

District Profile of Palm Beach County: Monitoring Pathway Quality, Workforce Alignment, and Student Outcomes in Career- and College- Focused Charter Schools

2026

Florida Association of Charter School Authorizers



Purpose and Use of the District Profiles

These district profiles are designed to provide charter school authorizers, policymakers, and educational leaders with practical examples of how school districts review, approve, monitor, and support career- and college-focused charter schools. Each profile highlights local authorizing practices, operational considerations, and lessons learned that contribute to the successful application, opening, and implementation and oversight of specialized educational programs. Based on lessons learned, each profile also includes guidance for authorizers seeking to hold career-focused schools accountable to high quality standards. While every district operates within its own unique context, these profiles identify promising practices that may be adapted to strengthen authorizing systems and improve educational opportunities for students.

Career- and college-focused schools prepare students for success through a combination of rigorous academics, career exploration, technical skill development, and postsecondary planning. By documenting the experiences of Florida school districts, these case studies illustrate how authorizers can balance innovation with accountability while also ensuring that schools possess the instructional, operational, and organizational capacity necessary to deliver high-quality career pathways that respond to local workforce needs.





Methodology

This district profile was developed by the Florida Association of Charter School Authorizers (FACSA) as part of its work under the Pathways to Prosperity national dissemination grant, which documents and shares practices that support high-quality career- and college-focused charter schools. FACSA based the resource primarily on a semistructured group interview conducted on March 31, 2026, with members of the School District of Palm Beach County's Charter School Team, including Darren Edgecomb, Wenda Oscar, Annmarie Dilbert, and Kerry Emery. The interview explored application review, career and technical education (CTE) expertise, pathway design, staffing and certification, facilities and equipment, safety, funding, partnerships, monitoring, and student outcomes using South Tech Academy and Inlet Grove Community High School as primary examples. FACSA analyzed the interview findings and translated them into practical guidance for authorizers.

The interview also incorporated information gathered by district participants through preparatory conversations with school leadership and district program information. FACSA organized the material around pathway quality, workforce alignment, operational sustainability, and measurable student outcomes. This resource reflects district-reported practices and selected examples; FACSA did not conduct independent school visits; interview students or industry partners; or validate all reported practices and outcomes through complete application, monitoring, financial, or student-level records.

Focus Area: Monitoring Pathway Quality, Workforce Alignment, and Student Outcomes in Career- and College-Focused Charter Schools

The experiences of the School District of Palm Beach County in Florida illustrate how authorizers can evaluate mature career- and college-focused



school models by looking at the following key elements: pathway coherence, workforce alignment, operational sustainability, student outcomes, and long-term program quality.

Palm Beach County's experience is especially useful for authorizers because it focuses on schools with more fully developed career pathways. In these models, the question is no longer only whether the school has identified career- and college-focused features. The question is also whether the school has built pathways that students can enter, persist in, complete, and use after graduation.

In this profile, career- and college-focused education is used as the broader umbrella, while CTE is used when referring specifically to structured technical programs, industry-aligned pathways, certifications, and related implementation requirements.

For authorizers, the central question is not simply whether a school offers career-themed courses or industry certifications. The central question is whether students are participating in coherent, well-supported pathways that lead to meaningful academic, workforce, and postsecondary outcomes.

Why This Case Matters for Authorizers

Career- and college-focused schools often make specific promises to students and families. They may promise access to industry-recognized credentials, dual enrollment, technical skills, work-based learning, career exploration, college preparation, employment opportunities, or direct connections to high-demand fields.

Those promises require authorizers to monitor more than just general school performance. For instance, a school may have strong academic outcomes but weak pathway implementation. A school may offer many certifications, but some credentials may have limited value. A school may have strong industry partnerships on paper, but little evidence that partners shape instruction, provide student opportunities, or strengthen postsecondary transitions.



Palm Beach County's case shows the importance of authorizers examining questions such as the following:

- Are pathways coherent, sequential, and accessible to students?
- Are credentials meaningful, and are they aligned with workforce or postsecondary opportunities?
- Are students completing pathways, earning credentials, graduating, and transitioning successfully?
- Are facilities, equipment, staffing, safety systems, and funding sustainable over time?
- Are industry and postsecondary partners meaningfully involved?
- How should pathway quality and student outcomes inform renewal?
- How does an authorizer distinguish strong school performance from strong pathway performance?

