



Things to Know:

Guidance Handbook



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Welcome, School Leaders!

The ERCO team is proud to partner with you in education. Public community schools serve a significant and powerful role in providing meaningful, high-quality choices for students and families in the state of Ohio. We enjoy working with you.

As members of the national charter school authorizing profession, we commit that our policies and practices will:

- **Maintain high standards for schools**
- **Uphold school autonomy**
- **Protect student and public interests**

The following “Things to Know” briefly outlines important:

- **Reporting expectations and requirements**
- **Statutory and contractual deadlines**
- **Sponsors’ and schools’ core role and responsibilities**
- **Processes to be followed in fulfilling responsibilities**

Clear mutual understanding will ensure a strong, positive, and productive working relationship between your school and ERCO for years to come.

The best additional means of fostering that relationship is, of course, keeping the lines of communication open. Please contact ERCO with questions or concerns at any time, and we will also regularly communicate with you.

We sincerely thank you for choosing ERCO as your sponsor.

The ERCO Team

Roles, Responsibilities, Expectations

Sponsors' Role and Responsibilities:

- **Monitor and evaluate** compliance with applicable law and contract terms, including: academic performance; financial performance; operations; and governance.
- **Ensure** appropriate fiscal control, records creation, and records maintenance.
- **Report results of evaluation** annually to the Department of Education.
- **Report other required information** to stakeholders.
- **Provide technical assistance** to schools in complying with applicable laws and contract terms. (Assistance does not, however, include providing legal counsel, operating the school, etc.)
- **Intervene as needed** when sponsor deems necessary to alleviate performance concerns that threaten public interest and student outcomes.
* Intervention may take the form of: informal communication, formal communication, offers of assistance, mandatory corrective actions, probation, suspension, contract termination and/or closure.
- **Prepare and assist** with contingency plans in the event the school experiences financial difficulties or closes before the end of the school year.
- **Follow** applicable Ohio laws and contract terms.

Schools may expect ERCO to also:

- **Communicate clearly**
 - **Operate transparently**
 - **Respond in a timely manner**
 - **Strive to be proactive**
 - **Hold high performance expectations**
 - **Make data-based decisions**
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Schools' Role and Responsibilities:

- **Follow** applicable law and contract terms, including: academic performance; financial performance; operations; and governance.
- **Ensure** appropriate fiscal control, records creation, and records maintenance.
- **Report required and requested information** to sponsor, other public entities in a timely manner.
- **Report school performance** to parents annually.
- **Request -- and accept -- needed technical assistance** in complying with applicable laws and contract terms. (Assistance does not include providing legal counsel, operating the school, etc.)
- **Cooperate positively with intervention** when the sponsor deems necessary to alleviate performance concerns that threaten public interest and student outcomes.
* Intervention may take the form of: informal communication, formal communication, offers of assistance, mandatory corrective actions, probation, suspension, contract termination, and/or closure.
- **Prepare and execute effective, meaningful plans** to avoid and/or correct financial difficulties or other issues that may force closure of the school.
- **Attend sponsor meetings**, which include two annual mandatory superintendents' meetings (May and August), and additional workshops if needed.

ERCO also expects sponsored schools to:

- **Communicate clearly**
 - **Operate transparently**
 - **Respond in a timely manner**
 - **Strive to be proactive**
 - **Hold high performance expectations**
 - **Make data-based decisions**
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On-Site Visits:

On-Site visits are scheduled in-person meetings with school officials that may include: Superintendent, Principal, Director, Academic Team, Management Company Administrators, EMIS coordinator, Treasurer, Special Education administrator, Teaching staff and other stakeholders when applicable.

- Comprehensive on-site visits take place at least twice per year, in fall and spring. The ERCO representative for your region will contact you to schedule dates.
- ERCO will oversee, monitor, and offer technical assistance while in the school building, including observing classroom instruction.
- ERCO collects data from school employees and/or other stakeholders (e.g., governing authority members, management company staff, students, parents) during on-site reviews and from a review of school records.
- Site Visit Compliance requirements are reviewed and are required to be submitted via Epicenter. ERCO Regional Representative may require the documents to be received while on-site or emailed when necessary.
- The On-Site Visit rubric and protocols include the goals of the visit and prescribe strict adherence to a specific set of actions for conducting on-site reviews. The rubric is completed by the regional representative and includes if the school is compliant, non-compliant or incomplete for each required compliance area, and the representative includes supporting documentation and notes or comments when applicable.
- Regional Reps identify areas needing improvement on the rubric and include steps and timeframes for taking appropriate action for improvement, and request and review relevant status updates from the school.
- ERCO Regional Reps complete the Site Visit rubric and submit the completed written rubric report to Epicenter following the On-Site visit. The school officials have access to the epicenter to review the results of the visit.

