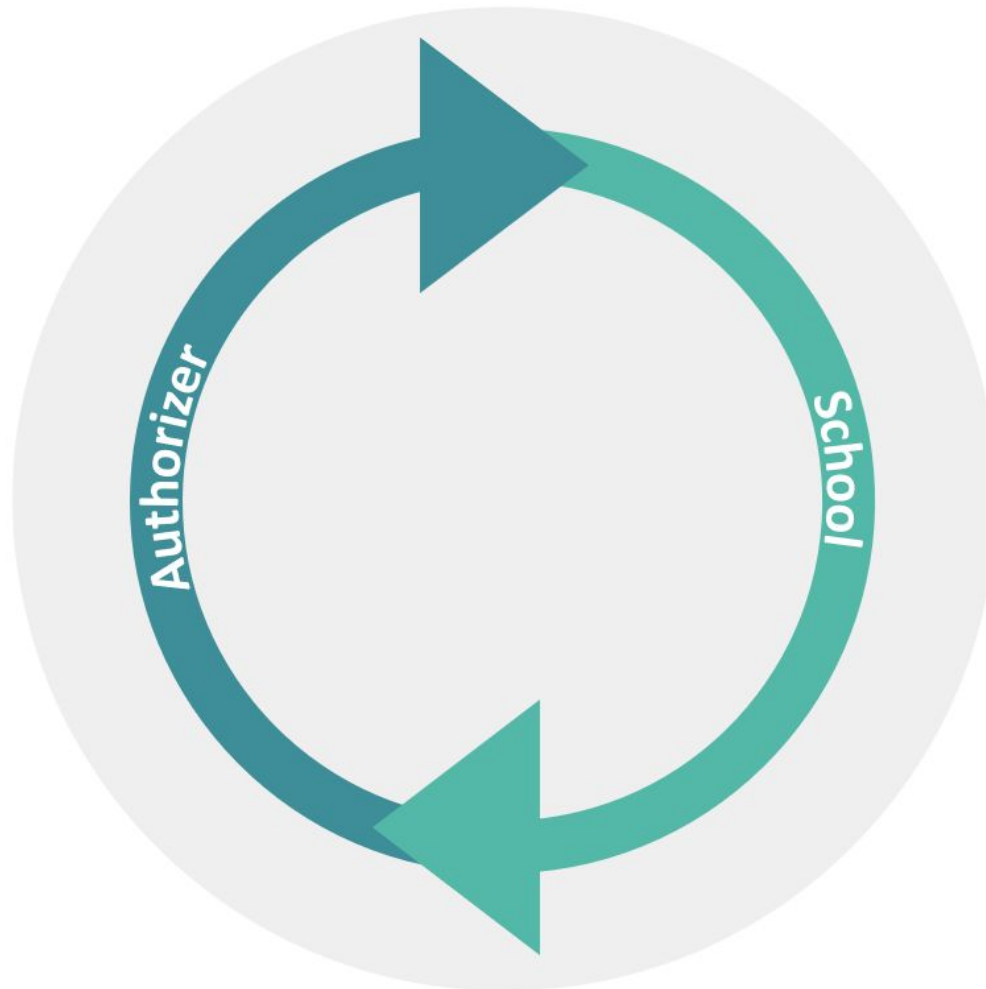
Balancing support and compliance

Support

Compliance

A Dual Approach to Continuous Improvement

How does this connect to our equity work?

