



# Maryland Charter School Founder's Manual



A Guidebook For Maryland Charter School  
Development  
Maryland Alliance of Public Charter Schools  
9/1/2017

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## **Preface**

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The Maryland Alliance of Public Charter Schools (MAPCS) published the *Maryland Charter School Founder's Manual* to provide potential charter school developers with practical advice for the essential phases of planning, designing, and operating a Maryland charter school.

As the only statewide organization dedicated to the Maryland charter school movement, MAPCS promotes charter schools by serving as their public voice, through networking, education, advocacy, and public relations. Most importantly, MAPCS offers a wide range of technical assistance both to help charter school organizers with planning and proposal development and to support operators with running exceptional public schools.

Please note that the scope of this manual is limited and is in no way intended to be definitive. We have provided helpful information, perspective, pointers, etc. You are strongly advised to spend sufficient time conducting research on best practices for creating and operating a charter school and to use this manual as a starting point. To that end, we have included an extensive annotated bibliography of resources available online. Finally, selected resources, including Maryland's Public Charter School Improvement Act of 2015, are attached as appendices.

This manual is currently in its fourth edition. It is intended to provide guidance in regard to the subject matter covered. The manual is not issued by the Maryland State Department of Education. It is distributed with the understanding that the Maryland Alliance of Public Charter Schools is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting, tax, or other professional services. Due to the complex and rapidly evolving nature of charter school development and operations, the Maryland Alliance of Public Charter Schools strongly recommends consultation with expert, professional counsel, the authorizing district which is the Local Education Authority (LEA), as well as the Maryland State Department of Education.

## ***Acknowledgments***

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The **Maryland Charter School Founders' Manual** was originally developed under a grant provided by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) in 2003. Primary responsibility for writing and assembling the manual was vested in Joni Berman, Past President, Maryland Charter School Network; and Jeffrey Lischin, grantwriter and program designer.

The **Maryland Charter School Founder's Manual** draws heavily from the excellent materials created by other charter advocates and support organizations around the United States, including:

- New Jersey Charter School Resource Center
- Northwest Regional Education Laboratory (Portland)
- US Charter Schools
- The Foundation Center
- The Massachusetts Charter School Handbook
- Illinois Charter School Developers' Handbook
- Alliance for NonProfit Management
- Internet Nonprofit Center Document Library (Evergreen State Society, Seattle)

## ***Copyright and Attributions***

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## *Chapter One*

# **Introduction to Charter Schools**

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### ***What is a Charter School?***<sup>1</sup>

Charter schools are public schools, financed with public dollars. They must accept students on a nondiscriminatory basis and are fully accountable to public oversight. In fact, they are more accountable than traditional public schools. Charter schools are examined through financial audits and academic monitoring. If they fail to meet their stated goals, they can be closed.

Charter schools allow their creators and staff to be highly innovative with their curriculum and educational design. The essential philosophy driving the charter school movement is that there is a tradeoff in creating a charter school – specifically, in exchange for greater freedom, the charter school agrees to greater accountability.

Charter schools provide educational models for the broader public school system. As part of a school district’s portfolio of school choices for families, charters can help a district serve its diverse population. Best practices in high-performing charter schools can be examined and adopted by other schools in the district.

A charter school operates under a contract—the “charter”—with an educational or government entity. In Maryland, that entity is the Local Board of Education (local school district). The local board is responsible for fiscal and academic oversight of the school. The contract spells out the school’s academic performance goals and other areas of operation.

Charter schools are subject to strict accountability. A charter school is held to its charter agreement with the district with clear standards for performance, governance and

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<sup>1</sup> The appendices at the back of this manual contain useful information on charter schools including legislation, sample mission and vision statements, and non-regulatory guidance.

financial management. Charter school students take the same statewide student achievement exams, and charter schools are subject to the same safety, health, civil rights and special education regulations as regular district schools. The school is evaluated for renewal at the end of each five year term, and can be closed at that time if not performing as promised.

Charter schools have three distinguishing characteristics:

1. They are public schools, funded with public dollars and fully accountable to public oversight.
2. They are created by the staff of a public school, a parent or guardian of a student who attends a public school in the county; a nonsectarian nonprofit entity; a nonsectarian institution of higher education in the state; or any combination of persons specified above.
3. They foster competition, which may improve education for all children.

To gain and maintain charter renewal, the schools must prove that their students have achieved the educational skills specified in the contract. Students are required to take all mandated state and local tests and are required to meet the higher standards that are currently being implemented.

The charter concept invites innovation while demanding results.

“The intention of most charter school legislation is to: <sup>2</sup>

- Increase opportunities for learning and access to quality education for all students
- Create choice for parents and students within the public school system
- Provide a system of accountability for results in public education
- Encourage innovative teaching practices
- Create new professional opportunities for teachers
- Encourage community and parent involvement in public education
- Leverage improved public education broadly—“Funds received by charter public schools are taxpayer dollars that support students who are residents of local school districts. These funds are expended regardless of whether the students attend charter public schools or traditional public schools.”

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.uscharterschools.org>

Under current Maryland law (see Appendix A), “a county board shall disburse to a public charter school, an amount of county, state, and federal money for elementary, middle, and secondary students that is commensurate with the amount disbursed to other public schools in the local jurisdiction.”<sup>3</sup> Facilities funding is central to one of the most serious barriers faced by charter schools founders – finding and renovating a suitable facility – a challenge discussed in greater detail in Chapter Seven, Facilities.

Charter schools may be new or may be conversions of existing public schools. In Maryland, both a new and conversion charter must be authorized by a local school district. Conversion charters can be created by converting existing public schools to charter school status with majority support from certified teachers, parents and guardians, and a vote by the local school board. This handbook focuses on the development of new schools, rather than conversion of existing schools. Many of the steps are similar, but if you are interested in converting an existing school, we recommend that you carefully review the charter law with respect to conversions and contact MAPCS and the local school district to discuss the process of converting to charter status.

A frequently heard concept among charter school leaders is the issue of choice. Charter schools are often described as being part of the “school choice movement.” There is a degree of controversy as to how this is described and what it stands for. This manual takes no position on the debate, other than the belief that all children are entitled to a high quality education, and that it is our intent to assist public educators who strive to provide it. This manual seeks not to debate the virtues of charter schools versus traditional public schools, magnet schools, private schools, etc. Instead, it seeks to be a resource for those who see the pathway to academic achievement passing through the doors of a charter school.

Charter schools in Maryland must be organized as nonprofit corporations or other discrete, legal, non-profit entit[ies] authorized by the state of Maryland. During the design phase, a new charter can become a nonprofit by forming a board of directors of at

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<sup>3</sup> SB 595



least three people and filing Articles of Incorporation with the Maryland Secretary of State. In addition, most charter schools apply for federal 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status to assist them in fundraising from foundations, corporations and individuals. This status allows funders to make tax-deductible donations to the organization. Most foundations will not issue grants to organizations that do not have 501(c)(3) status. Holding this status also may allow an organization to be exempt from paying income taxes. Note that additional steps are required to gain many of the benefits of tax-exempt status. Some charter school developers organize the charter school through an existing nonprofit organization. Even in these cases, it may be in your best interest to establish a new nonprofit or at least an independent board that is associated with the existing group but is specifically created to operate the charter school.

### ***The Maryland Alliance of Public Charter Schools***<sup>4</sup>

The Maryland Alliance of Public Charter Schools (MAPCS) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit statewide organization whose mission is to promote and serve the Maryland charter school movement. No other organization in the state is committed to this singular focus.

MAPCS supports educational reform and innovation by helping charter school organizers work through the challenges of designing and operating a public charter school. MAPCS offers the following:

1. Administers a clearinghouse of charter school information and resources;
2. Supports the development and operation of these new public schools; and
3. Functions as the public voice for the Maryland charter school community.

The only statewide organization serving the Maryland charter school community, MAPCS provides information and assistance to all stakeholders of public education,

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<sup>4</sup> <https://mdcharterschools.org>

including families, educators, policy makers, authorizers, community leaders, businesses, and the media.

MAPCS nurtures potential charter school founders with resources and ideas, connecting them to other charter school educators across the state. As founders develop their charter schools, they will find essential technical assistance through MAPCS. Since state-enabling legislation was signed in May, 2003, MAPCS and its predecessor organization MAPCS have been working with chartering authorities to facilitate implementation of the law.

MAPCS promotes Maryland charter schools by serving as their public voice, through networking, education, advocacy, and public relations. All of MAPCS efforts are aimed at ensuring that charter schools are supported with the necessary resources to be successful. As charter schools succeed, they offer our best opportunity to reform the delivery of all public education in Maryland.

Maryland children deserve the best – we must provide our children with an excellent education. We need to raise expectations so that Maryland public education exceeds minimum standards as we educate our children. Charter schools provide the best means of providing an excellent education immediately.

### ***How to Decide if You Should Create a Charter School***

“People establish charter schools for a variety of reasons. The founders generally fall into three groups: grassroots organizations or parents, teachers and community members; entrepreneurs; or existing schools converting to charter status. According to the first-year report of the National Study of Charter Schools, the six reasons charter schools are created are:<sup>5</sup>

- To advance an educational vision
- To have more autonomy over organizational, personnel, or governance matters
- Serve a special population

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.uscharterschools.org/>

- For financial reasons
- To engender parent involvement and ownership
- To attract students and parents.”

There are many types of founders and founding groups in the charter school movement. Some are parents seeking a better education for their children. Some are educators seeking to realize a dream of more effective education, a superior learning environment, a vision for educational innovation, and/or a better place of employment. Some are community leaders seeking better education for the community’s children, community economic development, or hope for distressed neighborhoods. Some are organizations such as colleges, museums, Community Development Corporations, or social service organizations seeking to build on their missions/visions by creating new and improved educational institutions. Many are combinations of these groups. This list is clearly not all-inclusive.

## ***Overview of the Design Process***

Before you begin reading about the tasks of school design and charter application, it’s useful to see an overview of the entire charter school design process. You can find an overview of the charter school design process in Appendix B- Charter School Development Roadmap. This should give you an idea of what needs to happen—and in an approximate order. Each charter school design team will need to develop its own workplan and schedule, based on the time and skill of its members. However, we estimate that it takes 9–18 months to develop a strong charter school proposal, with another 8–12 months needed as a “planning year” after the charter is approved but before the school is opened. In addition, in the case of an appeal to the State Board of education will add an additional 120 days to the process. Charter schools have been established in shorter timeframes, but teams should allow at least 20 months and, ideally, 30 months between the decision to create a school and school opening.

## ***Founders Start with a Dream***

If you are considering your role as a founder, here are some of the roles ahead of you.

## **Founders:**

- Are a small committed group who move the charter school from a shared educational dream to a shared educational reality
- Work together to plan for the charter school and complete the charter school application
- May become staff or board members of the charter school once it is in operation. Staff members are paid employees and should not be voting board members. Some staff may be ex officio (non-voting) board members.
- Need to be willing to offer or learn needed expertise (beyond sharing a common educational vision for their schools) including, but not limited to:
  - Reading and understanding the state charter school law;
  - Following and/or developing the charter application;
  - Writing the charter application;
  - Educational law and legal issues;
  - Marketing and recruiting a constituency;
  - Dealing with the media, and community relations;
  - Identifying and obtaining human and financial resources;
  - Real estate and facilities planning and management;
  - Educational assessment and evaluation;
  - Leadership, governance, and management issues;
  - Public communication and media relations;
  - Other areas as they apply to the school's situation.

