

This **draft** opening criteria checklist will inform the development of the MOU or Charter Contract with a locally-approved charter school, pending approval by the Gwinnett Board of Education.

- The criteria are based on guidance from the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) pre-opening framework and playbook, as well as conditions identified by the district’s internal review team to support a successful school launch for APA in the 2027–2028 academic year.
- All outlined action items must be completed during the 2026–2027 academic year, which serves as APA’s Year 0.
- The authorizer is responsible for providing oversight throughout the pre-opening period for all new charter schools, regardless of any specific conditions identified.
- The Office of Program Development and Improvement will provide oversight and accountability.

Table of Contents

Student Enrollment and Supports:	1
Facilities:	2
Finance:	2
Staffing:	3
Academics:	4
Governance:	5

Student Enrollment and Supports:

- 90% Enrollment
- Enrollment patterns reflect proportions of students with disabilities and English learners anticipated from communities from which the school draws students
- Policies related to admissions, lottery, waitlists, fair and open recruitment, and enrollment are developed, approved, and publicly shared
- Student and family handbook that contains policies related to discipline, complaints/grievances, FERPA, Open Meetings Law, volunteering, course requirements, graduation and retention, dress code, family engagement, etc., is developed and approved by the board
- A student recruitment plan designed to achieve enrollment targets, that includes comprehensive and diverse outreach and engagement strategies responsive to the needs and aspirations of the community the school intends to serve, is developed and implemented; plan includes strategies for ongoing engagement with enrolled students prior to the start of the school year
- Student discipline and behavior management systems and approaches are designed to minimize exclusion and be responsive to student needs; approach includes plans to gather and evaluate data by student subgroups to ensure equitable disciplinary practices
- Student information packets are developed that include free and reduced lunch forms/family economic data survey, records request forms, and home language survey

- Systems and staffing is established to support students' social and emotional well-being (e.g., the school employs or ensures students have access to social workers, counselors, and/or other resources)

Facilities:

- A facility that supports implementation of the education program, consistent with the mission and key design elements, is secured in the proposed communities - Meadowcreek, Norcross, or Duluth Clusters
- The facility, including learning environments, administrative spaces, common areas, and special purpose spaces, meets program requirements and supports delivery of the key design elements for the number of students to be enrolled; furniture, lighting, climate control, etc., support student learning
- The learning environment and facility meet requirements of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
- Required insurance coverage is in place
- Policies and practices related to crisis management are established, including a safety and emergency plan, and a plan for conducting and documenting fire inspections, fire drills, and other required drills
- A certificate of occupancy, or other required building use authorization, has been attained

Finance:

- Provide social security tax exemption status
- Cash flow projections for the start-up year and first year of operation are developed and reviewed by the board, with updates as needed based on budget revisions
- Multiple budget scenarios for Year 1 at various enrollment levels are developed and reviewed by the board and updated as needed based on new information, particularly enrollment data
- The board reviews and approves quality financial statements on a consistent basis-- including, at a minimum: enrollment report; income/expense statement with budget to actuals; balance sheet; rolling 12-month cash flow statement--consistent with state and authorizer requirements and quality oversight practices
- Bank account is established and the board has authorized check signers
- Line of credit is secured (if applicable)
- School is set up in the appropriate public retirement systems for school staff
- An independent auditor is retained and approved by the board, consistent with state and authorizer requirements
- The school has appropriate in-house, employed financial expertise and/or has a contract with a reputable financial services provider
- Fiscal and internal control policies are established for the school's basis of accounting, segregation of duties, physical security of assets, budget development and approval,

preparation and review of financial statements, purchase and procurement, and any other required financial-related policies

- Accounting system, consistent with state requirements, is identified and in use
- Necessary state and federal documents and requirements are completed to generate state and federal payments (e.g., general education, special education, Title, ERate filing, etc.)
- Payroll systems are established, consistent with state requirements
- Budget for Year 1, based on up-to-date/actual enrollment numbers, is developed and approved by the board
- Multi-year budget scenarios are developed and reviewed by the board and updated as needed

Staffing:

- All staff are hired prior to school opening to begin employment prior to opening day and staffing positions are aligned to enrolled student needs; leads for special education, discipline, testing coordination, and Multilingual Education services have been designated
- System is established to collect and securely maintain personnel records, including identification of a human resources manager
- Systems and enrollments established for payroll taxes, unemployment, and employee benefits (e.g., health, retirement, disability)
- A personnel handbook and related policies that protect employee rights, such as those relating to the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and employee contracts are developed, approved by the board, and shared with employees
- Staffing chart and job descriptions are finalized for all roles
- A teacher and staff evaluation system is established, consistent with the school's mission and key design elements, including performance evaluation, onboarding, performance improvement, and coaching and support
- A plan, including schedule, for Year 1 teacher professional development, aligned to the mission and key design elements, is developed; schedule includes a pre-opening orientation that covers discipline policies, data privacy, student conduct and procedures, special populations, instructional methods, and data analysis
- Health, safety, and criminal background checks are completed for all school staff and volunteers that may come into contact with students; a plan is in place to ensure they are completed for any new staff and volunteers
- Employees meet licensure and certification requirements
- Recruitment, hiring, and retention practices are developed to build a staff team designed to deliver on the mission, key design elements, and school goals
- Mandatory state, district, or authorizer training are completed: assessment coordinator, Title Programs, Special Education, etc.