*... continuous improvement also requires **a shift in mindsets about who is involved in system improvement efforts**. Traditionally, improvement efforts **defer to system leadership**.... Continuous improvement methods, on the other hand, **prioritize all voices in a system**, with the aim of designing better systems with and for those impacted by the system…*

-Valdez, Takahasi, Krausen, Bowman, and Gurrola, *Getting Better at Getting More Equitable*, WestEd March 2020
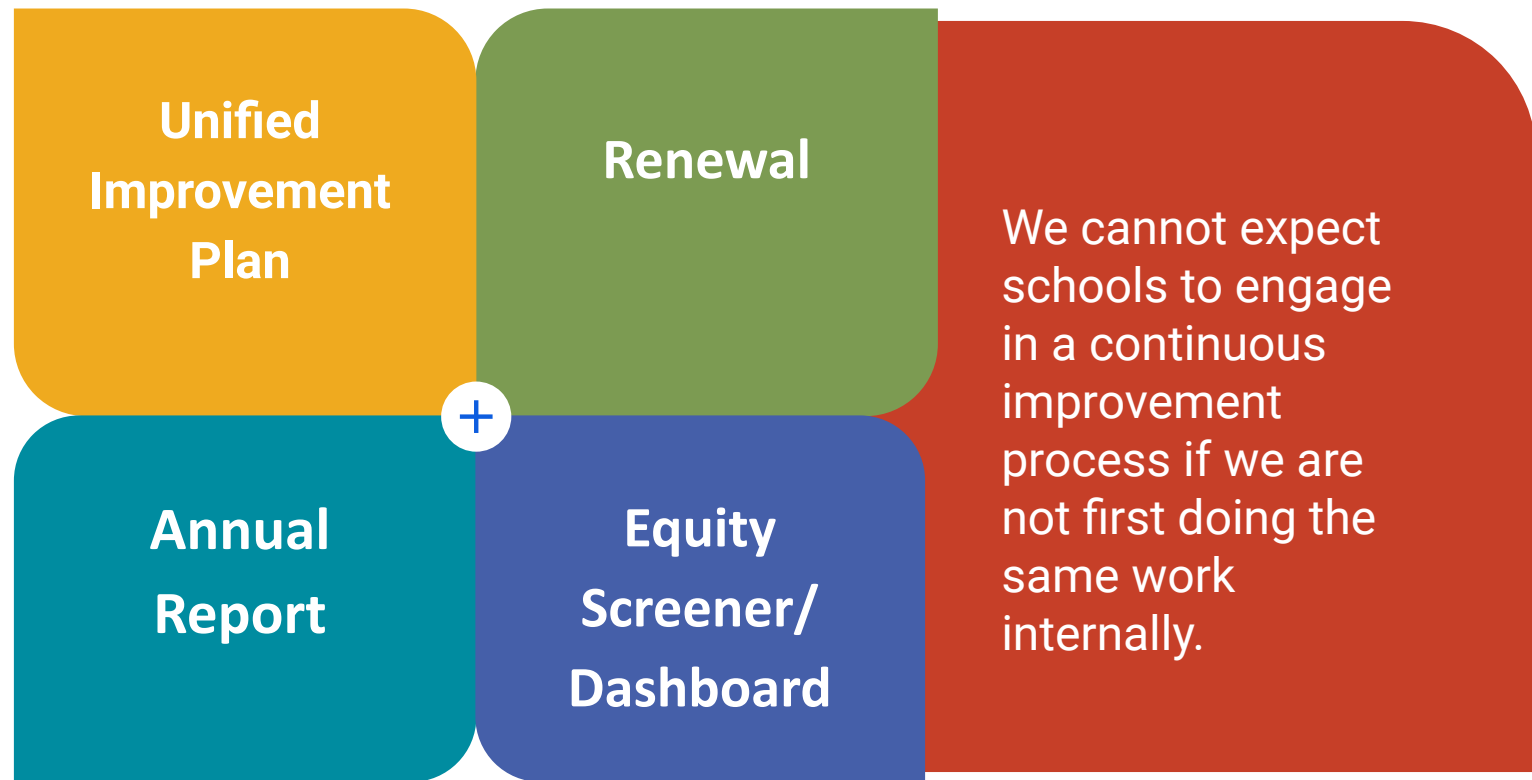
Authorizer Continuous Improvement

NACSA Quality Practice Project Finding

Authorizers with high-quality portfolios do more than enforce compliance - **they build relationships with schools** outside of the traditional accountability process and **offer supports** that respect and protect the autonomy of the school.