At the heart of the founders' dream is often an underlying theme that serves as the backbone of their educational vision. Charter school themes have been art-infused, environmentally-focused, character-education grounded, back-to-basics, progressive education focused, or about special populations. Some themes follow proven models such as KIPP Academies and Job Corps. Other charter schools seek to offer mainstream best practices finding their uniqueness in a small highly personalized learning community. MAPCS takes no position on which themes or models are best. Experience has shown that there are many pathways to educational excellence. What is most critical is that the founding group achieves clarity on its desires and purposes, and then implements them in a highly effective manner.

## ***Founders' First Step – The Core Questions***

A critical first step for ALL founders is to ask yourselves:

- Who are we?
- Why are we considering starting a charter school?
- What might our school's mission look like?
- What is our vision for what our school will look like in 5 Years? In 10 Years?

We talked about the “*Who*” question in the previous section about Founders and their dream. Indeed, founders must also ask themselves a lot of “*What, When, Where and How*” questions – and perhaps most critically “*Why*.”

Most founders have truly idealistic answers to the Why question and many have some very pragmatic answers. Creating a charter school is one of the most inspiring and rewarding activities one can work toward. There are few activities more meaningful than taking responsibility for the education and personal development of children— ***Our Children are Our Destiny***.

The process for defining Mission and Vision will be discussed in detail later in this manual. However, we think it is never too soon for you to start thinking about your mission and vision.

**Mission** is a broad concept. Mission is described by a mission statement and includes three major concepts: the purpose, the "business" an organization engages in to achieve this purpose, and a statement of values guiding the accomplishment of the mission.

**Vision** is the most global concept. A vision is literally a mental image of the successful accomplishment of the mission, and thus the purpose of the charter school.

Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "I have a dream," and what followed was a vision that changed a nation. That famous speech is a dramatic example of the power that can be generated by a person who communicates a compelling vision of the future.

The following questions may help you think about the choices you are making.

- Does your local district offer any programs similar to the one you are interested in developing? Have you tried to implement your ideas through other channels?
- What are you interested in? Why is that your focus? Who else is doing it? How would creating a charter school allow you to achieve your goals?
- Is your school design plan consistent with the Maryland Charter School Law and related statutes? Are there any legal, operational, or process barriers to pursuing the charter route? How might you address these?
- Can you foresee any disadvantages to the charter route? What compromises might you have to make as a charter school to actualize your educational vision and design as a charter school?
- What factors will make your school innovative and successful?
- If you are a parent, do you want to start this new school for your own children?
  - How much time and energy are you willing to commit to this project?
  - Do you realize that in addition to the education part, you need to learn to prepare and stick to a budget, fund-raise, do payroll, buy insurance, deal with a landlord, and numerous other non-pedagogical issues?
  - Are you prepared to be a fund-raiser, even at the very beginning?

Now take a moment to consider your answers. We said that we are seeking to help you think realistically. Here are some answers to the Why question which suggest that you might need to try another approach to reach your educational vision.

**Some inappropriate answers include:**

- If you want total ownership of the school, forget it – a charter school is a PUBLIC school governed by a board and answerable to the state. A founder can become the board president or the school's lead administrator, but not both.
- If you are looking to make a lot of money, forget it – as a PUBLIC school there is no potential for monetary “profit,” salaries must be commensurate with prevailing standards, and subcontracting is subject to statutory regulation.
- If you think that creating a charter school is going to be easy, forget it – creating an educational institution is a daunting task requiring a great deal of resources, dedication, and hard work. It is NOT for the faint of heart.

## ***A Critical Second Step is to Examine Capacity***

You probably picked up this manual with a full set of ideas about your dreams for a charter school. By now, we hope that you are beginning to get a sense of the responsibility ahead of you. In putting your team together, you will need to have the capacity to address many different skills.

**Educational Capacity:** A charter school needs to be a place for education with a trained, supervised, certified educational staff. It needs to have a curriculum that is aligned with the Common Core State Standards. It needs a pedagogical approach that is compatible with its mission, vision, students, and community. It's critical to include at least one experienced educator on your design team.

**Governance Capacity:** A charter school needs to create a *board* with all its procedures and a *partnership* among board, staff, parents, students, and community.

**Business Capacity:** This is to be understood both as creating a fiscal system and as operating an entrepreneurial entity. As a business, if the school does not achieve fiscal stability it will close, regardless of how good a job it does of educating its students.

As a business, it will close if it

- Fails to market its product—educating students;
- Fails to meet its sales targets—enrollment;
- Fails to produce a quality product—educational outcomes; and
- If it fails to satisfy its customers—parents and students.

**Talent Capacity:** Leadership, skills in education, governance, fiscal management, marketing, legal issues, real estate, organizing, marketing, fund raising, and strategic planning, as well as the ability to find, acquire and organize all this talent.

**Real Estate Capacity:** A major reason why approved charter schools fail to open is the inability to secure and prepare a proper facility.

**Leadership Capacity:** Leadership is a somewhat nebulous concept. We all use the term, but frequently mean different things. Some lead through example or inspiration,

others through their authority, others as facilitators. Regardless of approach, there can be easy agreement that in starting a charter school founders must have, or acquire, effective leadership. Leadership must work on multiple levels – organizing, administering, accomplishing – and must evolve over time as the school matures from a concept/dream into an applicant, a startup process, a functioning school, and a growing/thriving school. Leadership must exist among founders, board, staff, and stakeholders. Ultimately, it is the quality of a charter school’s leadership that will most determine its success.

### **Learn from successful charters**

There is no reason to reinvent the wheel. We recommend that you become familiar with existing charter schools models and the information and resources available to inform charter school development. Learn about the charter schools in Maryland and visit them, you can find a list of all of the charters schools in Maryland on the MAPCS website. Research the surrounding areas, such as Washington DC, Philadelphia and New York-- all have a large number of high performing charter schools and there are sure to be some that have elements that you are seeking to put into your charter school. Charter school developers can benefit from the lessons learned from both successful and unsuccessful charter school operators.

### ***Elements of Charter School Failure and Success***

An examination of **why charter schools fail** after opening will reveal three critical reasons:

1. Poor fiscal management.
2. Poor educational outcomes.
3. Dissatisfied parents leads to lack of enrollment.

#### **Charter schools that succeed:**

1. Achieve positive educational outcomes,
2. Provide competent fiscal management, and
4. Build a strong bond with their stakeholders.

They do this in large part because of excellence in **leadership** – leadership among founders, board, and staff. They do this because they did their homework, defined a



strong mission/vision, and had a quality plan for developing and implementing their school. They build community support, identify sufficient resources, and work very, very hard.

You may question why this section includes as much dissuasion as it has encouragement. Sadly, many people who come to MAPCS with a hope and a dream of starting a charter school do NOT have the capacity, realistic vision, or appropriate purposes to actualize that dream. This manual seeks to encourage realistic thinking.

Starting a charter school is a truly daunting task. If you read this manual and see correctness of fit between yourself (selves) and becoming a founder(s), then MAPCS seeks to join you on your journey as allies, partners, and resources. If not, then perhaps you can join other founders, work for a charter school, volunteer with a charter school.

There is a place for all of us in our children's education. We need to find that place and embrace it. Most of the experts writing this manual are NOT themselves directly operating charter schools. We are technical assistance providers, consultants, educators, former founders, former board members, former staff of authorizers, etc. We have found our place in providing assistance, guidance, and resources to those who create and operate charter schools. An honest self-appraisal will help you find your ideal role.

Whether you are a parent, child, or founder, it is our wish to be of assistance, and we offer our heartfelt congratulations on taking the time to pursue this most noble of undertakings.

***“Parents and teachers choose charter schools primarily for educational reasons – high academic standards, small class size, innovative approaches, or educational philosophies in line with their own. Some also have chosen charter schools for their small size and associated safety (charter schools serve an average of 250 students).”<sup>6</sup>***

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.uscharterschools.org>

## **Chapter One – Lessons Learned**

The Illinois Charter School Developers' Handbook describes the following founders' "To Do List" for starting a charter school:

- Familiarize yourself with Charter Schools Law (see Appendix) and begin to think about the items that must be addressed in your charter school proposal according to the law.
- Build a team of like-minded individuals who can work with you to found the school.
- Write a mission statement.
- Complete a Needs Assessment
- Financial planning
- Identify a suitable facility and a backup plan.
- Identify short-term sources of revenue for consultants, lawyers, and realtors.
- Build a stable, effective governance structure.
- Recruit a committed Board of Directors with diverse expertise. You may want representatives from community organizations, businesses, the local district, higher education, and future staff, parents, and students. Board members should have expertise in one or more of the following areas:
  - Curriculum and instruction
  - Standards and assessment
  - Special education
  - Management and leadership
  - Financial management
  - Legal issues
  - Community/public relations
  - Parent relations
  - Staffing and personnel
  - Organization and board development
  - Facilities and real estate
  - Fundraising
- Develop a plan for ongoing participation of parents, teachers, and the broader community.
- Review charter school applications- they are public documents and can be accessed by contacting the charter school or the authorizing district.
- Write and submit the application.
  - Ensure that your draft accountability plan is clear and meaningful, and that it will serve as a road map for operations and evaluation of your school.
  - Make sure the budgeting and accounting sections of your application are clear and realistic and are aligned with your critical school design elements.
  - Develop comprehensive startup and five-year projected operating budgets based on anticipated enrollment.
  - Develop financial management systems and internal accounting procedures.
- Schedule ongoing committee work.
- Continue community outreach and marketing efforts.
- Identify and cultivate potential community partners and other resources for the school.

## *Chapter Two*

# ***Introduction to the Strategic Planning Approach***

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## ***What is Strategic Planning?***<sup>7</sup>

Strategic planning is essential in designing, applying for, starting and operating a charter school. Say it again. Strategic planning is essential. In the chapters that follow, all of our advice is filtered through a perspective of strategic planning. The process of writing your charter school application is best undertaken as a strategic planning process.

The best frame of mind for proper planning includes an appreciation of the need to achieve “wholeness” in your process. That is, see every aspect of your application and implementation process in the context of how they come together to achieve a comprehensive entity. Beware the danger of viewing plan sections in isolation. Remember that a school is a living, breathing organism that only lives if all its parts function together.

Strategic planning is a management tool used to help you do a better job—to focus your energy, to ensure that stakeholders are working toward the same goals, and to assess and adjust the charter school's direction in response to a changing environment. It is a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what a charter school is, what it does, and why it does it, with a focus on the future. If you have a strategic plan, you have a strong framework for making decisions. Strategic planning, as described in this chapter, focuses on the needs of a founding group. The methods can be readily modified to be repeated continuously as the charter school opens for students and matures over time. The need for planning never ends – it does, however, evolve with changing circumstances.

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<sup>7</sup> Alliance for NonProfit Management with material adapted from “Bryson's Strategic Planning in Public and Nonprofit Organizations.”

## ***Characteristics of the Planning Process***

### **The process is about planning—**

It involves intentionally setting goals (i.e., choosing a desired future) and developing an approach to achieving those goals.

### **The process is disciplined—**

It calls for a certain order and pattern to keep it focused and productive. It raises questions that help you examine experience, test assumptions, gather and incorporate information about the present; and anticipate the environment in which the charter school will operate in the future.

### **Finally, the process is about fundamental decisions and actions—**

You will make choices to answer the questions mentioned before. It is ultimately no more, and no less, than a set of decisions about what to do, why to do it, and how to do it.

Because it is impossible to do everything that needs to be done, strategic planning prioritizes decisions and actions— Indeed, much of the strategy lies in making tough decisions.