District Context

Located in southeastern Florida, the School District of Palm Beach County is headquartered in West Palm Beach and serves more than 160,000 students throughout the county. Its career- and college-focused programming reflects the varied workforce needs, community priorities, and student interests across the district. The district's charter school portfolio includes both stand-alone CTE-focused schools and schools with embedded career pathways. Programs range from workforce-entry pathways, such as cosmetology, barbering, and culinary arts, to college-aligned pathways in engineering, biotechnology, law, and medical sciences.

Defining Quality in Career- and College-Focused Schools

Palm Beach County approaches career and college readiness as interconnected rather than distinct outcomes. Career readiness is defined through structured pathways and the attainment of industry-recognized certifications that serve as



both workforce credentials and indicators of technical competency. At the same time, college readiness is embedded within many pathways through access to dual enrollment, Advanced Placement (AP) coursework, and postsecondary articulation opportunities. District leaders emphasized that many students pursue both workforce and college pathways simultaneously, using workforce experiences to support future educational goals.

This integrated philosophy shapes the district's authorizing approach. Rather than evaluating schools solely through traditional academic indicators, Palm Beach County places significant emphasis on whether schools demonstrate pathway coherence, workforce relevance, postsecondary alignment, and measurable student outcomes. Schools are expected to communicate readiness through certifications earned, graduation rates, postsecondary placements, and evidence that students are prepared for the next stage, whether that stage involves employment, continued education, or both.

This integrated philosophy is important for authorizers. Career- and college-focused schools should not force students into narrow tracks. At their best, they expand options by helping students graduate with academic preparation, technical skills, credentials, college credit, and clearer postsecondary plans.

Within this framework, Palm Beach County evaluates high-quality career- and college-focused schools based on several core indicators. These include clearly sequenced pathways, alignment between coursework and industry certifications, meaningful postsecondary opportunities, sustainable industry partnerships, operational readiness, and long-term program viability. The district also values schools that demonstrate intentional recruitment and student engagement strategies designed to support pathway completion and long-term student success. In practice, these schools may include those offering multiyear career pathways tied to local workforce needs; dual enrollment or articulated credit opportunities; work-based learning experiences; industry advisory boards student support systems; and partnerships with employers and postsecondary institutions





that help students transition successfully into college, technical training, military service, or high-wage careers.

Defining Quality in Mature Career- and College-Focused Models

Palm Beach County’s approach provides a useful quality framework for authorizers. In this case, quality is not defined by the existence of a program alone. Quality depends on whether the school has built a coherent model that students can access, complete, and use after graduation.

Building from Palm Beach County’s experience, Table 1 identifies questions that authorizers can use to assess the quality of mature career- and college-focused schools. These questions are not Palm Beach–specific requirements—rather, they translate the district’s reported approach into practitioner-facing prompts for authorizers.

Table 1. Authorizer Questions to Assess Quality of Mature Career- and College-Focused Schools

Quality area	Authorizer question
Pathway coherence	Are courses intentionally sequenced over multiple years?
Academic integration	Does the pathway support graduation, academic achievement, and college readiness?
Credential value	Are certifications meaningful, recognized, and aligned with future opportunities?
Workforce alignment	Are pathways connected to labor market needs and employer expectations?
Postsecondary alignment	Do students have access to dual enrollment, articulated credit, technical training, college pathways, or other next-step opportunities?



Quality area	Authorizer question
Student access and persistence	Are students recruited, advised, supported, and retained in pathways over time?
Operational sustainability	Does the school have the staffing, facilities, equipment, safety systems, and funding needed to maintain quality?
Partnership quality	Do industry and postsecondary partners actively contribute to pathway design, implementation, and improvement?
Outcome evidence	Are students graduating, earning credentials, completing pathways, and transitioning successfully?
Continuous improvement	Does the school use data to strengthen pathways over time?