Authorizer Continuous Improvement: Align Processes

Unified Improvement Plan

Renewal

Annual Report

+

Equity Screener/ Dashboard

We cannot expect schools to engage in a continuous improvement process if we are not first doing the same work internally.

Unified Improvement Plan

	Challenge	Strategies
Compliance	Schools view the UIP as one more compliance task to complete	• Align UIP with other CSI processes so that it satisfies multiple annual requirements • Create explicit guidance on content, process, and logistics
Timeline	State timeline made no sense	• Change submission and training calendar (gradual rollout with early adopters)
Meaningful	Schools entering what they thought CSI or CDE wanted to see, rather than what they were actually doing internally	• Alignment incentivized schools to use UIP in a meaningful way. • Increased training and support lowered barriers to use.
Future	Continue to find ways to align other processes (title budgeting, grant compliance, cohorts, equity screener)	• Refine internal (CSI) cross-department collaboration to pursue additional areas of alignment

NACSA Quality Practice Project Finding

Continually review policies and procedures, and roll back unneeded paperwork or compliance burdens on schools

Charter Renewal

Streamlining & Aligning	Feedback	Site Visit

Streamlining & Aligning

- The renewal process kicks off at the start of the calendar year and concludes six months prior to the expiration of the contract.

- It is a **streamlined process that aligns various components of the charter renewal process with ongoing school processes** and focus the conversation on the data and information that matters most.

Feedback

- **The renewal process includes several opportunities for schools to receive feedback.** In addition to the feedback provided through the annual reports, feedback is provided on draft renewal narrative requirements prior to the finalization of the submission.

- Schools also present to the authorizer board prior to finalizing the submission and can therefore adjust their submission as needed.

Site Visit

- Through site visits, CSI seeks to understand the more qualitative aspects of school performance. CSI does not have standard protocols it uses on school site visits. Instead, site visits are opportunities for school leaders to articulate and demonstrate their model and vision, **highlighting ways in which they are working to improve outcomes for kids.**

- In a site visit, authorizer staff look for **evidence that the school is implementing its Unified Improvement Plan**.

Resources

Strategic Planning Guide for Charter School Boards

COLORADO CHARTER SCHOOL INSTITUTE

Strategic Planning Overview

A primary responsibility of the board of directors of charter schools is to determine the strategic direction that the organization will take over the next three to five years. This requires the board to have a comprehensive understanding of the current status of the school academically, financially, operationally, and culturally.

Strategic planning involves creating a vision, with supporting goals that can be regularly measured and adjusted as needed. The strategic plan becomes the guide the board and school leader use to align leadership and improvement efforts. It allows the board to focus on effective governance processes and the school leader to direct their efforts on operational leadership practices. A well-developed strategic plan provides the structure for the board to monitor progress toward achieving goals and create a process for evaluating the school leader.
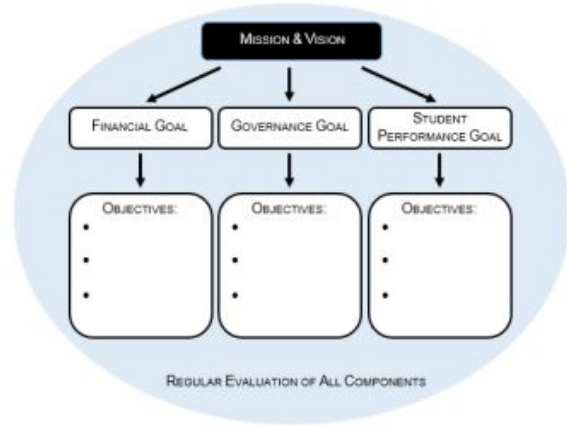
Knowing the magnitude of challenges that charter schools encounter, a well-developed and utilized strategic plan will assist the board and school leader to successfully navigate these issues as they arise.
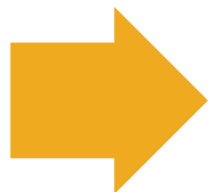
Strategic Planning Outcomes

The charter school governing board plays a key role in defining strategic goals and developing the structure of the plan. It is recommended there be 3-5 major goal areas identified, including finance, student performance, and governance. The remaining two goals should focus on specific areas the board identifies as critical to the school fulfilling its mission. Some areas to consider are operations, school culture, communications, public relations/marketing, and fund raising.