Strategic planning can be complex, challenging, and even messy. This is because you are working with real people who care deeply about their objective. So, prepare yourself for an investment that takes time, intentionality, and resolve.

- **Time:** the organization must ensure that the plan is truly an informed document, not just a guess or gut reaction.
- **Intentionality:** planning for the sake of planning is a waste of time. Plan in order to implement new ideas and change the course of events.
- **Resolve:** no strategic plan can succeed without the future investment of resources, both people and money. You cannot just hope that things will turn out a certain way; you must also add the right ingredients to pave the way.

## ***Do We Have to Do It All?***

The information that follows assumes a commitment to a full planning process. There is no question that start up organizations will find this difficult. At minimum, commit to take some planning steps, even if baby steps. Work to create a planning culture in your charter school, not to get it precisely right the first time. Some planning is better than none at all. In the end, “enough planning” is when the founders understand and have consensus about a clear direction.

## ***Preparing the Team for a Successful Planning Process***

We are spending a lot of time on the what and the why of strategic planning—before we get to the how—because we truly believe that planning is critical to success. Getting your team ready for planning is as important as the actual plan and will help smooth the way to a successful result.

1. Get agreement among founders (and later include staff and board) that strategic planning is an ongoing process. It has no ending point – you will be either gathering input/data, setting priorities, implementing priorities, or monitoring progress on goals forever. This mindset gets rid of the notion that planning is a temporary nuisance. It is an ongoing part of good governance and good management.
2. Decide whether you will go it alone or get outside help from a planning consultant. Either method is acceptable but carries different significance for the school. Going it alone means you will need to be vigilant that you don’t stay too long on any one part of the process. Going it alone requires a strong and active strategic planning group made up of board and staff. Make deadlines stick as much as possible.

3. Clarify the roles early in the process.
4. Make your planning mission focused. Test every idea against the mission to ensure it fits.
5. Set priorities – the road to a successful charter school is exhausting. Commit to achieve what is necessary for success. Reserve the right to build upon a strong foundation. Avoid over committing and letting your enthusiasm run away with you. You have a school to create and limited time/resources.
6. Do not limit data gathering only from sources that are familiar. Talk to other founders, existing schools, educators, and community leaders – to everyone with something to add to the discussion. Find out your weaknesses before they ruin any strategic future you choose.

### ***Strategic Thinking and Strategic Management***

At the beginning, good management will be determined by “did we make it through today with no new or unsolvable crises?” Startup charter schools require a get-it-done, get-it-fixed attitude toward management. Management is always “the art of muddling through.” There are never perfect answers to difficult questions. There is no crystal ball that spells out the future – there is only the ability to make the best of what is currently available including picking the best of several less-than-ideal solutions.

That’s today. Tomorrow you will be up and running at full speed. Tomorrow the stakes will be higher and more people will be counting on the organization to change lives in a meaningful way. Some level of anticipating and responding to future needs will be essential to long-term success. Good managers tolerate mistakes, great managers encourage taking risks and learning from the experience. Strategic planning is a form of risk taking. At its best, it is an informed and inclusive tool that shares the burden and shares the benefits. You will still be “muddling through” but there will be a focus and direction that makes it worth the effort. Winging it will no longer be an option, so start investing in some level of strategic planning today.

Strategic planning supports strategic thinking and leads to strategic management. Strategic thinking means asking, "are we doing the right thing?" and using three key requirements: a definite purpose; an understanding of the environment, particularly of the forces that affect or impede the fulfillment of that purpose; and creativity in developing effective responses to those forces.

Strategic management is the application of strategic thinking to the job of leading a charter school. Dr. Jagdish Sheth, a respected authority on marketing and strategic planning, provides the following framework for understanding strategic management:

- Formulation of the charter school's mission in light of changing external factors such as regulation, competition, technology, and customers;
- Development of a strategy to achieve the mission;
- Creation of an organizational structure that will deploy resources to successfully carry out its strategy.

Strategic management is adaptive and keeps a charter school relevant. Strategic planning is not a substitute for the exercise of judgment by leadership. Strategic planning does not flow smoothly from one step to the next. It is a creative, dynamic process.

The Support Centers of America has adopted the following guiding principles to support its consulting practice in strategic planning. Successful strategic planning:

- Leads to action;
- Builds a shared vision that is values-based;
- Is an inclusive, participatory process in which founders, board and staff take ownership;
- Accepts accountability to the community;
- Is externally focused and sensitive to the charter school's environment;
- Is based on quality data;
- Requires an openness to questioning the status quo;
- Is a key part of effective management.

## ***Managing the Process***

The planning process needs to be managed. It is important to make sure that everyone is operating from the same set of expectations and knowledge base. Large groups of individuals are not conducive to the creation of documents and quick decision-making. They are more suited to producing feedback, ideas, and suggestions about existing documents or modifying draft decisions after the initial analysis has been completed. A planning committee is one tool that is used to focus the energies and responsibilities of the process. The planning committee spearheads the process serving as the quarterback of the team, but it does not take sole responsibility for all decision-making and all the nuts and bolts work.

A planning process should be designed to include all founders and as many other stakeholders as is practical.

### **An inclusive process:**

- Helps to build both internal and external enthusiasm and commitment to the charter school. Individuals take on ownership of the goals and efforts to achieve the stated outcomes;
- Incorporates a level of objectivity into the process;
- Develops foundations for future working relationships;
- Develops uniformity of purpose among all stakeholders;
- Establishes a continual information exchange among key stakeholders.

### **The planning committee should be:**

- Limited to no more than five to seven individuals;
- A combination of visionaries (individuals who see what the charter school can be) and "actionaries" (those who ask what resources will support and ensure that the projected goals and tasks are realistic);
- A group of individuals who has formal or informal power and the respect of the rest of the founders;
- A combination of future board and staff members, if possible, including the individual who will write the final plan.



## ***The Plan: A How-To***

### ***Strategic Planning Model***

We are providing a brief “how-to” because of the importance we place on strategic planning as the foundation of your charter school plan. You may also want to visit your local library to find additional information on strategic planning.

The five general steps are:

1. Readiness
2. Articulating the Mission, Vision and Values
3. Situation Assessment
4. Developing Strategies, Goals and Objectives
5. Completing the Written Plan

### ***Step One – Readiness***

Founders must first assess if they are ready. Readiness implies leaders that are truly committed to the effort, and able to devote the necessary time and attention. Founders that determine they are ready to begin strategic planning must perform five tasks to pave the way for an organized process:

- Identify specific issues or choices that the planning process should address;
- Clarify roles (who does what in the process);
- Create a Planning Committee;
- Develop an organizational profile;
- Identify the information that must be collected to help make sound decisions.

The product developed at the end of the Step One is a Work Plan.

## ***Step Two - Articulating Mission, Vision and Values***

A mission statement is like an introductory paragraph. It lets the reader know where the charter school is going; and it also shows that the charter school knows where it is going. A mission statement must communicate the essence of the charter school to the reader. The ability to articulate mission indicates focus and purposefulness.

A mission statement typically describes a charter school's

- **Purpose** – why create the charter school, and what it seeks to accomplish.
- **Business** – the main methods through which the charter school will fulfill this purpose.
- **Values** – the principles or beliefs that guide the charter school as it pursues its purpose.

Whereas the mission statement summarizes the what, how, and why of a charter school's work, a vision statement presents an image of what success will look like. With mission and vision statements in hand, a charter school's founders have taken an important step towards creating a shared, coherent idea of what type of school it is strategically planning.

### **How to Write a Mission Statement**

There is no formula for finding the wording that best expresses the collective intention of your charter school. It can be drafted by one person alone or after input gathered from all the founders. The most important issue is that there is consensus on the answers to the questions used in developing the mission statement.

One approach is to define and discuss these questions and find out where the areas of consensus are and where there are differences. There is a "process" benefit to hashing over a mission statement as well. In the course of discussion and debate, founders are introduced to nuances of a charter school's mission and environment. As a result, the group will have confidence that the mission statement, which emerges, is genuinely an articulation of commonly held ideas.

Groups are good at many things, but one of them is not writing. Have group discussions about big ideas and concepts and then let one or two individuals draft and redraft the wording before submitting a reworked version for the group to respond to. It may help to circulate the draft mission statement to other stakeholders. Mix facts with passion, humanity, and an eye on the big picture. Keep refining the mission statement until you have a version that stakeholders can actively support.

### **Now to the Values**

Values are beliefs that your charter school's founders hold in common and endeavor to put into practice. The values guide your founders in performing their work. Examples of values include: a commitment to excellent education, innovation, diversity, creativity, honesty, integrity, and so on. Marvin Weisbord writes in *Productive Workplaces*<sup>8</sup> that values come alive only when people are involved in doing important tasks. Ideally, an individual's personal values will align with the spoken and unspoken values of the charter school. By developing clear consensus on the values of the charter school, founders have a chance to contribute to the articulation of these values, as well as to evaluate how well their personal values and motivation match those of the charter school.

### **Creating the Vision – The Fun Part of the Process**

A vision is literally a mental image of the successful accomplishment of the mission, and thus the purpose of the charter school. You might say that a vision is a ***guiding image of success formed in terms of a contribution to society***. If a strategic plan is the "blueprint" for a charter school's work, then the vision is the "artist's rendering" of the achievement of that plan.

#### **Vision:**

- Is a common or shared understanding of what it means to learn and be educated.

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<sup>8</sup> Weisbord, Martin (1991). Productive Workplaces: Organizing and Managing for Dignity, Meaning, and Community (The Jossey-Bass Management Series) Pfeiffer (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)

- Describes the dream that motivates you and others to create a charter school.
- Describes the outcomes of an education at the proposed school, what students know when they graduate, the role teachers play in the school, the role of the proposed school in the community it will serve.

**A Vision Also:**

- Provides a solid base upon which to build a successful application.
- Is easy to share with others.
- Describes the clear sense of purpose shared by parents, students, teachers, staff, and the schools board of directors.
- Motivates the school's decision-makers in all aspects of planning and operations;
- Prevents misunderstandings.
- May be used as a guide for decision-making.
- May provide a set of criteria by which to measure a school's progress toward its defined purposes.
- Gives potential employees, prospective students, and their parents clear indications of how they will be treated and what will be expected of them.
- Explains to chartering authorities and the community at large how this charter school is distinctive from other public schools.

There is one universal rule of planning. You will never be greater than the vision that guides you. No Olympic athlete ever got to the Olympics by mistake—a compelling vision of his or her stellar performance inevitably guides all the sweat and tears for many years. The vision statement should require the organization's members to stretch their expectations, aspirations, and performance. Without that powerful, attractive, valuable vision, why bother?

A vision statement should be realistic and credible, well articulated and easily understood, appropriate, ambitious, and responsive to change. It should orient the group's energies and serve as a guide to action. It should be consistent with the organization's values. In short, a vision should challenge your team to achieve its mission. Creating a vision begins with and relies heavily on intuition and dreaming. You may brainstorm what you would like to accomplish. Talk about the values that you share in pursuing that vision. Different ideas do not have to be a problem. People can spur each other on to more daring and valuable dreams and visions—dreams of changing the world that they are willing to work hard for.