Application Review and Authorization Practices

Although this profile focuses on mature pathway models, application review remains central because authorizers can use what they learn from established schools to strengthen review of new or expanding programs. Palm Beach County’s experience suggests that mature models help clarify what strong applications should demonstrate up front: coherent pathway design, realistic staffing, appropriate facilities, meaningful partnerships, sustainable funding, and evidence that students will be able to complete the pathway and use it after graduation.

Palm Beach County distinguishes career- and college-focused charter applications from traditional charter applications by requiring a significantly more comprehensive level of detail related to program implementation, operational readiness, and pathway sustainability. District representatives emphasized that applicants must demonstrate a clear understanding of how their programs will function operationally, academically, and financially prior to approval. This includes detailed explanations of pathway sequencing, workforce alignment,



certification opportunities, staffing structures, industry partnerships, facilities readiness, and funding sustainability.

A major focus during application review is **pathway design and program coherence**. The district prioritizes schools that present intentionally structured multiyear pathways rather than isolated electives or disconnected workforce experiences. Applicants are expected to demonstrate how students will progress through pathways over time, how technical and academic learning will be integrated, and how pathways ultimately connect to workforce opportunities or postsecondary education. The district look at whether structured 4-year pathways have an intentional sequence and a clear entry point, progression, completion point, and connection to postsecondary education or employment.

Facilities readiness serves as another major component of the authorization process. District representatives described how CTE programs often require specialized infrastructure that traditional academic facilities may not support. Authorizers carefully evaluate whether proposed facilities are capable of safely supporting technical instruction and specialized equipment. For example, automotive programs require appropriate ventilation, electrical capacity, lift safety systems, and industry-standard workspace configurations to safely support student learning. Applicants are expected to demonstrate that these operational and safety considerations have been addressed prior to approval rather than deferred until after authorization.

The district also places significant emphasis on **industry partnerships** during application review. Applicants are expected to demonstrate that meaningful partnerships either exist or are actively being developed to support long-term program implementation. Palm Beach County differentiates between nominal partnerships and partnerships that actively contribute to instructional quality, equipment maintenance, workforce alignment, internships, and program sustainability. Strong partnerships are viewed as indicators that programs are connected to current workforce expectations and capable of remaining responsive to changing industry demands. These partnerships may also support higher



education choice and career pathway alignment by creating opportunities for dual enrollment, articulated credit, credential attainment, mentorship, and direct connections between secondary education, postsecondary institutions, and high-demand career fields.

To support these differentiated review practices, Palm Beach County incorporates district-level CTE expertise into the authorization process. CTE specialists participate directly in reviewing applications and assessing pathway feasibility, facilities readiness, certification alignment, and workforce relevance. District representatives emphasized that traditional academic review processes alone are insufficient to fully evaluate the complexities of career- and college-focused schools. The district's choice office also works collaboratively with applicants throughout the process, providing guidance related to operational expectations, lessons learned from existing programs, and potential implementation challenges.

A major strength of Palm Beach County's approach is its emphasis on structured pathways rather than disconnected electives. The district looks for multiyear pathways that show how students will progress over time and how technical learning connects to academic preparation and future opportunities.

Building on Palm Beach's experience, authorizers can look at a range of targeted areas when reviewing mature college- and career-focused schools (Table 2).

Table 2. Application Review Look-Fors for Authorizers

Review area	Evidence authorizers should request
Pathway sequence	• 4-year or multiyear program of study • Course progression • Prerequisite structure
Student progression	• Data on how students enter, persist, complete, and transition from the pathway



Review area	Evidence authorizers should request
Credential alignment	• Certifications available • Credential value • Pass-rate expectations • Connection to employment or further training
Academic alignment	• Data on how pathway participation fits with graduation, advanced coursework, dual enrollment, and college readiness
Workforce rationale	• Labor market information • Employer input • Advisory board role • High-demand field alignment
Postsecondary connections	• Dual enrollment • Articulated credit • Technical college, apprenticeship, military, or higher education connections
Staffing	• Instructor qualifications • Certification flexibility • Recruitment and retention plans
Facilities and equipment	• Specialized space • Equipment needs • Safety systems • Inspection requirements • Maintenance plan
Funding sustainability	• Start-up costs • Recurring costs • Perkins or grant funding • Certification incentives • Replacement costs



