

District Profile of Orange County Public Schools: Making Career and College Readiness Visible in Specialized School Models

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 resource 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. The profile was developed primarily from a semistructured interview conducted on April 8, 2026, with Dr. Kia Sweeney-Scott, an Orange County Public Schools charter school authorizing leader. FACSA analyzed the interview findings and translated them into practical guidance for authorizers.

The interview examined the district's application review, budgeting, monitoring, and site-visit practices, with examples drawn from Orlando Science Schools, Cornerstone Charter Academy, and other specialized programs. FACSA reviewed the interview transcript and organized the findings around how authorizers can recognize and evaluate career- and college-focused features within specialized focus areas, such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) or college preparation. The tools, questions, and recommended practices included in this resource represent FACSA's analysis of the district's experience. FACSA did not include independent school visits; student or school-leader interviews; or verification through application files, monitoring records, or student-level outcome data.

Focus Area: Making Career and College Readiness Visible in Specialized School Models

Orange County Public Schools illustrates how an authorizer with a strong academic accountability foundation can begin adapting its review and monitoring practices to better recognize career- and college-focused features in schools with specialized instructional models, such as STEM.



This case matters because career- and college-focused promises are not always easy to see through standard charter oversight tools. A school may demonstrate strong academic performance, maintain compliance, and appear successful on paper while still offering only limited evidence that students are actually experiencing the specialized opportunities promised in the model. Without a more intentional lens, authorizers may not fully verify whether students have access to workforce exposure, specialized coursework, postsecondary planning, industry connections, credentials, internships, or multiple pathways beyond graduation.

Unlike authorizers overseeing stand-alone technical academies or long-established career and technical education (CTE) schools, Orange County's experience highlights a different and common challenge: Many schools do not identify primarily as career-focused schools, but they still include important career- and college-focused elements. These elements may include early exposure to STEM fields, college-going culture, postsecondary planning, specialized coursework, community and business partnerships, and emerging career-readiness opportunities.

For authorizers, the key question is not simply whether a school calls itself career focused. The more important question is whether the school's model gives students a coherent, supported, and measurable pathway toward future opportunities—and whether the authorizer has the review and monitoring practices needed to see that pathway clearly.

Why This Case Matters for Authorizers

Career- and college-focused schools do not all look the same. Some are organized around traditional career academies with industry certifications, technical labs, and work-based learning placements. Others begin as academically focused, STEM-oriented, or college-preparatory schools that gradually develop career-connected features for students over time.

That difference matters for authorizers. When career and college readiness is embedded within a broader academic model, the work can be under-monitored or



treated as a general enrichment feature rather than a core part of the school's promise. As a result, authorizers may approve, renew, or monitor schools without fully understanding whether students are receiving the specialized experiences that distinguish the model.

Orange County's case helps authorizers consider how to make those features more visible. It points to the need for review and monitoring questions that look beyond academic results alone and ask whether the school's specialized mission is being implemented with coherence, access, evidence, and meaningful student outcomes.

In this profile, the key issue is not whether every specialized academic school should be treated as a career-focused school. Rather, the key issue is whether a school's specialized model includes career- and college-focused promises that require a broader authorizing lens. That lens becomes important when a school's mission, program design, partnerships, coursework, advising, or public materials suggest that students will receive more than a strong academic program alone. In those instances, authorizers would want to look at whether students are getting exposure to careers pertaining to the specialization, postsecondary planning, dual enrollment, industry credentials, internships, applied learning, workforce experiences, or other structured pathways to future opportunity.

District Context

Located in Orlando in the heart of Central Florida, Orange County Public Schools serves a diverse portfolio of charter schools, including academically focused schools with embedded STEM programming. For example, Orlando Science Schools introduce students to science and technology in the elementary grades and extend those opportunities through middle and high school.

Historically, the district's charter school review and oversight practices have emphasized academic quality, curriculum alignment, organizational capacity, school performance, financial viability, and college readiness.



As career- and college-focused programming continues to evolve, district leaders have recognized that some specialized schools require additional review and monitoring considerations. These include workforce preparation, program-specific staffing, facilities, equipment, partnerships, industry credentials, student postsecondary plans, and other indicators of long-term student success.

Orange County is best understood as an authorizer in transition. The district is not replacing its traditional accountability framework. Instead, it is refining that framework to better recognize specialized models and to ensure that schools preparing students for college, careers, military service, technical training, or employment are evaluated on the full range of outcomes they promise.