An exercise founders may use in defining vision is breaking into small groups, agree on a rough time frame, say five to ten years, ask people to think about the following questions: How do you want your community to be different? What role do you want your charter school to play in your community? What will success look like? Then ask each group to come up with a metaphor for your charter school, and to draw a picture of success:

**"Our charter school will be like ... a mariachi band - all playing the same music together, or like a train - pulling important cargo and laying the track as we go, or.... "**

The value of metaphors is that people get to stretch their minds and experiment with different ways of thinking about what success means to them. Finally, have all the groups share their pictures of success with each other. One person should facilitate the discussion and help the groups discuss what they mean and what they hope for. Look for areas of agreement, as well as different ideas that emerge. The goal is to find language and imagery that your founders can relate to as their vision for success.

At the end of Step Two, a draft mission statement, and a draft vision statement is developed. Appendix C offers several examples from new and operating Maryland charter schools.

### ***Step Three - Assessing the Situation***

#### **Assessing the Need for a Charter School<sup>9</sup>**

Before you delve too deeply into the process of creating a new charter school, you should make sure that the time and place are right for such a school. A solid assessment includes determining where you will create a charter school and in gaining an understanding of the education needs within that area. We suggest that you develop a

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<sup>9</sup> Section modified from Paving a New Path, INCS

formal, written needs assessment at the beginning of the charter school design process. The New York Charter School Center defines a needs assessment as a “comprehensive evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of targeted student populations with the expressed goal of determining how best to build on strengths and improve areas of weakness in order to enhance student learning.” A comprehensive needs assessment:

- Is based on a clearly presented, valid, empirical data
- Includes a variety of sources of information (e.g., Maryland Report Card for standardized test results, census bureau data, teachers, parents, students, administrators)
- Is based on adequate sample of individuals and groups
- Interprets the data to identify strengths and weaknesses
- Presents the underlying causes of the strengths and weaknesses
- Sets priorities for needs in a manner that addresses student learning

**Guiding questions for creating a needs assessment:**

- What are students’ academic strengths and weaknesses as suggested by the data?
- What patterns and trends emerge from the data?
- How well are the schools supporting students’ social and emotional needs?
- What gaps exist in the district? (e.g., an arts program, a science and technology program, a different pedagogical approach, a strong middle-school program, a college-prep program, or a program designed to serve high-school dropouts)
- What needs does the district or community have? (Is the district growing rapidly? Is the district meeting “Adequate Yearly Progress” under No Child Left Behind?)
- What are the demographic characteristics of the community? (e.g., neighborhood income levels, college attainment results among adults, and employment rate)
- What is the district currently doing well?
- What resources exist in the district or community to support schools? (e.g., available facilities, potential partners such as institutions of higher education, community-based organizations or engaged businesses)

**Items to include in a needs assessment:**

- Analysis of existing schools and district
  - Feeder-schools
  - Financial health and management
  - School and classroom environment
  - Curriculum, instruction and assessment
  - Administrative leadership
  - School governance
  - Staff-development learning

- Family-school relations
- Student test performance--including performance of students in various sub-groups (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, English language learners, and students with disabilities)
- Additional measures of achievement--attendance, dropout rates, college enrollment and persistence rates, workforce readiness measures.
- Analysis of needs met and unmet
  - Subgroups of students--including grades, gender, race/ethnicity, English language learners, and students with disabilities
- Kinds of needs that are unmet--academic, behavioral, social/emotional, college matriculation and persistence

Once founders commit to why the proposed charter school will exist and what it will do, they must take a clear-eyed look at its current situation. Strategic planning, thinking, and management include an awareness of resources and an eye to the future environment. Situation assessment means obtaining information about the founders' strengths, weaknesses, and performance—information that will highlight the critical issues that they face and that its strategic plan must address. These could include a variety of primary concerns, such as funding issues, opportunities, regulations, needs in the targeted student population. The point is to understand and evaluate the critical issues around which to organize the strategic plan.

You may start your assessment with what is called an environmental scan. Then, it is often helpful to take these results and organize them using a **SWOT** (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) format. At the end, you will review the critical issues against your mission and vision in order to evaluate the challenges ahead.

An **environmental scan** is a first assessment step to determine priorities for new strategic initiatives (such as starting a charter school) and mission enhancement. This data collection can be done through literature research, individual/group interview, focus groups, or surveys. You might use more than one method to collect information. Let's take a quick look at the value and limitations of each method.

- **Literature Review** is important for gathering commonly gathered data like employment statistics, census data, etc. It may also provide cutting edge ideas in

the field and can be used to educate board members on future alternative and trends in the field.

An example would be reviewing recent research on the success or failure of specific curricula in meeting the needs of students similar to those in your community.

- **Interviews** are time consuming both to schedule and to complete. A preset list of a few questions (5-6 at most) is essential and must be used consistently with all interviewees in order to have value. The advantage to conducting individual interviews occurs when those being interviewed are unavailable for other sorts of data collection and/or require confidentiality in order to give open and honest responses. In those cases, a third party is required and the responses should be grouped (all funders, all competitors etc.) so that individual information cannot be identified.

An example would be to meet with community leaders, such as the head of the planning board, to find out how they feel about the place of charter schools or the strength of the public school system in town.

- **Focus Groups** are less time consuming than individual interviews and the discussion is interactive with other group members. While still using a consistent set of a few questions, the interaction between members gets to a depth of information not available otherwise. The difficulty is in summarizing the findings of a group process. There is also a tendency for the person running the group to try to respond to questions or defend the organization. This should be avoided at all costs. It will inhibit the participants and may result in less significant findings.

An example would be to talk to a group of prospective parents about their desires and concerns about their own children's education.

- **Surveys** are often seen as the cheapest, least time consuming and easiest way to collect input from key stakeholders. While they are fairly straightforward to use, they have several severe limitations. Response rates are very low (you may not get much more than by using focus groups), the information collected is limited by the response categories in the questions (which may miss important new ideas) and open-ended questions lower the response rate and are hard to summarize.

An example would be a survey of the parents in order to reach more than a handful as in a focus group.



While the environmental scan is a vital part of any planning process, it is also the step where most planning processes break down. Data collection of this sort is hard work and takes a bit of time. Too often organizations lose energy here or take too long to do the job. Set a reasonable time limit and prioritize stakeholders from whom you must get input (i.e., funders, parents, community activists, and donors). Any environmental scan, which exceeds 3 months, is destined to fail.

An alternative to the environmental scan—or a way for the Planning Committee to integrate the result—is to have a one-time planning retreat where founders (and possibly a select group of stakeholders) do their best to brainstorm strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, while prioritizing the results. This approach is used regularly in organizations and has the value of getting the job done quickly. The price for this efficiency is a high risk of missing important input and trends that are not on the group’s radar screen. If you can add results from an environmental scan, the job will be more meaningful.

The **SWOT** technique, a simple and effective vehicle for collecting information, helps focus the process by breaking it down into four broad categories:

- |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>S</b> What are the founders’ <b><u>Strengths</u></b>?</p> <p><b>W</b> What are the founders’ <b><u>Weaknesses</u></b>?</p> <p><b>O</b> What external <b><u>Opportunities</u></b> might move the charter school forward?</p> <p><b>T</b> What external <b><u>Threats</u></b> might prevent the charter school from succeeding?</p> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Evaluating the founders’ general strengths and weaknesses, as well as the strengths and weaknesses specific to each aspect of the charter school’s design/application, typically includes assessments of:

- Founders and potential board member capabilities;
- Quality of design/application;
- Reputation of founders and potential partners;
- Management information and financial systems;

- Facilities and resources, etc.

Successful organizations exploit strengths rather than just focus on weaknesses. In other words, this process is not just about fixing the things that are wrong, but also nurturing what is right.

The same kind of thinking should apply to how founders approach opportunities and threats-- the external trends that influence creating the charter school. These are usually categorized into Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Demographic, and Legal (PESTDL) forces. These external forces can include such circumstances as changing student populations, increased competition, changing regulations, etc. They can either help a charter school move forward (opportunities) or hold a charter school organization back (threats) -- but opportunities that are ignored can become threats, and threats that are dealt with appropriately can be turned into opportunities.

Since SWOT analysis may be your primary means of receiving input from a broad and representative constituency, it is important to include as many stakeholders as possible in this process.

A common and useful approach used during meetings is to brainstorm ideas onto flip charts. After the lists of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats have been recorded, the listed ideas can be grouped into logical topic or issue groups (e.g., all the ideas related to staffing or program development should be grouped together) to make the data easier to present and analyze.

The products of Step Three include a database of quality information that can be used to make decisions and a list of critical issues, which demand a response from the founders.

## ***Step Four - Developing Strategies, Goals, and Objectives***

Once the charter school mission is clear and critical issues identified, it is time to figure out what to do about them: the broad approaches to be taken (strategies), and the general and specific results to be sought (the goals and objectives). Strategies, goals, and objectives may come from individual inspiration, group discussion, formal decision-making techniques—but the bottom line is that, in the end, the leadership agrees on how to address the critical issues. The charter school application is a very helpful document in identifying a list of critical issues to address. It is important that planners are never afraid to go back to an earlier step in the process and take advantage of newly learned insights to create the best possible plan.

A key component of a potential charter school's plan is the evaluation of its design components effectiveness and efficiency. This evaluation will provide data about whether to follow each design element or to develop new ones. Focus on both potential outcomes, or results, and process, or methods. Outcome evaluation looks at whether the charter school will achieve its planned results. Process evaluation looks at internal charter school management, both staff performance and the extent to which the charter school will be successfully implemented. Build the outcome evaluation into your goals and objectives.

The product of Step Four is an outline of the founding group's strategic directions -- the general strategies, long-range goals, and specific objectives of its response to critical issues.

## ***Step Five - Completing the Written Plan***

The mission has been articulated, the critical issues identified, and the goals and strategies agreed upon. This step essentially involves putting all that down on paper. Usually one member of the Planning Committee (or even a planning consultant) will

draft a final planning document and submit it for review to all key decision makers. This is also the time to consult with outside experts such as the Maryland Alliance of Public Charter Schools and leaders of successful charter schools to determine:

- whether the plan is viable;
- whether the founders can accomplishing the goals proposed by the strategic plan;
- to ensure that the plan answers key questions about priorities and directions in sufficient detail to serve as a guide.

Revisions should not be dragged out for months, but action should be taken to answer any important questions that are raised at this step. It would certainly be a mistake to bury conflict at this step just to wrap up the process more quickly; because the conflict, if serious, will inevitably undermine the potency of the strategic directions chosen by the planning committee.

The product of Step Five is a strategic plan!

### ***Standard Format for a Strategic Plan***

A strategic plan is simply a document that summarizes (in about ten pages of written text) why the charter school is being created, what it is trying to accomplish, and how it will go about doing so. Below is an example of a common format for strategic plans, as well as brief descriptions of each component listed, which might help writers organize their thoughts and their material. This is just an example, however-- not the one and only way to go about this task.

#### **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

The final document should include a table of contents. These are the sections commonly included in a strategic plan.

#### **I. Executive Summary**

In one to two pages, this section should summarize the strategic plan. It should reference the mission and vision; highlight the long-range goals (what the charter school is seeking to accomplish); and perhaps, note the process for developing the plan. From this summary, readers should understand what is most important about the organization.

## **II. Mission and Vision Statements**

These statements can stand alone without any introductory text.

## **III. Profile of Founders**

The reader should learn the story of the founders.

## **IV. Critical Issues and Strategies**

The section may be presented as an outline or as a narrative. It should include, at minimum, the tasks necessary to answer the questions in the charter school application. Once the application is complete, repeat process with an emphasis on implementing these elements.