Pre-opening Compliance & Readiness Review (PCRR)

- The PCRR is completed by the ERCO Regional Rep to ensure all ERCO Schools are compliant: operationally, academically, financially, and legally to begin the school year in accordance with Ohio Revised Code and ERCO quality standards.
- Conducted 15 days before the school's first instructional day.

- ERCO will schedule an Opening Assurance site visit when needed or required.
 - Opening Assurance is required if the school is in its first year of operation.
 - The school is operating from a new facility or has added a facility.
 - Prior opening assurance is incomplete or missing.
 - Opening Assurances must be submitted to ODEW no later than 10 business days before the school's first instructional day. Failure to meet this deadline will result in a delay of the school's start date or denial of the school's ability to open.
- ERCO will issue a Corrective Action plan (CAP) request, if needed or required.

Enrollment and Financial Reviews

- ERCO conducts monthly financial and enrollment reviews of each school based on specified standards and processes. ERCO then provides written feedback to the school following each month's review, including proactive recommendations for improvement.
- ERCO reviews the enrollment and financial records of each school monthly.
- ERCO has policies and processes in place for enrollment and financial reviews.
- ERCO provides written feedback to the school following each month's reviews, including proactive recommendations to improve the governing authority's decision-making.

Performance Monitoring:

- ERCO annually reviews each school's academic, financial, organizational/operational and legal/governance performance using data related to the terms in each school's performance framework contained in its contract. Throughout the year, ERCO collects data related to academic, financial, organizational/operational and legal/governance performance of the school and evaluates the overall performance of the school based on the outcomes of its data analysis. ERCO reviews multiple years of academic, financial and organizational/operational data when evaluating the overall performance of the school. ERCO uses this analysis to determine subsequent actions required of its school (e.g., technical assistance, corrective action, intervention, professional development, coaching, contract termination, contract renewal).
- ERCO annually provides cumulative reports to its schools that summarize academic, fiscal, organizational/operational and legal/governance performance against the performance framework. ERCO's annual performance reports identify areas of strength and areas for improvement for each school. ERCO directly informs each school's governing authority in writing and at board meetings about its school's performance. ERCO's annual performance reports state the school's prospects for renewal.

Technical Assistance:

- ERCO provides timely technical assistance to its schools in response to issues, problems, and concerns once they are identified by either the school or ERCO.
- ERCO proactively solicits information from the school about its needs for technical assistance and about the quality and impact of previous technical assistance through a needs assessment.
- ERCO uses the results of a needs assessment to plan proactive technical assistance to its schools.
- ERCO provides technical assistance to schools to comply with all laws and rules applicable to community schools within the terms of the preliminary agreement and the community school contract, and timely initiates intervention when it deems necessary.

Legal and Policy Updates

- ERCO has a method by which it informs its schools of changes to rules, laws, and/or policies that impact the community school operations.
- Annually and prior to the opening of the school year, ERCO's legal counsel provides legal updates and handouts to assist its schools in understanding changes to rules, law, and policy that impact community school operations.
- Legal counsel communicates regularly to ERCO staff when federal or state law changes. These communications are shared with schools.
- Legal and Policy updates are communicated to the schools at the Annual Administrators Meeting when applicable.

Audit Reports

- Audit reports are completed by the Auditor of State and are received and reviewed by community school sponsors.
- Corrective action plans (CAP) and documentation may be requested in response to any adverse findings identified in the audit.

Intervention, Probation, Suspension, and Termination

If ERCO finds that any of the conditions in the Community School contract or conditions prescribed in section 3314 of ORC are violated, ERCO may place a school on probation, suspend the school's operation, or terminate the school's contract.