Defining Quality in Career- and College-Focused Schools

In Orange County, CTE refers to educational programs that combine rigorous academics with technical knowledge; workplace skills; industry-recognized credentials; and preparation for high-skill, high-wage, and high-demand careers. CTE is one important form of career- and college-focused education, but it is not the only form. District leaders noted that some schools in the portfolio have career- and college-focused characteristics even though they have historically been reviewed primarily as more traditional academic models.

This distinction matters for authorizers because college readiness and career readiness may show up differently across schools. Orange County currently defines college readiness through indicators such as college-going culture, postsecondary planning, and academic preparation. Career readiness is still emerging as a more clearly defined area of review and may require additional evidence, such as pathway participation, industry certifications, work-based learning, employer partnerships, or other workforce-connected experiences. For authorizers, the task is to recognize both established career pathways and earlier



stage career-connected features while also clarifying what evidence would show that students are being prepared for meaningful postsecondary options.

Defining Quality in Specialized Career- and College-Focused Models

Orange County's experience suggests that authorizers should be careful not to define career- and college-focused quality too narrowly. Some schools may offer traditional career pathways with formal course sequences, technical labs, industry certifications, and work-based learning placements. In those cases, authorizers can look for clear evidence of pathway design, instructor qualifications, facilities, equipment, credential alignment, and employer partnerships.

Other schools may be earlier in their career-connected development. They may not yet offer a full technical pathway or credential sequence, but they may be building important foundations through career-focused instruction, exposure to career fields, college-going culture, postsecondary planning, specialized coursework, applied learning, or partnerships with colleges, community organizations, or businesses. These features do not substitute for a full career pathway, but they may signal that a school is beginning to create a more coherent career- and college-focused model.

For authorizers, the key is to match the review lens to the model. A technical academy should be evaluated for whether it can safely and sustainably deliver a defined pathway. A specialized academic school should be evaluated for whether its career- and college-focused features are intentional and accessible to students, are connected to the school's mission, and are supported by evidence. In both cases, quality depends not only on what the school says it offers but also on whether students actually experience a coherent set of opportunities that prepare them for life after graduation.



For specialized schools with career- and college-focused features, monitoring can help the authorizer understand whether the school's specialized mission is something students are actually experiencing, as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Quality Features and Authorizer Questions for Specialized Schools With Career- and College-Focused Models

Quality feature	Authorizer question
Clear academic foundation	Does the school maintain rigorous academic expectations and prepare students for postsecondary success?
Specialized instructional focus	Is the school's specialization reflected in the mission, curriculum, instruction, student experiences, and school culture?
Coherent student progression	Do students experience a developmental progression from early exposure to deeper preparation over time?
Postsecondary planning	Are students supported in understanding college, career, military, technical training, and workforce options?
Partnerships and exposure	Does the school connect students to colleges, employers, community organizations, or other partners in meaningful ways?
Emerging career-readiness measures	Is the school beginning to track credentials, pathway completion, workforce experiences, or postsecondary outcomes where appropriate?
Continuous improvement	Does the school use student outcome and implementation data to improve the model over time?

The questions in Table 1 reflect a broader view of quality that is especially important for career- and college-preparatory schools. For instance, a school may have strong test scores and a strong college-going culture, but authorizers still need to ask whether the school's specialized model is coherent, intentional, and connected to student outcomes.



Application Review and Authorization Practices

Orange County Public Schools currently reviews career- and college-focused charter school applications through the same comprehensive framework used for traditional charter schools. The district also recognizes that specialized educational models may require additional evaluation as they become more prevalent. During the application review process, district staff evaluate curriculum design, instructional programming, course offerings, student support systems, and alignment with the school's stated mission and educational goals. Particular attention is given to whether applicants have clearly articulated how students will progress toward meaningful postsecondary outcomes and whether the proposed academic model reflects a coherent vision for preparing students for college, careers, or both.

Although career- and college-focused schools are not currently evaluated through a separate application process, reviewers consider evidence that schools have established meaningful connections with community organizations, colleges, and businesses that support student learning and postsecondary awareness. District representatives noted that schools demonstrating a strong college-going culture often include activities such as college visits, college fairs, guidance supports, and partnerships that expose students to postsecondary opportunities. As additional specialized school proposals emerge, Orange County anticipates expanding its review process to place greater emphasis on workforce partnerships, pathway implementation, and program-specific operational readiness.