Review area	Evidence authorizers should request
Partnerships	• MOUs • Advisory board expectations • Employer roles • Internship or work-based learning commitments
Governance and leadership	• Board expertise • CTE coordinator or pathway leadership structure • Data monitoring systems
Student supports	Supports for • Recruitment • Advising • Intervention • Transportation • Scheduling • Pathway completion

Distinguishing Course Offerings From Coherent Pathways

One of the strongest lessons from Palm Beach County is the importance of pathway coherence.

A school may offer career-themed courses without offering a true pathway. A coherent pathway should have a clear sequence, defined milestones, aligned credentials, student advising, and a connection to postsecondary or workforce opportunities.

Table 3. Questions for Authorizers to Determine Pathway Coherence

If the school offers ...	The authorizer could ask ...
Career-themed electives	Are these connected to a larger program of study?
Multiple academy options	Are students able to complete a full sequence?



If the school offers ...	The authorizer could ask ...
Industry certifications	Are the credentials valuable and aligned with the pathway?
Work-based learning	Is it structured, supervised, and connected to student learning goals?
Employer partnerships	Do partners contribute beyond letters of support?
Dual enrollment or AP	Are these options accessible and aligned with student goals?
Strong graduation rates	Are pathway students graduating with additional preparation and opportunities?
Scholarship outcomes	How are scholarships connected to pathway participation, advising, or college readiness?

This difference between offering courses and operating a coherent pathway matters most when authorizers review performance over time. A school may be successful overall while still offering pathways that are fragmented, underused, or poorly aligned or do not lead to meaningful credentials or postsecondary options. At renewal, authorizers should therefore ask not only whether the school performed well but also whether the career- and college-focused model functioned as promised.

Operational Capacity and Governance

Palm Beach County’s authorizing approach places significant emphasis on operational capacity and organizational readiness, recognizing that career- and college-focused schools require substantially different operational systems than traditional academic models do. District representatives emphasized that successful implementation depends not only on strong academic programming but also on a school’s ability to sustain specialized staffing, facilities, partnerships, safety systems, and equipment over time.



Staffing represents one of the most significant operational challenges associated with CTE programs. Schools frequently require instructors with specialized industry experience who may not follow traditional educator certification pathways. District representatives noted that many highly qualified industry professionals may also be recruited by higher paying private sector positions, creating ongoing staffing challenges for schools. As a result, authorizers must evaluate whether applicants have realistic staffing plans, sustainable recruitment pipelines, and an understanding of certification flexibility available for CTE instructors. Schools must also demonstrate plans for retaining qualified instructors, supporting ongoing professional development, and ensuring staffing continuity for programs in which industry expertise is critical to instructional quality and student success.

Governance and leadership structures also play a major role in program sustainability and implementation quality. Larger schools may employ dedicated CTE coordinators who oversee pathway implementation, industry partnerships, compliance requirements, workforce alignment, and student outcome monitoring. In contrast, smaller schools often rely on administrators to manage multiple operational and instructional responsibilities simultaneously, which can limit the level of focused oversight dedicated to pathway development. District representatives consistently identified dedicated leadership structures focused specifically on CTE as a strong indicator of successful implementation and long-term program sustainability.

Financial sustainability presents an additional area of operational complexity. CTE programs frequently require specialized equipment, industry-standard technology, consumable materials, and ongoing maintenance that create significant financial pressures. Programs may rely on multiple funding streams, including Perkins funding, grants, industry partnerships, and industry certification incentives, to support operations. Perkins funding is federal funding that supports eligible CTE programs, but availability depends on the school's eligibility and local allocation arrangements. District representatives emphasized that schools must demonstrate realistic financial planning and long-term sustainability strategies



during both application review and ongoing oversight, including an understanding of how to access and manage supplemental funding opportunities, budget for equipment replacement and program growth, and sustain high-cost programs beyond initial start-up funding.