## **V. Charter School Goals and Objectives**

In many ways, the goals and objectives are the heart of the strategic plan. Mission and vision answer the big questions about why the charter school will be created and how it seeks to benefit society, but the goals and objectives are the plan of action—what the charter school intends to do. As such, this section should serve as a useful guide for operational planning and a reference for evaluation.

## **VI. Action Steps to Creating the Charter School**

Develop this section as a guide to achieving the previous two sections.

## **VII. Appendices**

Resources such as possible curricula, this manual, possibly a description of a potential facility; community partners, etc.

## ***Chapter Two – Lessons Learned:*** **The Benefits of Planning**

Why should you consume all the resources that planning requires, a precious commodity for all founders? As a process that eventually defines the direction and activities of the charter school, it can be an overwhelming task. You will benefit both from the planning process, as well as from the final planning document.

Some benefits of a plan include:

- A framework and a clearly defined direction that guides and supports the governance and management of the charter school;
- A uniform vision and purpose that is shared among all stakeholders;
- An increased level of commitment to the charter school and its goals;
- Improved quality of education for students;
- A foundation for fund raising and board development;
- The ability to set priorities and to match resources to opportunities;
- The ability to deal with risks from the external environment.

### **Lessons Learned: After All the Work -- Use the Plan**

- Actively use the plan as to manage the design, application writing, and startup processes.
- Actively use the plan for short-term guidance and decision making.
- Formalize the usage of the plan into day-to-day activities. For example, a group or organization may read the mission statement at the opening of every business meeting to remind them of their focus and purpose.
- Organize the work of starting your charter school in the context of the plan.
- Establish operational goals and activities within the context of the strategic plan (e.g., include goals and objectives in decision making).
- Design a system for controlling the process.
- Ensure that there are mechanisms to inform founders on progress.

## *Chapter Three*

# **Fundraising – Everyone Gets Involved**

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### ***Introduction***

While you are working on the charter school’s financial plan, you will soon realize that per pupil charter school funding will not meet all of your needs. In any new organization—facing the challenges of securing and readying a facility, developing curriculum, purchasing furniture, books, equipment, etc., and preparing of the school’s educational plans—it can be tempting to just brainstorm fundraising ideas and select those that the founders like best.

This chapter will help founders understand the critical role of the board, individuals as donors, and how to prepare a simple fundraising plan to follow during the course of the year. We hope that this limited introduction to fundraising will help you overcome the barriers to getting started.

### ***Where the Money Comes From***

When you first consider fundraising, the tendency is to begin making suggestions and trying whichever activities someone volunteers to tackle. People may say:

- Let’s get a grant;
- Let’s have a fundraising dinner;
- How about a bake sale or yard sale;
- Maybe celebrity X can make a large donation.

A more successful method is to learn about the sources for charitable funds; to assess ideas to set realistic expectations, and to balance level of effort with resources; to develop a plan in order to concentrate your efforts on a few major goals; and finally, to begin a long process of relationship building.

Here are some facts and figures.

The 2016 Giving USA study found that for \$390.5 billion in 2016 contributions:

▪ <b>Individuals gave</b>	<b>72%</b>
▪ Foundations gave	15%
▪ Bequests gave	8%
▪ Corporations gave	5%

Since individual donors are the source of most charitable giving, it pays to focus on finding those people who share your vision for the education of children. Of The total contributions in 2016, education related giving was 15% or nearly \$60 million. As a percent of the Education was In Maryland, citizens have above average incomes, giving about 3% of income to charity with education as a high priority. Education also ranks among the top giving areas for Maryland foundations.

Some other reasons to focus attention on individual donors are that:

- Donations from individuals are most likely to be unrestricted;
- Individuals are most likely to support startup organizations – to respond to enthusiastic personal appeal;
- Fundraising among individuals builds a base of support within the community.

### ***Who Will Do the Fundraising for a New Charter School?***

The charter application process begins with a vision for education. However, the task requires founders to build an organization, an institution. All stakeholders play a role in fundraising for success, the founders, the board, the staff, and the parents. The complete school community works to build its presence in the larger community.



WHO	FUNDRAISING ROLE	STRENGTH
Founders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sign off on grant applications</li> <li>• Attend key meetings with potential donors</li> <li>• Function as spokesperson</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have the vision</li> <li>• Know details – wrote the charter application</li> <li>• Are credible educators or community leaders</li> </ul>
Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write foundation and corporate grants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have knowledge of program details and education philosophy</li> </ul>
Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify individuals</li> <li>• Advocate</li> <li>• Organize fundraising meetings or events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commitment to goals of school</li> <li>• Have given themselves</li> </ul>
Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer, especially for events</li> <li>• Identify friends and family</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very personal cause, their children</li> <li>• Diverse talents among the group</li> </ul>

As you learn more about fundraising, you will hear new terms and plenty of jargon. The following definitions may be helpful.

- **Annual fund:** the overall program and operating funds raised in a year. May be from individual donors, events, grants.
- **Annual appeal:** the annual approach to individuals, usually by mail.
- **Restricted funds:** funds donated for a specific project. Must be tracked separately in the accounting system and can only be used for the designated purpose. May cover more than one year.
- **Unrestricted funds:** can be used at management discretion, support operating costs.
- **Campaign:** a specific fundraising activity or goal. Might be a mailing or series of integrated events.
- **Major donor:** definition depends on the organization. Might be \$100 for a startup organization. For one Ivy League university a major donor is \$1,000,000 or more; they consider everything else as part of the annual appeal.

## ***How to Reach Individuals***

### ***Board***

Board members are always crucial for raising money—they know people, they care for the organization, they should be relentless advocates. So, while you might recruit board members because they are educators, lawyers, accountants, or community activists, you should always make clear that they are expected to participate in fundraising.

First, trustees should contribute themselves. The giving level may vary widely, but they should each give at a personally significant level. Foundations and other donors will ask if your board is 100% invested.

During the startup stage, paid school staff members are writing curricula, recruiting staff, and preparing the charter application. The board ***IS*** the fundraising staff at this time; they have real responsibility. They should lead the effort by bringing their address books to create a direct mail appeal, organizing fund raising events, organizing parents to help, hosting house parties to tell people about the school and its vision, inviting a few prospects to breakfast or lunch – or to the school for a tour. The board may well need training in order to get started. Build that into your budget. It will pay off.

The following table shows some common fundraising ideas and their roles vs. your particular goals.

Events					
Event type	Who leads	Pros	Cons	Goals	Guidance
House parties	Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduces school to board friends and family</li> <li>No cost, host pays</li> <li>Low investment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not likely to generate large donation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build list of friends</li> <li>Find local supporters for \$ and volunteers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prepare handouts about school goals and achievements</li> <li>Prepare information on fundraising needs</li> <li>Give people ability to pledge or donate on the spot, but also info to take away</li> </ul>
<p>"Fundraiser" event</p> <p>Examples: dinner, concert or other performance, especially useful if school theme is arts related.</p>	Board and Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Generates good feelings about the school</li> <li>Ticket fee plus silent or open auction, 50:50 (raffle needs license)</li> <li>Opportunity for corporate sponsors (favor events and children or education causes)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remember, often a FriendRaiser more than a FundRaiser</li> <li>Lots of work for the amount of money raised</li> <li>Needs cash as an advance investment to pay for location, caterer, printer, postage, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build towards a signature annual event, which may generate significant funds over time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can volunteers contribute location, food, auction items, printing, mailing – expenses that require \$ in advance</li> <li>Silent auction – price to the audience (don't offer items worth \$1000 if audience not able to give more than \$100)</li> </ul>
Cultivation event	Board and Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gives prospects a chance to see deeper</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Takes careful planning - an exact script</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Donation or pledge expected from many attendees within reasonable time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Similar to house party, but previously identified good prospects</li> <li>Showcase students – give people a feel good opportunity</li> </ul>

Events					
Event type	Who leads	Pros	Cons	Goals	Guidance
Bake sales, art sales, walk-a-thons, (walk or bike or kite flying – good if physical activity a school theme)	Board Parents and Volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engages more people, including parents and students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>People intensive, but can be volunteer led</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fees or sales at time of event</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Don't under price; be sure you make enough money.</li> <li>If it works, make it annual activity – build reputation</li> </ul>

## ***Annual Appeal***

It is never too early to start building a base of community supporters. The charter school should run an annual appeal every year.

***Start right away.***

***The board can lead by building a mailing list of their friends and colleagues. Include the parents. Find the school neighbors.***

***Add them all to the list.***

There are two basic approaches to reaching this list that you have developed—direct mail or email and phone. Often it helps to integrate the two. First, mail a letter and reply form to everyone on the list. Have the board add a brief handwritten note to each letter. Even if they don't know the person, these notes are proven to increase the response. Then follow-up the mailing with a phone-athon to those who haven't responded. Use the office of a board member if you can.

The letter can be simple. Open with a story about a child who didn't thrive in traditional public schools but has been (or could be) helped by your school or a similar school. Then describe the school and its education vision. Close with a specific request

A word about parents: While your school may not be in a high income neighborhood, the parents made an effort to have their child admitted to your school, which is, after all, a free public school. Maybe they can give only \$10, or \$10/month. But ask. They have a stake. In addition to money, parents may be able to contribute to the list or provide a skill. Having a parent undertake some plumbing repairs or paint the classroom saves money and

and action, such as “Please donate \$25. Use the form provided or donate on our website, [www.nameofcharterschool.org](http://www.nameofcharterschool.org).”

The phone approach is also simple. Introduce yourself as a board member and volunteer.

Note that they received a mailing recently. Say a few words about the school. *Ask for questions. **ASK** for the donation. **Thank** them either way.*

Meanwhile you are building a list of supporters, a list that will grow over time. In addition, you may identify potential major donors. If someone seems really interested or makes a significant donation (even \$100 might qualify for a new institution), call them, meet them, and engage them.

Thank the donors several times. The board member connection can make a personal call. The school should send a formal letter. The newsletter might list donors. Donors might be invited to a school event as a thank you. Keep going. A rule of thumb is seven thank-yous. This is a demanding goal. Plan the acknowledgement process along with the asking process.

Finally, start a good record system, a database. There are commercial systems, homegrown databases, and systems on the web.

## ***Other Funding Sources***

Foundation and corporate grants are, of course, other sources of funds. Foundations may support very specific projects, but are often wary of new organizations. They prefer the school to develop a track record first. However, if someone on the board has a personal connection, you may get a hearing.

Corporations think “marketing opportunity” in their giving approach. Supermarkets might provide “in kind” donations – food for an opening party. Local

companies might sponsor an event—especially if they are a very community-oriented business—such as a walkathon or bike ride.

Before the approach, research the organization. Does your group match their priorities?

See the Resource Section for more information about the **Federal Charter School Grant Program**. This Federal grant program provides significant money for charter school start-up and implementation. This grant program does not cover the pre-planning period, however.

### ***Making the Case – Telling the Story***

It is important to write a “case statement.” It works as a cheat sheet for the board and other volunteers. Try to prepare one for every fundraising need or event. It can be just a page or two with bullet points. In business, these are called talking papers. It will help in talking to donors and friends, providing “relentless advocates” with a clear story and facts to bolster a conversation or letter.

#### **The case statement should include:**

1. Mission and vision of the school;
2. Goal of the fundraising campaign (a facility or new science lab, computer room, gymnasium, library etc.);
3. Description of community need;
4. Description of project (such as after-school program if applicable);
5. Simplified budget; and
6. How the project will be evaluated.

The case statement tells why the school needs money, how much, how it will be used, and how you will know if you achieved the program goal.