Financial and operational capacity represent significant components of the authorization process. Applicants proposing specialized programs are expected to demonstrate that all anticipated costs are fully reflected within the proposed budget, including specialized equipment, instructional materials, staffing, facilities modifications, certification fees, and ongoing operational expenses. District representatives emphasized that programs such as welding, biomedical sciences, International Baccalaureate, or other specialized instructional models require



comprehensive financial planning to ensure that schools possess the necessary resources to successfully implement and sustain the proposed program.

Looking ahead, district leaders recognize that increasingly specialized career- and college-focused applications will require a more differentiated review process than has historically been necessary. Programs involving technical equipment, industry certifications, laboratory spaces, or workforce preparation will likely require closer collaboration with district CTE/career specialists and additional review of facilities, staffing qualifications, safety considerations, and implementation readiness. This evolving approach reflects the district's commitment to ensuring that innovative charter school models are both educationally sound and operationally prepared to deliver high-quality career and college pathways for students.

A STEM theme, for example, may be visible in a school name, mission statement, or elective offerings. A coherent STEM pathway, by contrast, should be visible in the school's course sequence, instructional model, student experiences, advising structure, partnerships, and outcomes.

Table 2 translates this distinction into application review evidence. This evidence can help authorizers determine whether a school's specialized focus is embedded in the model or limited to broad mission language, isolated activities, or aspirational plans.

Table 2. Application Review Evidence for Specialized Schools With Career- and College-Focused Features

Review area	Evidence authorizers should request
Model coherence	Clear explanation of how the school's specialized focus connects to student outcomes
Student progression	Description of how students move from exposure to preparation to postsecondary planning



Review area	Evidence authorizers should request
Curriculum and instruction	Evidence that specialized programming is embedded in the instructional model, not limited to isolated activities
Postsecondary planning	Advising model, college and career exploration activities, student planning tools
Partnerships	Evidence of relationships with colleges, employers, community organizations, or STEM/career partners
Staffing	Staff qualifications aligned with the specialized model; plans for specialized instructors where needed
Budget	Costs associated with specialized programming, materials, equipment, partnerships, exams, or student experiences
Governance	Board or advisory expertise aligned with the school's mission, including business, technology, industry, higher education, or workforce experience
Outcomes	Proposed measures beyond academic performance, such as postsecondary plans, college credit, certifications, internships, or pathway participation

Not every specialized school requires the same level of review as a full technical academy. The authorizer should calibrate the review to the promises made in the application. The more specific, technical, or workforce-connected the school's claims are, the more specific and technical the evidence should be.





From Theme to Pathway: A Key Authorizer Decision

One of the most useful lessons from Orange County's experience is the need to distinguish between a school theme, a specialized program, and a coherent career pathway.

Table 3 shares evidence to look for when monitoring schools that make career- and college-focused promises as part of their model.

Table 3. Distinguishing a Theme, Specialized Program, and Coherent Pathway

If the school offers ...	The authorizer should ask ...
Career theme	Where does the theme show up beyond branding and recruitment?
Specialized courses	Are the courses sequenced, connected, and accessible to students over time? Are they theme related?
College-going culture	How does the school help students understand and pursue multiple postsecondary options?
Career exposure	Is exposure connected to deeper preparation, advising, or skill development?
Industry or community partners	What do partners actually do for students and the instructional model?
Credentials or certifications	Are they meaningful and attainable, and are they aligned with the pathway and tracked by the school?
Strong academic outcomes	How does the authorizer know whether the specialized model contributes to those outcomes?

Distinguishing between a school theme, a specialized program, and a coherent career pathway matters because a school can have career- or college-focused



activities without having a coherent career- or college-focused model. A theme may show up in branding, school culture, or occasional events. A specialized program may include courses, clubs, partnerships, or enrichment opportunities. However, a coherent pathway should show how students move through a planned sequence of learning experiences that build knowledge, skills, advising, and postsecondary options over time. College fairs, banners, guest speakers, STEM clubs, and career days can all be valuable, but they are not enough on their own to demonstrate pathway quality. Authorizers should look for evidence that these activities are connected through a clear progression, accessible to students, aligned with the school's mission, and tied to outcomes the school can monitor.