Operational Capacity and Governance Questions for Authorizers

Authorizers could ask the following questions:

- Does the board understand the cost and complexity of the pathway model?
- Does the school have leadership capacity dedicated to pathway implementation? How does the board monitor pathway quality and student outcomes?
- Does the school have an equipment replacement and maintenance plan?
- Are partnerships reviewed for quality and impact?
- How does the school know whether students are completing pathways and benefiting from them?

Monitoring, Accountability, and Renewal

Palm Beach County's monitoring approach incorporates both traditional accountability measures and indicators specific to CTE implementation. District representatives emphasized that oversight extends beyond traditional academic compliance to include pathway integrity, workforce readiness, operational implementation, facilities safety, and certification outcomes.

The district monitors whether students are progressing through structured pathways toward meaningful outcomes such as industry certifications, graduation, dual-enrollment participation, and postsecondary opportunities. Schools are expected to maintain internal systems capable of tracking pathway participation, certification attainment, and overall program effectiveness. District representatives also emphasized that workforce-related outcomes serve as central indicators of school quality and program success.



Palm Beach County does not draw a strict distinction between academic performance and workforce outcomes. Instead, the district views both as interconnected indicators of overall student success and postsecondary readiness. Whether students pursue immediate employment, industry certifications, continued education, or a combination of pathways, the district considers each outcome to represent a meaningful measure of achievement. This broader accountability philosophy reflects the district's belief that high-quality educational experiences should prepare students for a variety of future opportunities aligned with their goals, interests, and workforce demands.

Monitoring also includes operational and safety oversight, particularly during early implementation stages. District representatives emphasized that foundational safety training is required before students are allowed to fully participate in technically complex environments. Facilities, equipment maintenance, instructor qualifications, and operational compliance are all considered important components of ongoing oversight. Because CTE instructors may possess significant industry experience rather than traditional academic credentials, the district utilizes a more nuanced approach to evaluating instructional qualifications and technical expertise.

This is where Palm Beach can serve as the strongest model for authorizers. Monitoring should help determine whether the school is delivering the model it was approved to operate. The domains used for monitoring are the same as those originally assessed at application, but they are now assessed with actual performance data. Authorizers should review results by student group and over time to identify differences in access, participation, and completion.





Table 4. Monitoring Indicators for Mature Pathway Models

Domain	Possible evidence
Academic performance	• Graduation rate • State accountability results • Course completion • Credit accumulation
Pathway participation	• Enrollment in pathways • Demographics • Persistence • Access across student groups
Pathway completion	• Completion of full sequence • Concentrator/completer data • Capstone or practicum completion
Credential outcomes	• Certifications attempted • Certifications earned • Pass rates • Credential value
College readiness	• Dual enrollment • AP/honors participation • College credit earned • College applications
Workforce readiness	• Work-based learning • Internships • Clinical experiences • Employer feedback • Technical skill attainment



Domain	Possible evidence
Postsecondary transition	• College enrollment • Technical training • Employment • Apprenticeship • Military service
Staffing	• Instructor qualifications • Vacancies • Turnover • Certification status • Professional development
Facilities and safety	• Equipment condition • Safety inspections • Student safety training • Maintenance logs
Financial sustainability	• Budget-to-actual pathway costs • Recurring costs • Replacement plan • Grant dependence
Partnership quality	• Advisory board minutes • Partner activities • Employer input • Postsecondary agreements
Student experience	• Student interviews • Surveys • Advising evidence • Understanding of pathway options

Authorizers should use this evidence not simply for compliance but also for sensemaking. The aim of the monitoring is to identify whether the pathway is coherent and is implemented with quality and contributing to student success.



Charter Contract Renewal Review: Did the School Deliver on Its Promise?

At contract renewal, authorizers should examine whether the school delivered the career- and college-focused model it was approved to operate.

Several tables in this profile, including Table 5 below, return to similar domains (pathway coherence, staffing, facilities, credentials, partnerships, outcomes, and sustainability) because those domains matter across the authorizing life cycle. What changes across these tables is the evidence. At application, authorizers review plans and capacity. During monitoring, they review implementation data. At renewal, they review whether the school delivered on its promises over time.