The Purpose of this Tool:

Once individual board members complete a Needs Assessment, the r... the whole board. Results should be used to determine areas of weakn...

Needs Assessment:

Each board member should fill out their responses to the Needs Asses... Strongly Agree (5 points) to Strongly Disagree (1 point). After completin... total rating on their own (if not using Excel) or, if using the Excel versio... has ratings based on the total points for each section, from Excellent t... the page on the tab.

Overall Board Performance:

Once each board member completes the needs assessment (availabl... option to compile their results in the Overall Board Performance tab. T... Member Name and the number values for each section. All ratings will... For an example, view the sample at the top of the page on the tab. Dis...

Section Ratings Key:

This information is also available in the Needs Assessment tab undern...

Section	Rating Values
SECTION I: Vision and Mission	10= Excellent, 8-9= Very Good, M...
SECTION II: Board Membership	38-45= Excellent, 29-37= Very G...
SECTION III: Board Needs and Training	23-25= Excellent, 19-22= Very G...
SECTION IV: Board Policies, Compliance and Responsibilities	81-90= Excellent, 68-80= Very G...
SECTION V: Board Bylaws	18-20= Excellent, 15-17= Very Go...
SECTION VI: Board Communication	14-15= Excellent, 11-12= Very Goo...
SECTION VII: Board Fiduciary Duties	112-125= Excellent, 85-124= Very...
SECTION VIII: Board/School Leader Relationship	27-35= Excellent, 22-26= Very Good, 16-25= Good, 10-15= Satisfactory, 6-9= Poor
SECTION IX: Authorizer Relations	36-40= Excellent, 26-34= Very Good, 17-25= Good, 16-22= Satisfactory, 8-15= Poor
SECTION X: Special Education	18-20= Excellent, 16-17= Very Good, 12-15= Good, 8-11= Satisfactory, 4-7= Poor

INSTRUCTIONS: Mark an X for the response that best r... the values associated with each answer. See the sample

Subcategory	Indicator
Sample Subcategory	Sample Indicator
Sample Rating	To calculate your overall rating Agree= 5, Agree= 4, Not Sure= with each value.
SECTION I: Value and Mission	
Board Understanding	The board has a clear underst...
Implementation	The board is able to demonstr...
Value and Mission Rating	To calculate your overall rating Agree= 5, Agree= 4, Not Sure= with each value.
SECTION II: Board Membership	
Board Nominating Process	The board has a nominating p... diverse with respect to race/eth...
Board Recruitment	The organization has complete... using an instrument such as th... characteristics that are lacking
Board Evaluation	The board is concerned with th... responsive to changing circum... achieve its mission. It is aware... renewing itself and of involving
Board Diversity	The board contains the necess... complement one another and t... and school population.
Board Expansion	There is a target profile of expe... priorities. There is a clear boar...
Board Expertise	There is strong expertise in ke... not too narrow a focus. All boar...
Board and Leadership Pipeline	The board has a long-term pla... potential board directors are re... as outside the organization. Th...
Board Elections	Board Election Process is in a... independent candidates, with a...
Board President's Role	The position of the Board Presi... dedicated to the mission of the... working closely with the Schoo... responsibilities between Scho...
Board Membership Rating	To calculate your overall rating Agree= 5, Agree= 4, Not Sure= with each value.