Be careful to describe the need as the community’s need, rather than the school’s need. For example, if requesting funding for an after-school program be sure to discuss the community’s lack of appropriate safe places for children to go after school, as well as

describing unique local threats such as gangs, drugs, crime, etc. that unsupervised children might face. You must demonstrate to the givers that their money will solve an important problem.

In addition, take care to describe the need fully, rather than just something that you lack. You might want to raise \$1,500 for smartboards for the classroom. It is not enough merely to state that the school needs audiovisual equipment. If you define this as a tool that will offer a multi-sensory learning approach by adding visual and auditory imagery to book learning, you are talking about offering a successful teaching model for all types of learners-- a more compelling story.

The case describes what the money is for, how much it will take to get something done, and why. If you just say we need \$5,000 – or we need money to furnish the classrooms – it is hard for the prospect to know if his or her contribution will make a difference. Sometimes it helps to list items needed and their costs, providing donors an opportunity to sponsor an item: 20 microscopes at \$X each, 4 lab tables at @ each, 4 balance beam scales at @ each, etc.

The case statement tool helps you define the reason your school needs the money and helps to tell your story effectively.

### ***The Plan – Five Simple Steps***

Finally, before heading off with hat in hand, pull all these ideas together into a plan. It doesn't have to be fancy, but a plan sets priorities, goals, balances resources, manages the work. You can use a table or spreadsheet.

<b>Simple Fundraising Plan</b>	
<b>Stage I – Fundraising Goals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define how much money is to be raised.</li> <li>• Define the purpose for raising the money – be VERY specific.</li> </ul>
<b>Stage II – Overall Plan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set targets for the amount of funds, which will be raised from each source (individuals, events, grants, etc.)</li> </ul>
<b>Stage III – The Targets</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• List individuals, corporate or foundation prospects.</li> <li>• Identify who will be responsible for contacting them</li> </ul>

<b>Simple Fundraising Plan</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Choose the strategy(s) for reaching out to these prospects such as phone call, letter, house-party, luncheon, etc.</li> </ul>
<b>Stage IV – Action Plan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create a calendar with each fundraising project, broken down into tasks.</li> <li>For each task, list who will perform it, who will assist them, and when will they be done.</li> </ul>
<b>Stage V: Fundraising</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Once a plan is developed it is essential to work the plan.</li> <li>Monitoring the plan is a key responsibility of the board.</li> <li>Fundraising is an ongoing process of building relationships and persistent efforts. This chapter is a very short introduction to some practical approaches to get the charter school started on the road to fundraising success.</li> <li>It may be helpful to talk with other nonprofit community-based organizations and charter schools in your community, to attend seminars, check the library's fundraising collection, and check out a few websites. Several are listed below to help you take the next step in preparing and executing a successful fundraising plan.</li> </ul>

### ***Fundraising Resources – A Starter List***

**Foundation Center:** Search for foundations, online tutorials (<http://www.fdncenter.org/>)

The Foundation Center has an extensive collection of books on every aspect of nonprofit organization and fundraising. Local public libraries have basic grant foundation directories, and at least, some book collection on fundraising.

There is one Foundation Center cooperating collections in Maryland:

Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore  
 Social Science & History  
 400 Cathedral St.  
 Baltimore, MD 21201  
 (410) 396-5320

**Federal Government:** Central source for federal grants ([www.grants.gov/](http://www.grants.gov/))

- Charter School Program Start-up Grant-  
<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oii/csp/index.html>

This grant is critical for founding groups starting a school. You can apply for this grant prior to being approved by the authorizer. The money only becomes available once you have been approved. Which grant you apply for depends on whether the State has an



active CSP SEA grant or you have to apply directly to the Federal government- which would be the non- SEA Start up grant.

- 21<sup>st</sup> Century After School/Community School Grants (once school is operating)

**Board Source:** Help for boards ([www.boardsource.org](http://www.boardsource.org))

**Association of Baltimore Area Grantmakers:** Network of grantmakers, not a source of grants, but identifies major foundation players in Maryland ([www.abagmd.org](http://www.abagmd.org)).

**Maryland Non Profits-** a membership organization that provides resources and trainings for non-profit organizations across Maryland. Reasonably priced workshops on various topics, including fundraising are available for member and non-members. <http://marylandnonprofits.org>

### ***Chapter Three – Fundraising Lessons Learned***

- Individual donors are the major sources of charitable funds.
- Board members are critical in fundraising.
- Don't forget the parents.
- Don't lose the creative fundraising ideas, but BUILD A PLAN.

## Chapter Four

# Methods for Writing the Application

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### ***The ABC's of Grant Writing*** <sup>10</sup>

Writing a charter school application involves a set of technical skills that are generally defined as grant writing. It involves precision, clarity, and focus. It is **not** merely an exercise in bureaucratic paperwork. It is the process of identifying and describing all the critical characteristics of your charter school. It should be used as an opportunity to think through what and why your founders are trying to create. It should be integrated into your strategic planning process.

One word of caution – while creating a charter school is a great opportunity to be creative, writing your application requires intense discipline. Follow all format instructions exactly as written. Answer each and every question in the order they are presented. Write clearly and limit your answers to what the question asks.

The application does not stand alone. This process is grounded in the conviction that a partnership should develop between the charter school and the local board of education.

This truly *is* an ideal partnership. The charter school has the ideas and the capacity to educate children and the local board has the resources to monitor and support the school. Bring the two together effectively, and the result is a dynamic collaboration.

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<sup>10</sup> Modified from Jane C. Geever and Patricia McNeill. *The Foundation Center's Guide to Proposal Writing* (New York: The Foundation Center, 1997).

## ***Overview – How to Approach the Charter School Application***

A charter school proposal/application of quality must include much more than broad, ambitious promises of what the school will deliver. This document should provide the reader with an overview of whom the school will serve and what kind of place it will be, but it should also provide a detailed school-design plan with specific supporting evidence, data and ideas that illustrate exactly how educational and administrative activities will work and the effort that has gone into the planning.

Keep communications open with the authorizer if at all possible. In the best scenario, the final proposal that you submit will not come to the district as a set of completely new ideas. Ask questions before submitting the application, possibly even showing parts to district leaders to get their comments on how to make a better case.

We suggest that your team view the charter application as a critical planning tool rather than a “hurdle” on the way to obtaining a charter. The charter application should require the core design team to consider and have specific plans for every key aspect of running a charter school- finance, operations, governance, education plan, facility, community outreach, assessment, etc. By writing down exactly what you expect to do, in clear language with supporting documentation, your team should be able to see if there are any holes in your plans before the school opens.<sup>11</sup>

### **Gather the Background Information**

The first thing you will need to do in writing the application is to gather the documentation for it. If all of needed information is not readily available, determine who will help you gather each type of information. The data-gathering process makes the actual writing much easier.

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<sup>11</sup> Excerpt from Paving a New Path, INCS

It is important that you have a good sense of how the complex details of the proposed school fits into its philosophy and mission. The need for the school must also be documented. These concepts must be well articulated in the proposal.

### ***Use the Application Guidelines as a Resource***

Each authorizer will have their own application and application process. Although many school districts in Maryland have not created formal authorizing process for charter schools, and part of your job as a developer may be to work with the district to formalize the parameters it will use to evaluate your proposal.

If the application is not on the school district's website, then you will need to contact the charter school liaison at the district for a copy of the most recent application. Maryland State Department of Education has created a [Model Charter School Application](#) that can be used as a guide and is a good resource.

In all districts, charter school developers should learn about the district and its leaders and seek district support by being clear about the value a charter school will bring to the district. In most districts, this will involve convincing wider constituencies of the value of charter schools.<sup>12</sup>

In the application guidelines questions are followed by citations from statute/regulations and notes on what the reader will be looking for. **One hundred percent of these are significant.**

ALWAYS make sure your responses are consistent with all appropriate statutes and regulations as cited. It is NOT good enough to say you will follow the regulations. You must DEMONSTRATE that you understand and are committed to compliance.

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<sup>12</sup> Paving a New Path, INCS

ALWAYS ask yourself if you have supplied what you were instructed to provide and that which the reader will be looking for. *They are not kidding – readers follow a scoring rubric and will thoroughly check all your responses.*

## ***Reviewing Existing Applications***

An application is not a copyrighted commercial publication and there are no points for being totally original. Study successful existing applications (you can make an appointment to review applications through local school districts that have authorized charter schools). Look at how they answered each question. Don't just copy from them. After all, they do not have your exact mission, vision, or learning environment. A reader can easily spot a choppy, thrown-together set of copied responses.

## ***Integrating All Aspects of School***

Review each section of the application with respect to whether it stands well alone – i.e., whether it thoroughly and clearly answers the questions. Then review each section of the application for consistency with all other sections. Consistency needs to be:

- **Factual:** A simple error such as failing to have the same number of personnel in the organizational chart and the budget is a red flag for readers. There are a myriad of opportunities for this type of error.
- **Philosophical:** A school with a very traditional pedagogy might well have a more hierarchal style of administration and a progressive pedagogy might go well with facilitative leadership. Whatever you describe throughout the application should build on the mission, vision, themes, etc. of the school.
- **Environmental:** A school must reflect the realities of its community – inner city schools in high poverty neighborhoods face different challenges than schools in rural or suburban communities. Neighborhoods with many English Language Learners (ELL) students or highly mobile populations need to be designed to

reflect those realities. Make sure that the need you described is well reflected in the school you propose.

### ***Key Sections – Thoughts for Application Preparation***

The charter school application is very thorough. By the time you have written this application, you will have detailed everything you plan to achieve and exactly how you will get there. As we've said before, don't think of this as an application. **It is YOUR plan of intent, YOUR plan of action.**

#### **SAMPLE ELEMENTS OF A MARYLAND CHARTER SCHOOL APPLICATION**

1. Profile of Founding Group
2. Administrative and Governance Structure
3. Mission , Goals and Objectives
4. Student Population and School Calendar
5. Educational Program
6. Academic Program, Standards, and Assessment
7. School Management
8. Student Policy and Services
9. Personnel
10. Human Resource Information
11. Policy, Regulations, and Legal Requirements
12. Parent Involvement and Community Participation
13. School Facilities
14. Finances, Budget Summary, Cash Flow Schedule
15. Recruiting and Marketing Plan
16. Transportation
17. School Safety and Security

### ***Statement of Need***

The statement of need will enable the reader to learn more about the issues. It presents the facts and evidence that support the need for the charter school and establishes that your founders understand the problems and, therefore, can reasonably

address them. The information used to support the case can come from authorities in the field, as well as from your own experience.

You want the need section to be succinct, yet persuasive. Like a good debater, you must assemble all the arguments. Then, present them in a logical sequence that will convince the reader of their importance. As you marshal your arguments, consider the following six points.

**First, Decide Which Facts or Statistics Best Support the Project.**

Be sure the data you present are accurate. There are few things more embarrassing than to have the authorizer tell you that your information is out of date or incorrect. Information that is too generic or broad will not help you develop a winning argument for your project. Information that does not relate to your organization or the project you are presenting will cause the authorizer to question the entire proposal. There also should be a balance between the information presented and the scale of the school.

**Second, Give the Reader Hope.**

The picture you paint should not be so grim that the solution appears hopeless. Avoid overstatement and overly emotional appeals.

**Third, Decide How You Can Demonstrate that Your School Will Address the Need Differently or Better than Other Local Institutions.**

It is often difficult to describe the need for your project without being critical of the existing public school district. Nevertheless, you must be careful not to overdue it. Being too critical of the district will not be well received by the readers. It may cause them to look more carefully at your own proposed school to see why you felt you had to build your case by demeaning others. Some of the readers will have history in the existing system.