In lieu of termination of a contract or suspension of the operation of a school as provided for in sections 3314.07 and 3314.072 [3314.07.2] of ORC, respectively, after consultation with the governing authority of sponsored school, if ERCO finds that any of the conditions prescribed in division (B)(1) of section 3314.07 of ORC apply to the school, ERCO may declare in written notice to the governing authority that the school is in a probationary status which shall not extend beyond the end of the current school year per.

ERCO's notice shall specify the conditions that warrant probationary status.

ERCO may declare a school to be in such status only if it has received from the governing authority reasonable assurances to the satisfaction of the sponsor that the governing authority can and will take actions necessary to remedy the conditions that have warranted such probationary status as specified by ERCO.

ERCO shall monitor the actions taken by the governing authority to remedy the conditions that have warranted probationary status and may take over the operation of the school as provided in the contract, suspend operation of the school or take steps to terminate the contract if ERCO at any time finds that the governing authority is no longer able or willing to remedy those conditions to the satisfaction of ERCO.

While specific interventions will depend upon circumstances that are unique to each situation, ERCO acknowledges that interventions will fall into certain categories and are not limited to the following: parental, community, employee, and vendor complaints, fiscal, academic, and governance deficiencies, site visit and fiscal audit concerns.

If ERCO receives written or verbal allegations or complaints, ERCO's Regional Representative is contacted to review the allegation or complaint for schools in their perspective area. Depending on the nature of the allegation/complaint, the school's administrator may be contacted to address the issue or ERCO may/will provide, in writing, the Board of Directors' assistance in addressing the issue. ERCO requests that any

resolution be in written format. If the issue is not resolved, ERCO may hold an informal meeting between all parties to work out a resolution.

In addition to the categories above, ERCO acknowledges that interventions can usually be placed on a continuum from less invasive to more invasive as follows: verbal intervention, request Corrective Action Plan (CAP), request technical assistance from school personnel or governing authority, request informal administrative and or fiscal intervention, require and/or provide replacement of a treasurer when warranted by circumstances, require and/or recommend the services of an Educational Management Company to assume control of the school's operation, assume total control of the school's operation per applicable ORC sections, issue letter of intent to put on probation, declare a school on probationary status, remove of governing authority, issue letter of intent to suspend school's operation, suspending school's operation, and or terminating a school's operation/contract.

Section 3314.07 Expiration, termination, or non-renewal of contract; rights of attendees where school closed; immunity of sponsor. ERCO shall adhere to pertinent part section 3314.07, which states as follows: (A) the expiration of the contract for a community school between a sponsor and a school shall be the date provided in the contract. A successor contract may be entered into pursuant to division (E) of section 3314.03 of ORC unless the contract is terminated or not renewed pursuant to this section. (B) A sponsor may choose not to renew a contract at its expiration or may choose to terminate a contract prior to its expiration for any of the following reasons:

Failure to meet student performance requirements stated in the contract;

Failure to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management;

Violation of any provision of the contract or applicable state or federal law;

Other good cause.

ERCO may choose to terminate a contract prior to its expiration if ERCO has suspended the operation of the contract under section 3314.072 of ORC. No later than first day of February in the year in which ERCO intends to terminate or take actions not to renew the contract, ERCO shall notify the school of the proposed action in writing. The notice shall include the reasons of the proposed action in detail, the effective date of the termination or non-renewal, and a statement that the school may, within 14 days of receiving the notice, request an informal hearing before ERCO. Such a request must be in writing. The informal hearing shall be held within fourteen days of the receipt of a request for the hearing. Not later than fourteen days after the informal hearing, the sponsor shall issue a written decision either affirming or rescinding the decision to terminate or not renew the contract. ERCO's decision to terminate a contract may be appealed to the state board of education. The notice of appeal shall be filed with the state board no later than 14 days following receipt of ERCO's written decision to terminate. Within 60 days of receipt of notice to appeal, the state board shall conduct a hearing and issue a written decision on the appeal. The decision by the state board pertaining to an appeal under ORC 3314.07 (B) (4) is final.

The termination of a contract under division (B)(5) 3314.07 of ORC shall be effective upon the occurrence of the later of the following: the date ERCO notified the school of its decision to terminate the contract as prescribed in division (B)(3) of 3314.07 of ORC; (b) If an informal hearing is requested under division (B)(3) of 3314.07 of ORC and as a result of that hearing ERCO affirms its decision to terminate the contract, the effective date of the termination specified in the notice issued under division (B)(3) of 3314.07 of ORC, or if that decision is appealed to the state board under division (B)(4) of 3314.07 of ORC and the state board affirms that decision, the date established in the resolution of the state board affirming ERCO's decision.