MISSION & VISION → FINANCIAL GOAL / GOVERNANCE GOAL / STUDENT PERFORMANCE GOAL → OBJECTIVES

REGULAR EVALUATION OF ALL COMPONENTS

Annual Report

- A quality authorizer designs and implements an annual report to support effective oversight, communication with charter schools, and public accountability and transparency.
- Annual report is the primary driver of renewal.

- The report template, format, structure have changed over time increasing the utility of the tool and the information by school leaders, school boards, and the public.
- There has also been an increase in training for schools.
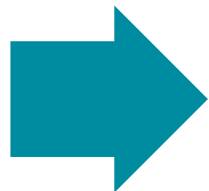
- Next steps include better understanding how many stakeholders utilize the interactive tools and how we can create a higher-level overview of school performance.
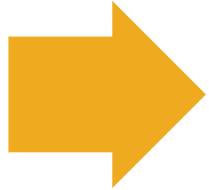- Performance framework revisions

NACSA Quality Practice Project Finding

A strong feedback loops exist between the authorizer's monitoring system and schools, which gives schools clarity on where they stand relative to authorizer expectations.
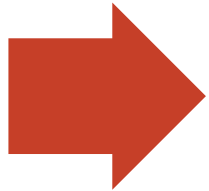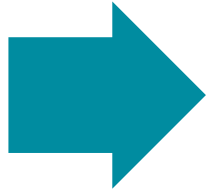
Equity Screener

- The Equity Screener provides a diagnostic to zoom out on what may be going on in a school.
- Data in interactive, tailored to the school, and accessible.

- Schools have the autonomy to set their own goals.
- Schools can align their equity goals with other processes - like the UIP and CARS (annual report).

- CSI staff provide the expertise and resources to help schools reach their goals.
- CSI staff guide schools through goal setting and are continuously engaged with school equity goals.
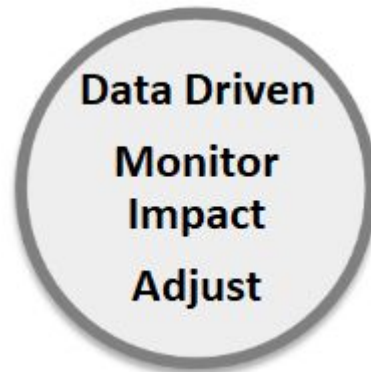
NACSA Quality Practice Project Finding

Authorizers view role as supporting school success, not as a "compliance cop." Yet they also draw a very clear line between providing "support" and "direction," the latter of which is strongly avoided.