Operational Capacity and Governance

Orange County Public Schools recognizes that operational capacity extends beyond traditional school management and becomes increasingly important as career- and college-focused programs become more specialized. District representatives identified instructor recruitment and certification as one of the most significant implementation challenges associated with specialized programs. Unlike traditional academic positions, many career instructors enter education with extensive industry experience but may require alternative certification pathways or district approval processes before they are eligible to teach. As a result, delays in certification can affect staffing timelines and program implementation, particularly in highly specialized fields in which qualified instructors are already in limited supply. District leaders emphasized the importance of early communication among applicants, charter authorizing staff, CTE personnel, and district certification offices to proactively address certification requirements and minimize implementation challenges before a school opens.

Governance also serves as a critical indicator of a school's organizational capacity and long-term sustainability. For schools whose specialized model includes career- and college-focused promises, district representatives



emphasized that governing boards should include, or have access to, members with relevant business, technology, industry, higher education, workforce, or career expertise. Board members with this experience are better positioned to provide informed oversight, evaluate strategic decisions, support partnerships, and understand the operational demands of specialized programming including industry-specific compliance. By aligning governance expertise with the school's mission, authorizers gain additional confidence that school leadership has the capacity to guide the model while maintaining accountability for academic excellence and postsecondary preparation.

Governance and Operational Questions

Authorizers could ask the following questions:

- Does the board understand the school's specialized model well enough to oversee it?
- Does the school have staff with the expertise needed to implement the model?
- Are specialized costs reflected in the budget?
- Are partnerships formalized enough to support implementation?
- Does the school have a plan to sustain specialized programming as enrollment grows?
- If the school expands into more technical programming, what additional facilities, equipment, safety, and staffing considerations will be required?





Monitoring and Accountability

Orange County Public Schools currently monitors career- and college-focused charter schools through the same comprehensive oversight framework used for its broader charter portfolio. The district also recognizes that specialized programs require additional measures of success. District representatives conduct two formal site visits each year to review school operations, instructional implementation, organizational performance, and academic outcomes. As part of its ongoing efforts to strengthen oversight, the district has recently expanded its monitoring process to include questions regarding graduating seniors' postsecondary plans, including whether students intend to enroll in college, enter the workforce, or serve in the military. These additional data provide district leaders with greater insight into how schools are preparing students for life beyond high school and represent an important step toward measuring broader student outcomes.

While academic performance, school grades, and college readiness remain the primary indicators of accountability, district leaders acknowledge that these measures alone do not fully capture the effectiveness of career- and college-focused programming. As additional specialized charter schools emerge, the district anticipates expanding its accountability framework to include indicators such as CTE or career-pathway program completion, industry-recognized certification attainment, workforce participation, and other measures that better reflect career readiness and successful pathway completion. District representatives also noted the challenge of evaluating career-focused programming within schools that consistently demonstrate high academic performance, recognizing that additional measures will be necessary to distinguish the impact of specialized career pathways from overall school success.

Orange County views monitoring as a process of continuous improvement rather than a static system of compliance. District leaders described regularly revising evaluation and monitoring tools to reflect emerging educational models, eliminate measures that no longer provide meaningful information, and incorporate questions



that encourage deeper discussions about program implementation and student outcomes. This commitment to refining oversight practices positions the district to more effectively evaluate career- and college-focused schools as programming continues to evolve while maintaining high expectations for academic achievement, organizational effectiveness, and long-term student success.

For specialized schools with career- and college-focused features, monitoring helps the authorizer understand whether the school's specialized mission is something students are actually experiencing—not just something described in the application, mission statement, or recruitment materials.

Monitoring Indicators for Emerging Models

Table 4 identifies possible monitoring evidence for schools that make career- and college-focused promises as part of their model. Authorizers should adapt these indicators based on the school's grade span, mission, level of specialization, and specific commitments made in the charter application or renewal record.