Table 5. Authorizer Questions and Evidence to Review for Renewal

Renewal question	Evidence to review
Did the school implement the approved pathway model?	• Course sequences • Staffing • Facilities • Student schedules • Pathway enrollment
Did students access and persist in pathways?	• Participation data • Persistence • Subgroup access • Student advising records
Did students complete meaningful pathways?	• Pathway completion capstones • Certifications • Dual enrollment • Work-based learning



Renewal question	Evidence to review
Were credentials meaningful?	• Credential type • Pass rates • Employer relevance • Connection to employment or further training
Did students achieve strong academic outcomes?	• Graduation rates • Course completion • Assessment data • Advanced coursework
Did students transition successfully?	• College • Technical training • Employment • Military • Apprenticeship • Scholarship data
Were partnerships active and useful?	• Advisory board records • MOUs • Employer feedback • Student placement records
Was the model sustainable?	• Budget history • Staffing stability • Equipment replacement • Facility adequacy
Did the school improve over time?	• Program evaluation • Data use • Pathway refinements • Board oversight records

This framework helps authorizers avoid making renewal decisions based only on broad school performance. A career- and college-focused school should be



evaluated on both core charter expectations and the specialized promises embedded in its model.

Site Visit Look-Fors

For mature career- and college-focused schools, site visits should help the authorizer test the quality of implementation.

At renewal, authorizers should examine whether the school delivered the career- and college-focused model described in its application, charter agreement, renewal record, or other approved materials.

The following look-fors can be used across the authorizing life cycle, including monitoring visits, renewal reviews, or targeted follow-up visits. In mature career- and college-focused schools, site visits should help the authorizer test whether the pathway model is visible in classrooms, labs, student experiences, partner engagement, and school records, not only in written plans.

Classroom and Lab Observations

Reviewers should look for the following:

- students engaged in pathway-aligned technical or applied learning
- clear connections between academic content and career applications
- use of industry-relevant tools, technology, equipment, or practices
- safety routines and appropriate supervision
- evidence that students are building skills over time

Student Interviews

Students should be able to explain the following:

- their pathway and why they selected it
- the courses, credentials, or experiences required to complete the pathway



- the way the pathway connects to graduation and future plans
- the college, technical training, employment, military, or apprenticeship options they are considering
- the support they receive from teachers, counselors, advisors, or partners

Teacher and Leader Interviews

Staff should be able to explain the following:

- the pathway sequence and expected outcomes
- the way students are recruited, advised, and supported
- the way credentials are selected and tracked
- the ways industry and postsecondary partners contribute
- the data that are used to improve the pathway

Partner Interviews

Employers, advisory board members, and postsecondary partners should be able to describe the following:

- their role in shaping or reviewing the pathway
- the frequency of their engagement with the school
- whether students are developing relevant skills
- whether credentials and experiences align with current industry or postsecondary expectations
- the way the partnership benefits students

Document Review

Authorizers should review the following:

- pathway maps
- student schedules



- certification data
- dual enrollment and AP participation
- advisory board minutes
- partnership agreements
- work-based learning records
- safety logs
- equipment inventories
- budget records
- postsecondary outcome data

South Tech Academy as an Implementation Example

South Tech Academy serves as a practical example of Palm Beach County's authorizing framework in action for a mature career- and college-focused model with established CTE pathways. District representatives consistently described South Tech as a high-performing example of CTE implementation within the broader career- and college-focused charter school landscape.

South Tech Academy demonstrates strong alignment between program design, operational systems, and student outcomes. The school utilizes structured 4-year pathways across 12 CTE academies, including Automotive Technology, Medical Sciences, Culinary Arts, Cybersecurity, Agritech, Cosmetology, and Music & Sound Production. Students are recruited into pathways beginning at the middle school level, with pathway selection and long-term participation serving as central components of the school's instructional model.

Operationally, the school demonstrates significant organizational capacity through pathway management, facilities readiness, industry partnerships, and sustained program implementation. The school's role within the district extends beyond student performance because district leaders frequently connect emerging



schools and applicants with South Tech Academy for site visits, implementation guidance, and operational insight.