If possible, you should make it clear that you are cognizant of, and on good terms with, others doing work in education. Keep in mind that readers are usually very interested in collaboration. They may even ask why you are not collaborating with those you view as key competitors. So, at least, you need to describe how your work complements, but does not duplicate, the work of others.

#### **Fourth, Avoid Circular Reasoning.**

In circular reasoning, you present the absence of your solution as the actual problem. Then your solution is offered as the way to solve the problem.

The statement of need does not have to be long and involved. Short, concise information captures the reader's attention.

#### **An Example of Circular Reasoning:**

*There is no arts focused school in Town X.*

*Therefore the new ArtsCharter School will fill the gap.*

#### **Better:**

*Research has shown that arts education fosters self-confidence, helps students learn conflict resolution, and improves their overall ability to learn. Thus, the proposed ArtsCharter School children will be successful.*



## ***Goals and Objectives***

**Goals** describe the broad standards and outcomes for the students, staff and school.

Goals answer these questions

- Are the specific standards and outcomes for students aligned with the vision?
- What should students know and be able to do?
- What are the desired outcomes?
- Are the objectives to be measured the truly important ones?

**Objectives** are the measurable outcomes of the school. They define your methods. Your objectives must be tangible, specific, concrete, measurable, and achievable in a specified time period. Writers often confuse objectives with goals, which are conceptual and more abstract. To reiterate, objectives are the specific measurable results of achieving goals.

Well-articulated objectives are critical to an application's success. For the purpose of illustration, here is the goal of a project with a subsidiary objective:

**Goal:** Our after-school program will help children read better.

**Objective:** Our after-school remedial education program will assist fifty children in improving their reading scores by one grade level as demonstrated on standardized reading tests administered after participating in the program for six months.

The goal in this case is abstract: improving reading, while the objective is much more specific. It is achievable in the short term (six months) and measurable (improving fifty children's reading scores by one grade level).

Using a different example, there are at least **four types of objectives**:

1. **Behavioral Objective:** A human action is anticipated.

**Example:** Fifty of the seventy children participating will learn to swim.

2. **Performance Objective:** A specific time frame within which a behavior will occur, at an expected proficiency level, is expected.

**Example:** Fifty of the seventy children will learn to swim within six months and will pass a basic swimming proficiency test administered by a Red Cross-certified lifeguard.

3. **Process Objective:** The manner in which something occurs is an end in itself.

**Example:** We will document the teaching methods utilized, identifying those with the greatest success.

4. **Product Objective:** A tangible item results.

**Example:** A manual will be created to be used in teaching swimming to this age and proficiency group in the future.

In any given application, you will find yourself setting forth one or more of these types of objectives. Be certain to present the objectives very clearly. Make sure that they do not become lost in verbiage and that they stand out on the page. For example, you might use numbers, bullets, or indentations to denote the objectives in the text. Above all, be realistic in setting objectives. Don't promise what you can't deliver. Remember, your school will be accountable for achieving its objectives.

You will need to create goals and objectives to respond to the following:

- Academic achievement – what performance level will the school be held accountable for attaining?
- Meeting school specific goals;
- Include state board goals, district priorities, and community needs;
- Content-based or performance-based?
- Maryland state-mandated assessments;
- Must be measurable – consider what instrument will be used to measure;
- Expected performance goal – baseline and increase.

## ***Educational Methods***

By means of the objectives, you have explained to the reader what will be achieved by the school. The application will include many sections that describe the

specific activities that will take place to achieve the objectives. It might be helpful to divide our discussion of methods into the following: how, when, and why.

**How:** This is the detailed description of what will occur within your charter school. Your methods should match the previously stated objectives.

**When:** The methods section should present the order and timing for the tasks. As appropriate provide timetables so that the reader does not have to map out the sequencing on his/her own. The timetable tells the reader "when" and provides another summary that supports the rest of the methods sections.

**Why:** You may need to defend your chosen methods, especially if they are new or unorthodox. Why will the planned pedagogy, theme or approaches lead to the outcomes you anticipate? You can answer this question in a number of ways, including using expert testimony and examples of other schools that work. See Appendix E for examples of pedagogy approaches.

The methods sections enable the reader to visualize the implementation of the school. They should convince the reader that your founders know what they are doing, thereby establishing their credibility.

## ***Staffing and Administration***

The application will contain a detailed staffing plan. You need to discuss the number of staff, their qualifications, and specific assignments. "Staffing" may refer to volunteers or to consultants, as well as to paid staff. Most proposal writers do not develop staffing sections for volunteers. Describing tasks that volunteers will undertake, however, can be most helpful to the reader. Such information underscores the value added by the volunteers as well as cost-effectiveness.

For paid staff, be certain to describe which staff will work full time and which will work part time. Identify how staff will be recruited specifically for the project. Salary costs are affected by the qualifications of the staff. Teaching staff salary will be based on

the authorizing district's salary scale. Delineate the practical experience you require for key staff, as well as level of expertise and educational background.

The application will contain a detailed administration plan. It needs to be crystal clear who is responsible for financial management, measuring outcomes, and reporting

## ***Evaluation***

Evaluation should be built into the way you describe all aspects of the charter school. The evaluation plan indicates that you take your objectives seriously and want to know how well you have achieved them. Evaluation is also a sound management tool. Like strategic planning, it helps a charter school refine and improve its programs. An evaluation can often be the best means for others to learn from your experience.

There are two types of formal evaluation. One measures the product; the other analyzes the process. Either or both might be appropriate to your project. The approach you choose will depend on the nature of the project and its objectives. For either type, you will need to describe the manner in which evaluation information will be collected and how the data will be analyzed. You should present your plan for how the evaluation and its results will be reported and the audience to which it will be directed. For example, it might be used internally or be shared with the authorizer, or it might deserve a wider audience. An authorizer might even have an opinion about the scope of this dissemination.

## ***Chapter Four – Lessons Learned about Writing the Application***

- Gather all your data.
- Find models in other applications.
- Practice writing goals and objectives.
- Assure that the application is an integrated whole – in content and in style

## *Chapter Five*

### **Governance Plan:**

## **Building a Fully Functioning Organization**

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### ***Board Governance***

Establishing and maintaining a strong board are critical tasks for any charter school. For a newly formed school, attention to the composition and work of the board is vital to ensure a smooth transition into a fully functional organization. Founding boards have the delicate task of protecting their original passion and dreams while also making room for new people to fully engage in a sense of “ownership” of the organization. Start out knowing that board development is a slow deliberate process that will test your patience, create opportunities to test your most basic premises and assumptions and hopefully, create stability for dealing with on-going challenges.

### ***What is Governance, Really?***

Board governance is a seriously misunderstood concept, even in schools with a long history. In a founding charter school, the concept of governance is often confused with management and operations as founding members find themselves needing to do a bit of both. Let’s start by isolating the unique tasks of governance:

- Ensuring that the charter school makes a real and valued difference in the community;
- Ensuring that the charter school functions in a prudent and ethical manner;
- Creating and sustaining a future focus that keeps the charter school relevant in the community;
- Evaluating the effectiveness of the charter school leader in managing all of the above.

### ***Ensuring that the Charter School Makes a Real and Valued Difference in the Community***

The first and most important task of the board is to state clearly, why the charter school exists and what it is to achieve over time. A clear and crisp mission statement is the tool that will be used over and over to frame this discussion and future decisions about the organization. What sets you apart from other schools in the area? How will you know if the school is successful? What unique strategy or philosophy forms the base of anything that you do?

Basically, the board ensures that the charter school starts out and stays mission focused. You will be tempted over time to respond to funding opportunities. It is the board's job to ensure that there are real criteria in place to evaluate these opportunities and stay clear of those that take you off mission.

It is also the job of the board to regularly review whether the charter school is achieving success. The board and the staff cannot do that evaluative work if there is not a commonly understood standard for success. The board sets and maintains clear standards for success and then regularly asks for information about ongoing progress against these standards.

**A Special Note:** Volume only indicates volume; it does not indicate success.

Be sure that your charter school can answer the “*so, what?*” question.

*“We served 150 children last year”*

So, what? – did they learn any new, important skills?

**Are they any better off than when they came to the school?**

## ***Ensuring that the Charter School Functions in a Prudent and Ethical Manner***

The board holds the charter school “in trust” for the citizens of Maryland and the community in which you are located. You have been given a charter to run a school. Board members act as “trustees” on behalf of the larger community and must ensure that the charter school functions in a safe and prudent manner. Having strong and ethical standards in the form of policies is important work of the board. Board members do not represent their own self-interest on a board – they represent the interests of the whole community. This includes responsibility to future students, as well responsibility to current students.

**Special Note:** It is far too common for charter schools to develop policy on the fly – in reaction to specific events. This creates two problems: the policies are too specific and don’t cover other potential problems and the policy is embedded in board minutes where it loses its effectiveness over time. A better process is to intentionally create fewer proactive policies that cover broader topics and maintain a separate policy manual that is monitored on a

Policy development and monitoring ensures that the charter school is worthwhile because the charter school takes its ethical responsibilities seriously in the areas of finance, personnel, treatment of students, security and safety of facilities, asset management, etc. Staff implements policy, the board must take great care to state policy clearly, and then monitor the charter school’s adherence to stated policy.

## ***Creating and Sustaining a Future Focus that Keeps the Charter School Relevant in the Community***

Too often, a board gets bogged down in the daily operations of the charter school. This is especially true of young charter schools where operational procedures are still evolving. A strong board will resist the temptation to micro-manage and will instead hold the staff accountable to both the mission statement (what difference do we make?) and

the stated policies (are we acting in a prudent and ethical manner?). It is not the job of the board (or individual board members) to act as the vicarious chief executive and ask, “would I have done it that way?” Whether current behavior/practices are ethical and effective is a board concern – specifically how tasks are carried out is not.

Since the board does not engage in day-to-day operations, it has the time and responsibility to look into the future. Where should the organization be in three years? How is the community changing and what must we do to adapt to the change? What will our students need in the future that is not available now?

The board’s job is to routinely assess its internal and external environment, and to set strategic priorities for the future (see the earlier chapter on strategic planning). The board sets these goals and then it monitors progress and helps remove obstacles that get in the way. This will require that the board stays informed about the needs of students and families, aware of changing regulatory requirements and alert to changing needs of a community. It also requires that the board stay focused on just a few future priorities and encourages staff to set aside time to work on tomorrow’s needs in addition to today’s challenges.

### ***Evaluating the Effectiveness of the School Leader in Managing All of the Above***

Regardless of what the title is – headmaster, principal, executive director – there is only one staff member that reports directly to the board. This person is hired by the board, reports to the board as a whole (not individual members) and is accountable for the operations of the charter school. The relationship between the board and the school leader is critical to the success of the charter school. There must also be clear accountability and role differentiation between the board and school leader.



For this reason, it is best practice for the school leader to have voice but no vote on board matters – i.e., to serve as an ex officio member of the board. He/she is not a full member of the board. His or her work is distinctly different.

This is often an area that is difficult for newly established charter schools, especially if the school leader is one of the founders. Role differentiation comes slowly in the early days when everyone is needed to do everything. Be assured that this role is essential to a strong future and that future conflicts are unavoidable if clarity is not achieved. The board evaluates the effectiveness of the school leader. However, the board must first do its own job of setting the mission, establishing policy and setting strategic priorities. It is only by doing its own job that it is able to evaluate the school leader with the criteria including: did the charter school make a valued difference, is it running in a prudent and ethical manner, and is there progress on strategic goals?