Table 4. Monitoring Indicators for Specialized Schools With Career- and College-Focused Features

Indicators	Possible evidence
Academic performance	• Attendance • Credit accumulation • Course completion • Graduation progress • Academic performance
College readiness	• Number and percentage of students enrolled in the pathway • Demographics • Persistence
Career readiness	State assessment results, school grade, graduation rate, course completion



Indicators	Possible evidence
Student progression	Advanced coursework, dual enrollment, college applications, FAFSA completion where applicable, college acceptances
Student advising	Career exploration, pathway participation, industry certifications where applicable, internships, workforce experiences
Partnerships	Evidence that students move from early exposure to deeper preparation over time
Student outcomes	Individual academic and career plans, counseling supports, postsecondary planning activities
Mission implementation	College, employer, community, or industry partner engagement

School Spotlight: Orlando Science Schools

Orlando Science Schools are a network of charter schools within Orange County Public School District. These schools provide a practical example of Orange County's evolving approach to career- and college-focused programming. Established with a mission centered on STEM, the network has expanded over time to include multiple campuses serving students from elementary through high school. Orlando Science Schools integrate STEM learning throughout the educational experience, introducing students to science and technology concepts in the early grades and building upon those foundations as students progress through increasingly rigorous academic coursework. This intentional progression reflects the district's philosophy that strong academic preparation and exposure to career-related fields can work together to prepare students for a wide range of postsecondary opportunities.

District leaders consistently identified Orlando Science Schools as an example of a high-performing charter network that successfully combines



rigorous academics with specialized programming. The schools have established a strong college-going culture that is evident throughout the campus environment. Students are encouraged to explore postsecondary opportunities through college visits, college fairs, and guidance activities, while school hallways prominently display college banners, faculty alma maters, and student college acceptances to reinforce expectations for continued education. These visible reminders help cultivate an environment in which postsecondary success is viewed as an attainable goal for all students and college and career planning become an integral part of the school culture rather than activities reserved for high school seniors.

Although Orlando Science Schools have historically been viewed primarily through an academic and STEM lens, district representatives acknowledged that many elements of the instructional model align closely with career- and college-focused education. The integration of science and technology, emphasis on preparing students for postsecondary success, and continued expansion of specialized programming reflect many of the characteristics associated with high-quality CTE. As Orange County continues refining its authorizing and accountability practices, district leaders anticipate that schools such as those that are part of Orlando Science Schools will help inform future approaches to evaluating specialized charter schools by demonstrating how rigorous academics, STEM education, and career preparation can be integrated within a comprehensive educational model.

Site Visit Look-Fors

For schools like Orlando Science Schools that feature a STEM-oriented and college preparatory model rather than a traditional career academy model, site visits can help reviewers understand how students experience the mission.



During site visits, authorizers should look for evidence in five areas.

- 1. School Culture:** Is the career and college focus visible in the school environment? This may include college banners, student acceptance displays, STEM-related student work, career exploration materials, advising resources, and evidence that postsecondary success is part of the school's shared language.
- 2. Classroom Instruction:** Are students engaging in rigorous academic work connected to the school's specialized focus? In a STEM model, reviewers might look for inquiry-based learning, applied problem-solving, technology integration, science and engineering practices, student collaboration, and opportunities to explain or defend technical thinking.
- 3. Student Experience:** Can students explain the school's specialized model? Do they understand how their coursework connects to future opportunities? Can they name college, career, technical training, military, or workforce options they are considering?
- 4. Advising and Postsecondary Planning:** Does the school provide structured opportunities for students to plan for life after graduation? Are college visits, career exploration, guidance activities, and family-facing postsecondary information parts of a coherent advising system?
- 5. Model Coherence:** Does the school's STEM or specialized mission appear across grade levels, or is it concentrated in isolated courses or activities? Are students building knowledge, skills, confidence, and postsecondary awareness over time?

A lesson to take away from Orlando Science Schools is that authorizers need a way to recognize when specialized academic models are also making career- and college-focused promises.



A school like an Orlando Science School invites authorizers to ask the following questions:

- How does exposure to the specialized area or content begin in the early grades and deepen over time?
- How are students supported in connecting academic preparation to future opportunities?
- What evidence shows that students are developing postsecondary awareness and readiness?
- Are there opportunities for students to explore careers, college majors, technical fields, or workforce pathways?
- How does the school know whether its specialized model is producing the outcomes it intends?

These questions help move the review from “Is this a strong academic school?” to “Is this school delivering on its full specialized mission?”

