

Ready to Open - Proposed Improvements to Process

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Current RTO Cohort

County	School Name
Hoke	Hype Leadership Academy
Durham	Carolina Collegiate (FKA-West Triangle High School)
Guilford	Centerpoint Classical
Warren	Warren Young Explorers School
VIRTUAL	North Carolina Connections Academy
Wake	IDYL- Wake (Fast Track)
Edgecombe	BH2 Stream School (Accelerated)
Forsyth	Ryze Academy (Accelerated)
Wake	FOCUS Academy (Accelerated)

- 9 RTO schools slated to open Fall 2026
- 3 RTO schools delayed to open Fall 2027

Background

What is Ready to Open (RTO)?

Consistent with NC charter law, the CSRB grants initial approval to applicants for charters “contingent upon the successful completion of a planning period prior to enrollment of students.”

Ready to Open consists of >>

- A year of in-person and virtual professional development
- Three RTO submission periods with feedback on all submitted documentation
- One on one support, technical assistance from OCS staff
- Final presentation to CSRB prior to receiving Charter Agreement

Importance of RTO (“Year 0”)

Studies on charter school performance show that poor first-year performance often gives way to poor second year performance, often leaving the future predictably unstable and bleak. But strong new school results were due in part to strengthening authorizer standards and practices.

Importance of RTO (“Year 0”)

NACSA’s analysis of **first-year closures indicates these primary reasons for closure**, many of which can be prevented with strong Ready To Open practices:

- **Failure to enroll enough students** to financially support the school’s academic, staffing, and operational obligations;
- Schools operating in potentially **unsafe facilities and/or facilities not approved** by the authorizer or state officials;
- Highly **problematic structural relationships** with school boards and their management organizations; and
- **Illegal and/or unwise decision making in school board policy and operations**, most often related to human resources actions or financial management decisions.

Historical “Minimum Guidelines” and RTO Presentations

- CSRB (previously, CSAB) typically looks at four main areas of “readiness” to determine final RTO status.
- OCS Staff present brief updates starting in March but schools do not appear before CSRB until June.
- OCS presents summary of main components of RTO - enrollment, facility, staffing, budget, RTO submissions. Some schools appear. CSRB votes on final RTO status.

Issue	Minimum Standard
Enrollment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 75% of projected enrollment
Facility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Substantial progress toward receipt of Educational Certificate of Occupancy at least 30 days prior to opening. • Valid contingency plan in place
Budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Valid break-even budget in place
RTO Progress Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All areas rated as emerging or developed

Concerns

New School Data Trends

- In both 24-25 and 25-26, one RTO school has closed before finishing the school year.
- **Previous five year trends:**
 - On average, schools enrolled about 13% fewer students than projected in their first year. However, in the last two years, there has been a much larger gap between the projections and the actual ADM.
 - Only about 26% of schools met or exceeded their original projections.
 - Over the last five June CSR/CSAB meetings, the vast majority of schools were approved (28 out of 34), with only a few denials or delays, often tied to enrollment concerns.

Previous Five Years Data Analysis- Those not meeting the 75% enroll standard

D	E	F	G	H
Y1 Approved Enrollment	June RTO Report	Meets 75% Enrollment Guideline	CSAB/CSRB Decision	Current Status
162	121	No	Approved	Operating
240	85	No	Approved	Operating
120	45	No	Approved with Stips	Never Opened
230	71	No	Denied	Never Opened
270	200	No	Approved	Operating
400	12	No	Denied	Never Opened
116	67	No	Approved Delay	Revoked
216	80	No	Relinquished	Never Opened
1725	1173	No	Approved	Operating
201	142	No	Approved	Operating
116	76	No	Approved	Revoked
450	229	No	Approved	Operating

2020 and 2021 Openings

% Difference Actual Vs. Projection	∨	%	% Difference Actual vs. June Enrollment Report
270			470
0%			33%
-27%			-1%
-26%			-18%
-1%			28%
2%			37%
-3%			27%
-5%			24%
-45%			55%
8%			-14%

2023 and 2024 Openings

% Difference Actual Vs. Projection	▼	%	% Difference Actual vs. June Enrollment Report	▼
-16%			-14%	
-46%			15%	
-4%			-4%	
-8%			13%	
-18%			-5%	
-38%			-17%	
-40%			-23%	
-35%			-19%	

RTO Options

1. Complete successfully, receive Charter Agreement;
2. Deny RTO, process ends for applicant, school does not open; OR
3. School requests delay and (if approved) continues in RTO.

OCS Observed Concerns ...

- “Unrealistic optimism”
- Work with these boards and founders for years - can be very difficult to say “you’re not ready”
- Over time we see board turnover, boards lose momentum, or boards believe that “one and done” is sufficient for learning how to operate a school
- RTO being completed by 1-2 members rather than full board effort

Therefore ...

A school's readiness should be assessed based on concrete evidence and data, and the readiness criteria should be transparent and shared early in the process.

RTO - OCS Improvements

Improvements to Process

- Restructured PY session agendas to better align topics/time of year. Only two of five require travel.
- Created cohort shared drives - all resources and documentation in one place
- Vastly reduced RTO submissions to allow greater focus on the critical/key levers for success
- Continue to update resources, templates, etc.

Increased RTO Check-Ins

In addition to the five full day trainings, topical webinars, and 1:1 assistance ...

- January webinar with OCS Director to discuss final months of RTO and minimum requirements
- Optional coaching sessions during each phase of RTO submission completion
- Facility/enrollment reports start in February; improved templates to decrease errors
- Enrollment verifications by OCS staff

Proposed CSRB Improvements

RTO Presentations

- ***March, April:*** brief updates on RTO school progress from Dr. Norins.
- ***May:*** RTO schools will present their own progress at CSRB (in person) as a “preview” to ***June’s*** final approval and Charter Agreement obtainment.

RTO Presentations

- At both May and June CSRB presentations, OCS will present “Readiness Reports” on each school and the school leadership (if hired) and Board will appear to answer questions.

Readiness Report - Example

II. Operations & Compliance (%)

Readiness Indicator(s)	Evidence/Documentation Reviewed	Comments/Findings	Score (1-4)
Facility secured, compliant with local building/fire codes	Certificate of occupancy		
Safety plan and emergency protocols approved	Safety plan		
Transportation plan in place	Transportation contracts ; policies		
Insurance coverage meets statutory requirements	Insurance certificates		

Revised Minimum Guidelines

- OCS proposes revising and providing more clarity to what is required (i.e. what is an absolute MINIMUM standard to open?).
- CSRB will not lose the authority to make the final decision on any RTO school's readiness to open. But clearer minimum guidelines would provide clarity to schools and assist OCS in counseling schools on what to expect and make appropriate decisions on a reasonable timeline.

Issue	Minimum Standard
Enrollment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [] of projections by June CSRB Meeting • Is 75% sufficient? Is it a mandatory amount or is there flexibility? How does this intersect with the break-even budget?
Facility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Substantial progress toward receipt of Educational Certificate of Occupancy at least 30 days prior to opening. What evidence is sufficient? • Valid contingency plan in place
Budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Valid break-even budget in place. • A break-even budget cannot be fewer than [] students. 80 is required by law but OCS suggests 100 as the lowest possible break-even.
RTO Progress Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All areas rated as emerging or developed OCS Will incorporate into Readiness Report

Next Steps

- Discussion and input at November CSRB meeting.
- Allow for month of feedback from CSRB - public comment.
- Bring a draft readiness report and other proposals to the December meeting.