# School Continuous Improvement: Build Capacity
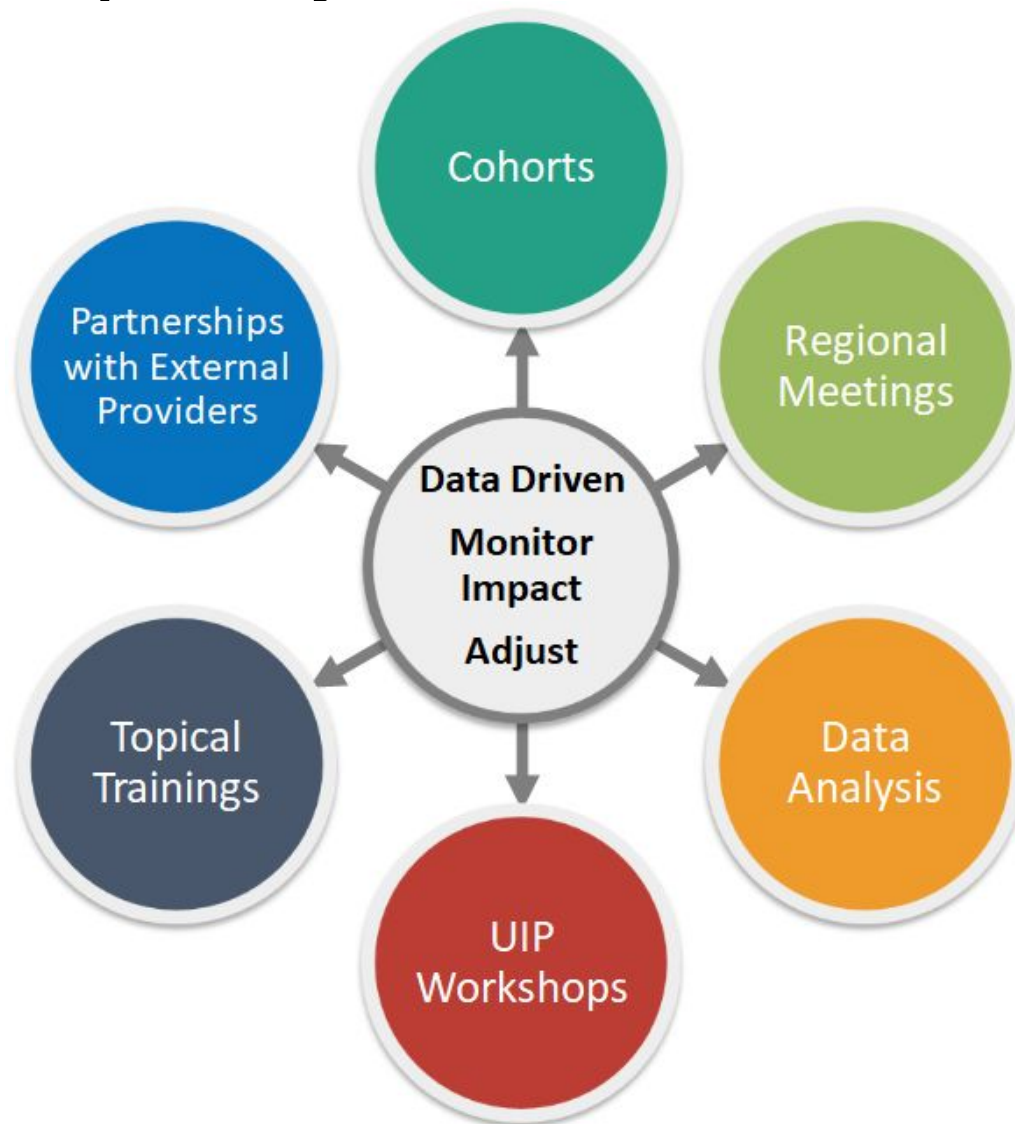
1. **Data Driven:** What are the data (**quantitative and qualitative***) telling us about capacity building needs in our schools?

   *And do you have a mechanism for tracking qualitative feedback?

2. **Monitor Impact:** Are these the right topics? Is this the right delivery mechanism? How do we know?

3. **Adjust:** Build a delivery model flexible enough to respond to evolving needs and feedback loops from Monitoring Impact.