Academics:

- Board and leadership have a clear understanding of the contractual academic indicators, measures, and goals for which the school is accountable
- The school has a system for gathering and reporting data (as needed) on academic indicators, measures, and goals, that are contractual in nature and not available through other means for the authorizer, including mission-specific (or school-specific) goals
- Year 1 calendar and daily schedule that comply with statutory and authorizer-specific requirements, and consistent with the mission and educational program, are developed, approved, and posted
- Implementation plans for mandated programming related to state or federal funding are developed
- Policies and plans for required statewide assessments are established
- A plan and staffing for clear and consistent instructional leadership is in place
- Plans are in place to support all learners including systems to identify students' strengths and needs for academic, behavioral, and social emotional development, ensuring students across all subgroups have access to appropriate supports, interventions, and resources to achieve, grow, and advance
- A plan for implementing assessments and using disaggregated data through formative and summative assessments is established, including a plan to evaluate and modify instruction and programs to meet student needs
- Curriculum and instructional materials, including curriculum scope and sequence, aligned to the mission, key design elements, and content standards, are in place for all grades to be served in Year 1
- Child Find process is established, including policies and procedures to identify, locate, and evaluate students eligible to receive special education supports and 504 supports
- A plan is established to develop and implement Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and Section 504 plans for eligible students, including collaboration and communication with parents and guardians
- A plan is established for implementing programs to support students with disabilities that meets operational compliance, including provision of services in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) and appropriate inclusion in the school's academic program, general education curriculum, assessments, and extracurricular activities, so students with disabilities can achieve academic and social goals outlined in their IEPs, consistent with the school's mission
- The school's discipline policy includes due process protections for students with disabilities, including use of manifestations, determinations, and behavioral intervention plans as appropriate
- A plan is developed to provide accommodations on assessments for students with disabilities
- School staff understand how to access and appropriately use all funding available to support students with disabilities
- Staffing for special education programs is aligned with requirements in federal/state law and the school's approach to educating students with disabilities, consistent with the school's mission

- A plan is established to support systematic collaboration among general education staff, special education staff, and service providers
- The school has in place a system for tracking and monitoring progress towards IEP goal attainment, degree of inclusion in the general education classroom, discipline, extracurricular programming, student retention and graduation, and post-graduation opportunities
- A professional development plan is in place that includes training for general and special education staff to strengthen differentiation and intervention strategies
- A plan is developed to provide services and supports for English learners consistent with the school's mission, including plans for exiting students from the program and providing ongoing monitoring of exited students
- A plan is established for compliance with native language communication requirements, including communication with parents or guardians
- Systems are established for identifying students in need of English Learner (EL) services
- A plan is established to provide appropriate accommodations on assessments for English learners
- School staff understand how to access and appropriately use all funding available to support English learners
- Staffing for English Learner programs are aligned with requirements in federal/state law and the school's approach to educating English learners, consistent with the school's mission
- A plan is developed to support systematic collaboration among general education staff, English learner staff, and special education staff
- Systems are in place to track and monitor students' progress towards English language proficiency, degree of inclusion in the general education classroom, discipline, extracurricular programming, student retention and graduation, and post-graduation opportunities
- A professional development plan is in place that includes training for general education and English learner staff to strengthen differentiation and intervention strategies for English learners

Governance:

- The organization is incorporated as a nonprofit with the state
- The school filed for 501(c)3 (nonprofit) status with the IRS
- State and federal tax-exempt status has been secured
- Charter contract is executed between the board and authorizer
- Bylaws that meet legal requirements are approved by the board
- Board officers are elected and seated as required by law, contractual requirements, and the organization's bylaws
- Board membership meets legal and bylaws requirements and includes individuals with relevant capacities for opening and operating a quality charter school
- Required board policies are developed, approved, and implemented by the board, such as conflict of interest, grievance, code of ethics, and background checks

- Background checks are completed for all board members
- Board meetings are conducted and calendar (with meeting times and locations) and meeting minutes are posted, consistent with the state's open meeting law requirements
- Board members have completed required trainings or are on track to do so
- The school has developed a plan to meet Ready To Open criteria and contract conditions with dates and individual(s) responsible identified; plan is updated as appropriate and includes a "green-lighting" process for board to evaluate progress and ultimate readiness to open
- The board has established and implements a plan to monitor academic, financial, and organizational performance and progress towards meeting the school's mission, consistent with expectations outlined in the charter contract
- The board has established and implements a plan for evaluating the school leader or the contracted education service provider (ESP), in accordance with a written board policy
- Board job descriptions, including for officers and committees, are developed and approved by the board
- The board has hired a qualified school leader, consistent with the school's mission, licensing requirements, and the charter contract
- Arm's length negotiations of a facilities lease is completed; a facilities lease or contract free from conflicts of interest is approved by the board
- Draft management agreement that demonstrates arm's length negotiation is reviewed by the board and submitted to the authorizer for review
- Board approves a written management agreement free from conflicts of interest, and consistent with authorizer and state requirements; that includes performance measures, consequences, and mechanisms for the school governing board to hold the provider accountable for performance; is aligned with the performance measures in the charter contract; and includes financial reporting requirements and provisions for the school governing board's financial oversight
- Legal counsel is retained