If a sponsored school does not intend to renew its contract with ERCO, the school shall notify ERCO in writing of that fact at least 180 days prior to the expiration of the contract. The school may enter into a contract with a new sponsor in accordance with section 3314.03 of ORC upon expiration of the previous contract.

New Start-up School Applications

- All school developers seeking a new contract with ERCO must apply for new school authorization through the application process outlined on the ERCO website.
- Schools seeking to change sponsors can also apply for authorization with ERCO by completing the application process outlined on the ERCO website.
- The evaluation rubric and the application process timeline is included on the website.

Renewal Applications

- ERCO requires all schools seeking renewal to apply through a renewal application.
- The criteria for renewal are transparent and specific.
- The criteria for renewal include multiple sources of evidence (e.g., multiple years of student achievement, multiple measures of student achievement, financial audits, and/or site visit and compliance reports)

Renewal Process Timeline	
Renewal application distributed to schools	October 15th
Reminder of renewal application and due date distributed to schools	November 1st
High Stakes Review submitted to Schools	October 30th
Renewal applications due from schools	November 30th
Advisory board recommends renewal of schools to Executive Board	December 15th
Governing authority and ODE Office of Community Schools notified of application disposition (renewal/non-renewal)	December-January
Statutory deadline to issue notice of non-renewal	January 15th

Other Stakeholder Input

ERCO occasionally receive communication regarding their schools from other stakeholders, including, but not limited to:

- ODE Departments
- SERS/STRS,
- Auditor of State
- Attorney General
- Bureau of Workers Compensation
- Jobs and Family Services
- Tax agencies
- Educational Service Centers
- Vendors

ERCO will contact you as soon as possible to address and resolve any concerns communicated to us. Prompt attention and resolution are vital to protect the interests of all stakeholders. Corrective action plans may be required to address the concern, depending on its nature and duration.

Parent Complaints

Sponsors sometimes receive complaints, written and/or verbal, from parents, etc. Our complaint resolution process is to:

- Encourage the complainant to contact the school superintendent, principal, and/or governing board with their concerns, if they have not yet done so.
- Note the complaint, requesting a written complaint if feasible for the complainant.
- Send a memo of complaint, including any written complaint submitted, to school stakeholders, including the governing board, school leaders, etc., with a deadline for response, usually in one business week.
- If the complaint remains unresolved, ERCO may facilitate a meeting of concerned parties to achieve resolution.
- ERCO will forward the response and/or resolution to the Ohio Department of Education if deemed appropriate or if the state has been involved.
- Maintain a record of all correspondence and communication about complaints in each school's file.

Reporting Responsibilities

Information	(By) When:	To:
School Calendar	June 1-July 31	Upload into EPICENTER
Calamity Day form	July 31	Upload into EPICENTER
SOES Profile Form New schools-----→ Continuing schools-----→	July 31 (Send) July 31 (Input) July 31	Upload into EPICENTER
Satisfactory Opening Assurances Site Visit	A minimum of 10 business days prior to school start	By appointment with Regional Representative
Fall Site Visit	October-November	By appointment with Regional Representative
School Annual Report	October 30	Upload into EPICENTER
Annual Budget Report and Approved Board Resolution	October 31	Upload into EPICENTER
Renewal Application (If contract term ends June 30 of previous yr.)	November 15	Upload into EPICENTER
5 Year Forecast Report and Approved Board Resolution	November 20 th	Upload into EPICENTER
Contract modifications	Immediately	admin@ercoinc.org Attn. Sonya Lunsford
Board agendas and approved/signed meeting minutes for each regular, emergency or special board meeting	Agenda: at least 24 hours prior to meeting Minutes: within 48 hours of board approval	Upload into EPICENTER
Attendance/enrollment reports	Monthly, on the 5 th	Upload into EPICENTER
Financial reports	Monthly, on the 10 th	Upload into EPICENTER
GAAP reports	November 30	Upload into EPICENTER
Spring site visit	February –March	By appointment with Regional Representative
5-year forecast	May 31 st (spring)	Upload into EPICENTER
Forwarded news and events	Ongoing basis	admin@ercoinc.org