Cohorts

MTSS

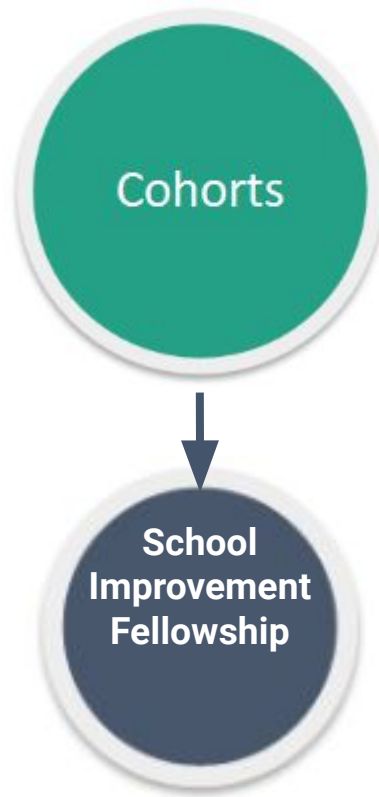School Improvement Fellowship

School Climate Collaborative
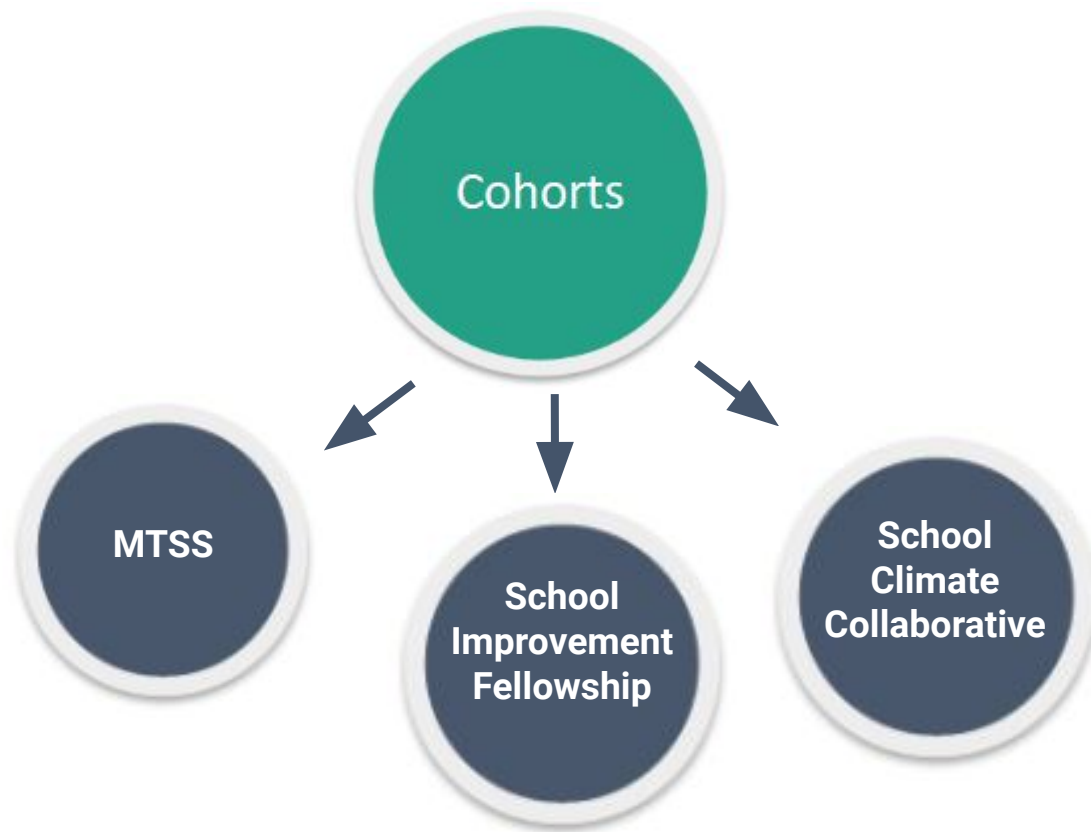
➔ CSI uses several soft levers to influence school quality including an intensive, year-long cohort model. Cohorts include regular group meetings, relevant and usable tools, and individualized coaching.

## NACSA Quality Practice Project Finding

Intentionally develop relationships with school staff and leadership, typically through visits to the school and phone calls, outside of formal accountability processes.

The School Improvement Fellowship grew out of the initial UIP alignment phase. Several school leaders expressed an interest in more **in-depth capacity building** related to school improvement cycles. This year-long fellowship includes a competitive application process, quarterly full-day immersive workshops featuring expert speakers and **usable tools**, and **regular individualized coaching**. Fellows complete the year with a presentation of their theory of action and i**mplementation plan** to a critical panel of peers and experts. The progression of the year mirrors the layout of the UIP.