Replicable Practices and Authorizer Implications

The experience of Orange County Public Schools illustrates that authorizers must remain flexible as career- and college-focused programming continues to evolve. While rigorous academic accountability continues to serve as the foundation of the district’s oversight model, district leaders recognize that specialized schools require a broader evaluation framework that considers operational capacity, staffing, facilities, safety, governance, and workforce preparation alongside traditional academic outcomes. As increasingly specialized charter applications emerge, authorizers may need to incorporate career industry expertise into the review process to effectively evaluate pathway implementation, instructor qualifications, specialized facilities, equipment needs, and long-term program sustainability. Orange County’s evolving approach demonstrates that authorizing



practices must adapt alongside educational innovation while maintaining high expectations for student achievement and organizational effectiveness.

The district's experience also highlights the importance of strong cross-department collaboration throughout both the authorization and oversight processes. District representatives emphasized that successful implementation of career- and college-focused schools often requires coordination among charter authorizing staff, CTE/career pathway specialists, certification personnel, and other district departments responsible for funding, facilities, and compliance. Early communication with applicants helps identify operational challenges before a school opens, allowing districts to proactively address issues related to instructor certification, specialized equipment, safety requirements, and funding opportunities. This collaborative approach strengthens implementation planning and better positions schools for long-term success.

Perhaps the most significant lesson from Orange County's experience is the importance of viewing authorizing as a process of continuous improvement rather than one guided by static evaluation systems. District leaders regularly revise their monitoring tools to reflect specialized educational models, eliminate measures that no longer provide meaningful information, and incorporate new indicators that encourage deeper conversations about school quality and student outcomes. Promising practices include requiring comprehensive financial planning for specialized programs, encouraging governing boards with relevant industry expertise, expanding accountability measures beyond traditional academic indicators, and evaluating career- and college-focused schools on the effectiveness of their unique instructional models rather than comparing them directly to traditional district-operated CTE or career pathway programs. Collectively, these practices provide a practical framework for authorizers seeking to strengthen oversight while supporting innovation in career-focused charter education.



Authorizer Moves From the Orange County Case

Orange County's experience suggests several practical moves for authorizers, as summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. Authorizer Moves for Recognizing and Monitoring Career- and College-Focused Features

Authorizer move	Why it matters
Identify career- and college-focused features in nontraditional models	Not all specialized schools are stand-alone CTE academies.
Maintain strong academic expectations	Career readiness should expand opportunity, not replace academic rigor.
Add postsecondary planning questions to monitoring	This is a manageable first step toward broader outcome tracking.
Use site visits to test mission implementation	Reviewers should look for evidence that the specialized model is real for students.
Bring in CTE or workforce expertise when models become more technical	Specialized pathways may require expertise beyond traditional charter review.
Review budgets for specialized programming costs	STEM, technical, or career-focused programs may require materials, equipment, exams, staffing, or partnerships.
Encourage governance or advisory expertise aligned with the model	Boards need the capacity to oversee specialized programming.
Revise tools over time	Monitoring systems should evolve as school models and student outcome measures evolve.



Conclusion

For authorizers, the central lesson from Orange County is that career- and college-focused quality should be evaluated according to the promises a school makes to students and families. If a school promises STEM preparation, college readiness, workforce exposure, industry-connected learning, or pathways to future opportunity, then the authorizers should be able to see those promises reflected in the application, budget, staffing plan, partnerships, site visit evidence, student experience, monitoring data, and renewal review. Strong academic performance remains essential, but it may not be sufficient to show whether students are actually experiencing the specialized opportunities that define the school's model.

Orange County Public Schools demonstrates how an established academic authorizer can begin refining its existing review and monitoring practices without creating an entirely separate authorizing system. The district's experience points to the importance of maintaining rigorous academic expectations while adding questions about model coherence, postsecondary planning, career exposure, operational capacity, specialized staffing, financial sustainability, partnerships, and long-term student outcomes. As school models become more specialized, authorizers may also need to draw on CTE, career pathway, workforce, or higher education expertise to evaluate whether programs are realistic and sustainable and are aligned with meaningful opportunities for students.

Orange County's evolving approach offers a practical example of how authorizers can balance innovation with accountability. The goal is not to treat every STEM, college-preparatory, or specialized school as a technical academy. The goal is to ensure that when schools make career- and college-focused commitments, those commitments are visible, coherent, accessible, and measurable. This helps authorizers support high-quality charter schools that prepare students for success in college, careers, military service, technical training, and an increasingly dynamic workforce.



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