Student outcomes at South Tech Academy further reinforce the district's accountability philosophy. Recent outcomes include a 100 percent graduation rate, more than 1,187 industry certifications earned in a single year, and over \$4.4 million in scholarships awarded to students. The school also offers dual enrollment, AP coursework, and honors opportunities that support both workforce readiness and postsecondary advancement. These outcomes illustrate how structured pathways, operational capacity, and workforce alignment can contribute to strong long-term student success.

For authorizers, South Tech should be used not only as a success story but also as a quality review case. Table 6 translates the South Tech example into questions that authorizers can use to examine whether a mature pathway model is coherent, accessible, outcome oriented, and sustainable.

Table 6. Authorizer Reflection Questions Using the South Tech Example

Authorizer question	Evidence to examine
Are pathways coherent?	4-year pathway maps, course sequences, student progression data
Are students completing pathways?	Completion rates, concentrator/completer data, credential attainment
Are credentials meaningful?	Certification types, pass rates, employer relevance, postsecondary alignment
Are students academically prepared?	Graduation, AP, honors, dual enrollment, college readiness evidence
Are students transitioning successfully?	Scholarships, college enrollment, employment, technical training, military, apprenticeship data



Authorizer question	Evidence to examine
Are pathways accessible?	Enrollment demographics, recruitment practices, advising supports
Are partnerships meaningful?	Advisory board activity, employer engagement, internships, equipment or curriculum support
Is the model sustainable?	Staffing stability, budget, equipment maintenance, facility capacity
Is the school improving?	Data review cycles, pathway adjustments, board oversight, student feedback

A Caution for Authorizers

Strong outcomes should be celebrated, but authorizers should still ask what those outcomes show. For example, a 100 percent graduation rate is powerful, but renewal review should also ask whether students completed pathways, earned valuable credentials, accessed postsecondary opportunities, and received supports aligned with their goals.

It is not the authorizer’s role to diminish success. The authorizer’s role is to understand the sources of success and determine whether the school is delivering the full model it promised.

Replicable Practices and Authorizer Implications

Palm Beach County’s experience highlights several promising and potentially replicable practices for authorizers overseeing career- and college-focused schools. One of the district’s most significant practices is the incorporation of CTE expertise into application review and oversight processes. Access to subject matter experts strengthens an authorizer’s ability to evaluate pathway feasibility, facilities readiness, workforce alignment, certification requirements, and operational sustainability.



The district's approach also demonstrates the importance of evaluating schools through a broader operational lens that extends beyond traditional academic measures. Facilities readiness, pathway coherence, staffing structures, safety systems, and industry partnerships all serve as critical indicators of implementation quality and long-term sustainability. Palm Beach County's approach suggests that authorizers must adapt review processes and accountability systems to reflect the operational complexity associated with career- and college-focused programming.

Several practical "look-fors" emerge from the district's approach. High-quality applications demonstrate structured pathway sequencing, meaningful workforce alignment, realistic staffing plans, operational readiness, active industry partnerships, sustainable funding models, and measurable student outcomes tied to both academic and workforce success. The district's experience also reinforces the importance of monitoring implementation fidelity over time rather than relying exclusively on traditional academic accountability systems.

At the same time, the case highlights several issues that authorizers must learn how to verify over time. Staffing shortages, equipment sustainability, facilities oversight, partnership quality, credential value, and workforce-related outcomes may be school-level implementation challenges, but they also create authorizer challenges because they require evidence that is not always captured through traditional academic monitoring. Palm Beach County's experience illustrates the need for differentiated oversight systems that can capture the operational and instructional realities of mature career- and college-focused schools.

Palm Beach is also a useful case for thinking about quality risks in mature pathway models.





