Transfer of Community School Sponsorship
Instructions and Timeline

Contract Effective July 1, 2027

Deadline	Responsibility	Items to Be Completed
09/30/2026	School	Application for Transfer of Community School Sponsorship is submitted
10/01/2026 – 12/31/2026	ESCLEW	Review and interview period **Subject to approval of the Change in Sponsorship Request by ODE*
01/15/2027	ESCLEW	School is notified of recommendation to the ESCLEW Governing Board and, If approved for sponsorship, a preliminary agreement is issued to the school
02/15/2027	School	Signed preliminary agreement is returned to the ESCLEW
02/28/2027	ESCLEW	School is sent a contract packet for completion
04/30/2027	School	Contract negotiations are finalized and all contract attachments are submitted
05/31/2027	School	School governing authority approves and signs the sponsorship contract and the original, signed contract is returned to the ESCLEW
06/30/2027	ESCLEW	Contract is signed by the ESCLEW Superintendent and executed
09/30/2027	School	School year begins or contract is void **Exception for dropout prevention and recovery programs*

Sponsoring Priorities

Sponsorship encompasses a great deal of legal responsibility and the ESCLEW Community Schools Center takes its responsibilities seriously. At the core, it upholds its mission of being a student-centered authorizer of charter schools, advancing quality educational opportunities throughout the state of Ohio.

Adhering to the *Principles and Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing* as established by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA), the ESCLEW Community Schools Center uses the principles and standards as the foundation of its strategic plan for quality school sponsoring.

Principles

Maintain High Standards
Uphold School Autonomy
Protect Student and Public Interest

Standards

Agency Commitment and Capacity
Application Process & Decision-Making
Performance Contracting
Ongoing Oversight and Evaluation
Revocation and Renewal Decision-Making

In accordance with the sponsoring priorities, principles, and standards, this application includes prescriptive requirements and evaluation criteria. In order to preserve the highest standard of quality sponsorship, the school must provide sound evidence of meeting the selection criteria. All schools seeking to transfer sponsorship must apply through this application. *Only schools that earn at least 75% of possible points will be considered for a preliminary agreement.*

There are significant consequences for poor performance in academics, finance, operations, and governance. If a school does not perform well, it may be closed automatically by law or by the sponsor, and could be subject to civil liability. It is imperative the school demonstrates its strong educational, operational, and financial performance before the ESCLEW Community Schools Center would offer a preliminary agreement.

ESCLEW's Eligibility Criteria

In order to be eligible to apply, an existing community school must not have had its contract non-renewed or terminated by its present sponsor for academic, compliance or financial reasons. An existing community school must also meet the following additional eligibility criteria in order to apply.

An existing community school must have received no monetary findings for recovery in any audits in the past two (2) years and must be fiscally sound. In addition, the community school must have not been on any substantive corrective action plans (at the sole discretion of the ESCLEW) from their sponsor during the prior academic year. Finally, the school must not be an online school.

The school's governing authority and its members thereof must not have any current ethics or conflict violations filed with the Ethics Commission.

Any community school to which either of the following conditions apply shall be prohibited from entering into a contract with a new sponsor without approval of the Department of Education and Workforce: 1. A performance rating of less than three stars for achievement under division (D)(3)(b) of section 3302.03 of the Revised Code and a performance rating of less than three stars for progress under division (D)(3)(c) of that section; or 2. The community school is one in which a majority of the students are enrolled in a dropout prevention and recovery program, and it has received a rating of "does not meet standards" for the annual student growth measure and combined graduation rates on the most recent report card issued for the school under section 3314.017 of the Revised Code.

A community school to which the criteria above apply, may only enter into a contract with a new sponsor if the Department approves the school's request.

Community schools in which a majority of the enrolled students are children with disabilities may enter into a contract with a new sponsor, provided that the new sponsor is rated effective or exemplary if: (1) The school received, on its most recent report card a performance rating of at least three stars for progress under division (D)(3)(c) of that section; and (2) The school's performance index score for students with disabilities was higher than the performance index score for students with disabilities for the school district in which the school is located. Please notify the Department of Education and Workforce no later than February 15, 2026, of your school's intent to change sponsors under this provision. The Department will review the relevant data and confirm that criteria have been met. Please send requests to Community.Schools@education.ohio.gov.

Meeting the eligibility criteria does not guarantee approval. The ESCLEW will accept the application and either approve or deny based on the evaluation process.

PROCESS FOR REQUESTING APPROVAL TO CHANGE SPONSORS (Schools not primarily serving students with disabilities)

Schools shall submit a request to change sponsors and all supporting documentation to the Department not later than 5 p.m. on February 15, 2026. Application and materials should be sent by email to Community.Schools@education.ohio.gov. The Department shall approve or deny the request within 30 days of receipt of the request. If the request is denied, the community school may submit an appeal to the Department, which shall hold a hearing in accordance with Chapter 119 of the Revised Code.

Notice of appeal to the Department must be filed not later than 10 days after receiving the decision from the Department. The Department shall conduct the hearing not later than 30 days after receiving the school's notice of appeal and act upon the determination of the hearing officer not later than the 25th day of June of the year in which the school wishes to change sponsors.

The Department will make a determination based on the information submitted by the community school.

Applicants should read each section thoroughly and provide detailed responses. Schools that are applying should make sure the answer to each question is clearly identified in their responses.