A Dual Approach to Continuous Improvement
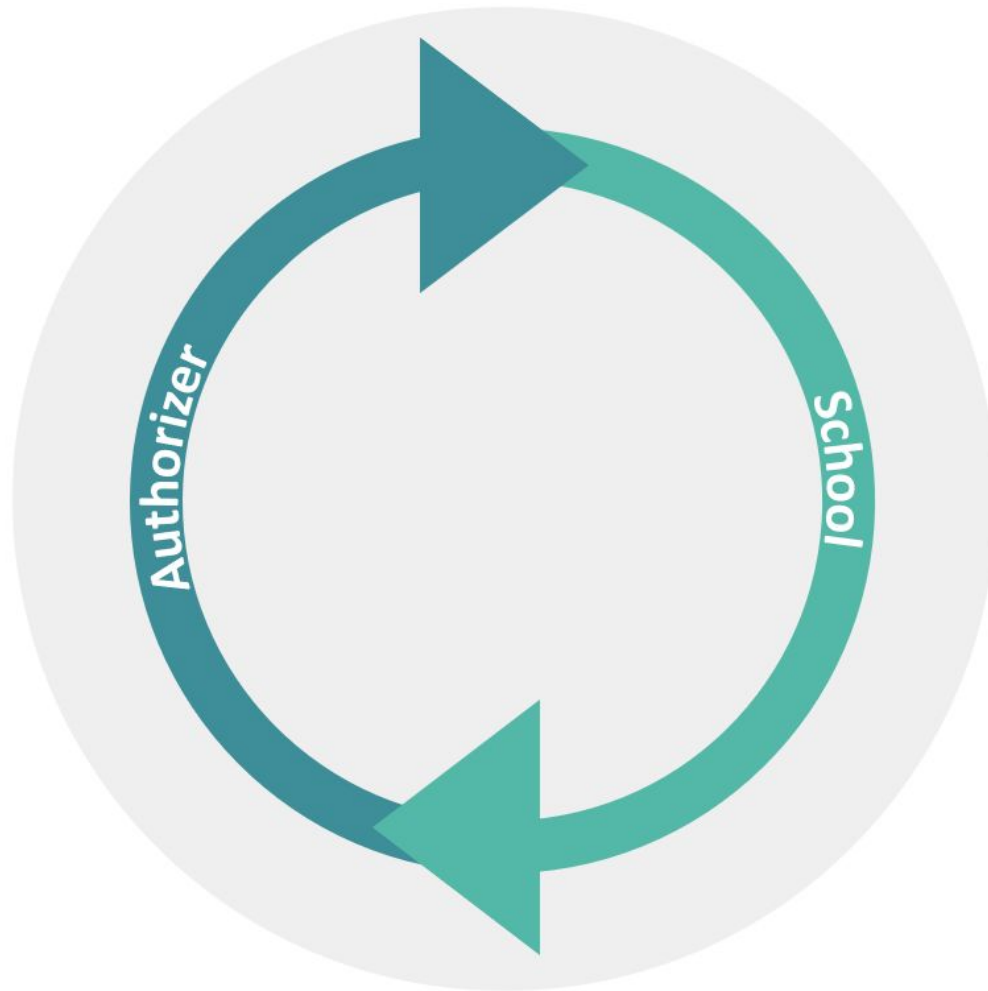
Resources

- [Renewal Website](#) (includes all renewal materials, site visit materials, and supplemental resources)

- [Strategic Planning Guide](#)

- [Board Needs Assessment](#)

- [CSI Unified Improvement Plan handbook](#) and [resources](#)

- [Annual accountability reports](#) and [resources](#)

- [Equity Screener resources](#)

- [NACSA Quality Practice Project](#)

- NACSA [Essential Practices](#) and [Principles and Standards](#)

- Bellwether Report – [Standardized or Customized – How Charter School Authorizers Can Better Support Diverse, High-quality School Options](#)

Thank you!

Ryan Marks

Colorado Charter School Institute
Director of Evaluation and Assessment
ryanmarks@csi.state.co.us
(he/him/his)

Jessica Welch

Colorado Charter School Institute
Assessment and Improvement Planning Specialist
jessicawelch@csi.state.co.us
(she/her/hers/ella)