Table 7. Red Flags and Possible Authorizer Responses

Red flag	Why it matters	Possible authorizer response
Many pathway options but unclear completion data	Students may be sampling courses without completing pathways	Require pathway participation and completion reporting
High certification count but unclear credential value	Not all credentials have equal workforce or postsecondary value	Require credential map and labor–postsecondary alignment evidence
Strong graduation rate but weak pathway evidence	School success may not reflect pathway quality	Review pathway-specific outcomes at renewal
Partnerships exist only on paper	Students may not benefit from employer or college connections	Review advisory board records and partner activities
Equipment is aging or is not industry aligned	Students may not learn on relevant tools	Require maintenance and replacement plan
Staffing instability in technical areas	Pathway quality may be inconsistent	Require staffing and retention strategy
Students lack advising	Students may enter pathways without understanding options	Review counseling and student planning systems
Pathways are not accessible to all student groups	Opportunity may be uneven	Monitor participation and completion by subgroup
Budget depends heavily on short-term grants	Program may not be sustainable	Require long-term financial sustainability plan
Renewal evidence focuses only on academics	Specialized promises may go unexamined	Add pathway-specific renewal evidence



Palm Beach County's experience also reflects several practical moves for authorizers.

Table 8. Authorizer Moves From the Palm Beach County Case

Authorizer move	Why it matters
Evaluate pathway coherence	Strong pathways are sequenced and intentional; they are not a collection of disconnected courses.
Examine credential value	Certifications should matter beyond the school building.
Monitor both academic and workforce outcomes	Career and college readiness should be interconnected.
Review facilities, equipment, and safety over time	Operational readiness is not only a pre-opening concern.
Look for dedicated pathway leadership	Mature models often need coordination beyond the principal.
Assess partnership quality	Strong partnerships contribute to instruction, advising, work-based learning, and improvement.
Track student access and completion	Authorizers need to know who participates, who persists, and who completes.
Use renewal to assess the full model	Renewal should consider whether the school delivered on its specialized promises.
Ask how the school uses data	Continuous improvement is a sign of pathway maturity.
Distinguish school success from pathway success	Strong overall outcomes do not automatically prove pathway quality.



Conclusion

Palm Beach County's approach to authorizing career- and college-focused schools reflects a strong alignment between program design, operational capacity, and student outcomes. The district has developed differentiated review and oversight practices that recognize the unique demands associated with CTE-focused models, including specialized facilities, workforce alignment, pathway coherence, safety considerations, and operational sustainability.

Through the incorporation of CTE expertise, intentional application review practices, broader accountability measures, and an emphasis on workforce readiness alongside academic achievement, the district provides a practical example of how authorizers can adapt traditional oversight systems to better support high-quality career- and college-focused schools. While formal accountability systems specific to CTE continue to evolve, Palm Beach County's foundational practices demonstrate how authorizers can strengthen oversight by aligning operational readiness, pathway quality, and measurable student outcomes within a comprehensive authorizing framework.

For authorizers, the central lesson is that mature career- and college-focused schools should be evaluated on the full set of promises they make to students and families. Strong academic performance remains essential, but it should be considered alongside pathway participation, pathway completion, credential value, work-based learning, dual enrollment, postsecondary transition, and evidence of long-term opportunity.

Palm Beach County's experience shows that high-quality career- and college-focused authorizing is not just about approving innovative models. It is about monitoring whether those models are coherent, sustainable, and effective over time. At renewal, authorizers should be able to determine whether the school delivered its academic program; maintained organizational health; and provided students with meaningful preparation for college, careers, technical training, military service, employment, or other postsecondary opportunities.



© 2026 WestEd. All rights reserved.



Suggested citation: Florida Association of Charter School Authorizers. (2026). *District profile of Palm Beach County Public Schools: Monitoring pathway quality, workforce alignment, and student outcomes in career- and college-focused charter schools*. WestEd.

WestEd is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that aims to improve the lives of children and adults at all ages of learning and development. We do this by addressing challenges in education and human development, increasing opportunity, and helping build communities where all can thrive. WestEd staff conduct and apply research, provide technical assistance, and support professional learning. We work with early learning educators, classroom teachers, local and state leaders, and policymakers at all levels of government.

For more information, visit [WestEd.org](https://www.wested.org). For regular updates on research, free resources, solutions, and job postings from WestEd, subscribe to the *E-Bulletin*, our semimonthly e-newsletter, at [WestEd.org/subscribe](https://www.wested.org/subscribe).