A community school seeking a change in sponsorship must submit a cover letter addressing the reason for change, along with a narrative describing the school's impact on the students and community it serves, plan for academic improvement, school's financial viability and school's operational performance.

Additional guidance regarding the Ohio Department of Education and Workforces guidelines for Community Schools Request to Change Sponsors can be found at: https://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Community-Schools/Sections/Schools/Request-to-Change-Sponsors-2024.pdf.aspx?lang=en-US

Step One: Application for Sponsorship

To begin the process of transferring community school sponsorship, follow the timeline and application instructions. Resources are also available on the ESCLEW Community Schools Center website and from state and local organizations. To discuss any questions, contact the ESCLEW Community Schools Center at (419) 246-3137.

All essay portion questions must be answered within the provided template. Any supplementary materials must be clearly labeled as separate attachments. Should a certain criterion not apply, a response stating why it is not applicable is required. No question should be left unanswered. The application must be received by the ESCLEW Community Schools Center no later than **September 30, 2026**.

Step Two: Review and Interview Period

The ESCLEW Application Review Team includes a core group from the ESCLEW Community Schools Center and external reviewers with expertise and sponsoring experience to make informed application decisions. Annually, and prior to reviewing applications, the Application Review Team is trained on the application process and materials; reviewer protocols; and the vision, mission, and strategic goals of the ESCLEW Community Schools Center. All reviewers sign a Conflict of Interest Disclosure form. Any reviewer found to have a real or perceived conflict of interest will be excused to ensure impartially in the review.

The rubric contains the application framework and evaluation criteria that are used as the primary factors for decision-making. Therefore, the school must present a comprehensive and evidence-based case for approval. The Application Review Team will conduct research into the applicant's history with community schools, interview the applicant, and discuss the viability and appropriateness of the school with the ESCLEW Governing Board. The Application Review Team will also interview the school's current sponsor.

After evaluating and discussing all the data, each reviewer will individually complete a rubric. The combined scores and comments will be provided to the school in the final evaluation rubric. Should the Application Review Team need additional information to make a determination, the school will be contacted during the review period.

Step Three: Preliminary Agreement and Contract Term Length

In order to guarantee the most comprehensive and appropriate decisions are rendered, the ESCLEW Community Schools Center only provides evidence-based recommendations to its Governing Board regarding applications for transfer of sponsorship. *Only schools that earn at least 75% of possible points will be considered for a preliminary agreement.*

If the application is approved, an in-person interview will be scheduled. After the interview, the Application Review Team and the ESCLEW Governing Board will make a decision whether to authorize a preliminary agreement. The school will be notified of the decision no later than **January 15, 2027**.

Should the ESCLEW Community Schools Center choose not to approve the application for sponsorship, the school will receive a notice that includes detailed reasons for the action and the effective date of denial.

Should the ESCLEW Community Schools Center choose to approve the application for sponsorship, the school and the ESCLEW Community Schools Center will execute a preliminary agreement describing the intent of the sponsor and the school to work in good faith towards the execution of a contract. The preliminary agreement will also be submitted to the Ohio Department of Education.

The ESCLEW Governing Board currently offers sponsorship contracts for a maximum of five (5) years. The following table outlines the final evaluation rubric score and corresponding contract term length recommendations.

Final Evaluation Rubric Score	Recommended Contract Term Length
90.0% - 100%	Five (5) Year Recommendation
85.0% - 89.9%	Four (4) Year Recommendation
80.0% - 84.9%	Three (3) Year Recommendation
75.1% - 79.9%	Two (2) Year Recommendation
75.0%	One (1) Year Recommendation
74.9% or Lower	Not Recommended for Sponsorship

Step Four: Contract Negotiation and Attachments

The ESCLEW Community Schools Center will send the school a contract packet no later than **February 28, 2027** which will include a contract template and attachment cover pages. The school must submit clean FBI/BCI criminal background checks for all applicants and governing authority members. In addition, the school's governing authority members must complete five (5) hours of training on board governance and open meetings law.

The school's governing authority, leader, management company (if applicable), and attorney should review the contract to ensure accuracy of all terms. Should the school find any errors or wish to negotiate any contract term, it should discuss the proposed changes with the ESCLEW Community Schools Center as soon as possible.

All contract attachments must be received by the ESCLEW Community Schools Center no later than **April 30, 2027**. The attachments will be reviewed for accuracy, completeness, and appropriateness. Should any adjustments be required, the ESCLEW Community Schools Center will notify the school in a timely manner and convey specific instructions for the adjustments.

Step Five: Contract Approval and Execution

After all contract terms are finalized, the contract must be approved by the school's governing authority. The school should prepare a resolution for the governing authority president to sign once the contract is approved. This signed resolution must be included in the contract, so it is best to have a separate resolution signed that day rather than having approval reflected in the unapproved, draft minutes.

Once the school's governing authority has approved the contract resolution, the governing authority president must sign and date the contract. Then, the original, signed contract must be sent via postal mail and received by the ESCLEW Community Schools Center no later than **May 31, 2027**.

All negotiations must be complete and the contract must be signed by both parties prior to the expiration of the current contract. The ESCLEW Superintendent will only sign the contract once all requirements have been met. The ESCLEW Community Schools Center will send a copy of the fully executed contract to the school and the Ohio Department of Education. The contract will also be available for reference in Epicenter. The contract will go into effect on **July 1, 2027**.