If the answer is “yes” in each of those areas, you probably have a strong school leader. If the answer is “no,” then the board must assess whether it was clear in its own statements of mission, policy and direction, and the degree to which the school leader had the skills needed to achieve the desired results.

The existence of a weak, unskilled or disorganized school leader must be dealt with quickly either through professional development or replacement. Most boards wait too long to identify these problems and do not do the necessary work to establish clear standards by which the school leader is evaluated.

**Special Note:** In the early days of a charter school there will be many situations which are not yet in the control of even the best school leader. Building an organizational infrastructure, while also running programs, is a daunting task that may require some flexibility in the standards for mission effectiveness and progress on strategic goals. The one area that should never be compromised is adherence to ethical standards/policies.

Under Maryland charter school law, the employees of a charter school, including the school leader, are employees of the local board of education and as such are subject to the terms of the local collective bargaining agreement and any negotiated amendments to the agreement.

### ***Who Should Be on the Board? – Recruitment and Care of Board Members***

The first important decision an organization makes is to differentiate between volunteers and board members. Board members are volunteers in that they do not get paid for their work, but they are a very unique type of volunteer and should be put into a separate category. Board members perform governance activities (outlined above). Volunteers are unpaid staff that support the daily operations of the organization.

Another essential difference is that volunteers typically report to staff (the exception is when volunteers are involved in board work on board committees). Because the school leader reports to the board while volunteers report to staff, there is a potential for conflict of interest when board members are also program volunteers. Do not underestimate this potential for conflict. This does not mean that board members cannot also be program volunteers – it just means that they must be very cognizant of which hat they are wearing in every situation and adapt their expectations. They should not bring volunteer concerns to the board table without working them through with staff first.

Good board members want to do board work – governance. They enjoy being involved in the big picture and recognize their limitations in doing the day-to-day tasks of the organization. They want to focus on the results of the work and have (or should have) a passion for the mission. They may bring specific expertise or experience that could be helpful to the organization but they do not limit their involvement/concern to those areas.

The true test of a good board member is whether he or she sit forward and participate on all agenda items. Individuals with expertise in financial matters should

carry equal passion for policy discussions and strategic priorities. Those who have backgrounds in education must also engage in the discussion of budgets and financial audits. While it is an ideal – it is one worth striving for – making the full board agenda relevant and engaging for all board members.

Often, charter schools look for community members who are already passionate about their mission. This will limit the potential pool to those who already know who you are and are in some way associated with your work. A better criterion is to look for people who “should” be interested in your mission. Take the time to cultivate these people, engage them in your work, and encourage them to serve. An example of these community members is private business owners who may not have school age children. They do, however, have a stake in the quality of education in the community, as that is their source for future employees. They will be more likely to hold the organization accountable for long-term success.

Another common mistake in recruiting board members is to minimize the time and effort needed to be a good board member. A startup organization will need people who are ready and available to give time for creating a solid governance base for future operations. Be honest about your stage of development and the work that needs to be done. Recruit people who want to do that hard work.

You should assume that people you recruit to the board will have had a range of experience in performing board functions. Learning to be a board member is often like learning to be a parent – training is on the job and the job differs depending on the special needs of each child. Invest time in orienting new board members to your special needs before they are asked to serve. Invest in annual board training that keeps your board doing governance tasks and improving their skills in governance. Have a clear board member job description that honestly informs prospective members of their duties and responsibilities.

## ***Board Structure – Alternative Models***

There are basically a handful of types of nonprofit boards in operation today and some models are best suited for particular size organizations. Recognize that the model you choose now may not be effective once the organization grows and/or matures. Be ready to make changes in the future even if those changes will be emotionally painful for the people involved. Most of all, be ready to move from a founding board to a governance board even if that means founding members may need to take on other, non-board roles.

### ***Board Models***

There are four basic board models:

1. Founding,
2. Grassroots,
3. Strategic Governance, and
4. Power Boards

Take your time as your organization grows. You don't need a power board before you have the infrastructure and track record to take advantage of those skills.

**Founding Boards:** This type of board is usually very small (less than 10 people) and close knit. Founders bring passion and energy that is unmatched in the education world. Board meetings are usually loosely organized and are reactive to the issues of the day (what do we need to get done next?). There is usually little differentiation between board members, volunteers, and early staff in terms of roles and activities. Interest in the charter school is very personal – board members may also be parents of the charter school's students.

The job of the founding board is time limited and intense. Take care that initial tasks of writing by-laws and policies consider that future boards should be larger and

focused on governance tasks, not operating tasks. The job of the founding board is to replace itself with a more permanent structure within 2-4 years.

**Grassroots Boards:** Many charter schools choose this “working board” model. Size varies but is most often 12-25 members. A grassroots board has many similarities to a founding board in that the members tend to be personally involved and passionate about the mission. There is also still some overlap between board functions and volunteer functions, although these can be managed by organizing the board agenda into two parts—a governance agenda followed by a separate operations agenda. This means that meetings tend to be long and include more detail than in other models. Special care must be taken to ensure that governance tasks do not get pushed off the agenda because of operational needs.

Grassroots boards can be very productive and work well for smaller charter schools. Since there is overlap in roles it is important to consistently ask, “whose job is this particular task?” Assuming it is someone else’s job can cause problems and missed opportunities.

As a charter school grows and matures, grassroots board can become problematic. There will come a time when the organization must ask itself whether this board model is still appropriate. If this is done intentionally and in a strategic way, the transition to another model can occur without much angst. If you are not careful, this model can cause conflict and distrust between board and staff. The transition is then much more painful and difficult.

**Strategic Governance Boards:** This model focuses exclusively on governance tasks unique to boards (see first section). Optimal size is 15-20 members recruited from a broad cross section of the community. Pay attention to involving new members who “should” be interested. These boards avoid micro-management, and board members tend not to be also volunteers. Meetings last about 90 minutes and the agenda is highly organized and followed.

Staggered board terms and term limits are routine to ensure that there are new voices on the board over time. The unifying force is the mission rather than individual passion or personalities. The founding passion and values are institutionalized in the culture of the organization so that turnover in staff and board is not destructive or feared. New ideas are welcome with program growth and enhancement the focus. Because management tasks are not part of the board agenda, there is more time for discussion of future goals and attracting new supporters based on a clear vision.

**Power Boards:** This model is typically used by large charter schools. Board membership is based on an individual's access to personal and professional resources. Board members understand that their job is to bring new resources and donors to the organization. Meetings are short and highly focused.

A strong power board achieves a healthy balance between governance and fundraising tasks. Since there is usually a large professional staff, there is little attention to management issues and board members are rarely program volunteers.

For smaller charter schools, there is an alternative to a power board. Many small to mid-size charter schools will add an advisory council that does the fundraising work of the power board. The advisory council only meets a few times a year and has no governance tasks. The regular board retains all the governance tasks, and also supports fundraising efforts. It is not advisable to mix board models. Individuals attracted to working with power boards will very quickly become frustrated by the work style of a grassroots board and visa versa.

Another alternative is the formation of a separate corporation, otherwise known as a foundation. The foundation can be structured in such a way that it directly benefits a specific recipient (your school), and has some (but not all) overlapping board membership. The foundation can attract the energy of people who want to help raise money but may not be interested in running the school. A foundation has the added

benefit of keeping unrestricted assets off the balance sheet of the school until they are needed. Running a foundation and a school is double the work. Be prepared to invest time and energy in both or wait until the school is functioning smoothly before starting a separate foundation.

### ***Individual Roles and Responsibilities – Who Does What?***

The following is a brief listing of individual roles within the organization relative to board functioning.

**Board Chairperson:** The Chair facilitates the work of the board by leading board meetings, assigning board tasks to committees and individuals, and monitoring board member accountability. The school leader does not “report” to the Chair though he or she may report “*through*” the Chair. The school leader reports to the board as a whole, not to individuals. The board gives instructions to the school leader officer by voting on policy and requests for information. The Chair supervises the board, not the school leader.

**Committees:** Board committees do the pre-work of the board. They research, digest information, and prepare recommendations for board decision-making. Whenever possible, committees should bring to the board more than one viable recommendation so that there is true choice and decision making, not the tendency to rubber stamp or ignore committee work. Good committee work provides real options for the entire board to discuss and consider before final decision-making.

Because committees do the work of the board, the following committees are advisable:

- **Policy Committee** identifies gaps in policy areas, leads board discussion on policy content, and develops written policies for board approval. It also establishes a reasonable monitoring schedule for existing policies and decides the best methods for monitoring (direct observation, staff reports or outside evaluation) each policy area. Many charter schools have specific committees for areas of policy expertise such as finance or personnel. Non-board members may be invited to be part of these (and all) board committees to act as advisors.

- **Evaluation Committee** establishes clear standards/metrics for success using the mission as the base tool. It also reviews evaluation data from staff and other sources and reports on progress to the board. The evaluation committee engages staff in the discussion of what data is important and what are reasonable indicators of success.
- **Strategic Planning Committee** facilitates an ongoing planning process to set 3-year strategic goals, and then monitors' progress on the goals. It also assesses ways in which the board can help remove obstacles to progress either through advocacy, creating important community linkages or making financial investments in strategic priorities. The Planning Committee would also establish a schedule of board presentations to keep the membership informed of changes in the external environment and potential new challenges or opportunities. These presentations could include staff presentations about client needs or outside presenters who have information about changes in the field.
- **Nominating and Board Development Committee** (sometimes known as a Governance Committee) works on the recruitment, training, and retention of board members. This includes identifying and vetting prospective members, organizing new member orientations so that new members are ready to assume the role and preparing the way for existing members to assume leadership roles.
- **Executive Committee (Board Officers and Committee Chairs)** There is currently some controversy on the need and function for an Executive Committee. The Executive Committee should never become the "shadow" board that discusses all the upcoming decisions prior to the board meeting. However, the Executive Committee may be called on to make interim decisions between board meetings for items that cannot wait for the next scheduled meeting. This decision making function should be used with caution and only at times where it is absolutely necessary. A common use of the Executive Committee is to set the agenda for the next meeting. This function is not needed if the board ends each meeting by setting the agenda for the next meeting.
- **Ad Hoc Committees.** The board should retain the right to establish any committee necessary to do the work of the board. Ad Hoc committees can be established as the need arises and disband when the work is done. Standing Committees that are named in the by-laws must remain in effect at all times and must report at every board meeting, even if they have not met. It is best to minimize the number of standing committees and use ad hoc committees as needed for interim tasks (e.g., a Search Committee for Executive transition, a policy subcommittee requiring a specific area of expertise such as a committee to



oversee a curriculum upgrade or a facility expansion).

- **Development Committee** does not need to be a board committee and it should include non-board members. It only acts as a board committee when it establishes policy relative to fundraising. Otherwise, it is an operational committee that would also involve staff and volunteers to achieve the fund raising goals of the charter school.

The school leader has the right to establish any other committee that he/she desires to help with the operations of the charter school. These committees are advisory (they do not make decisions which are binding on the school leader), and can provide valuable input from the community. They do not report to the board unless they are doing board work. Examples of advisory committees could include parent advisory committee, facility committee, marketing committee, or an insurance committee. The school leader is under no obligation to establish advisory committees and is free to solicit advice as needed from individuals rather than committees.

### ***Fundraising as the Job of the Board***

You will note that the discussion of fundraising as the job of the board first surfaced under the discussion of power boards. That is not to suggest that founding, grassroots and governance boards do not fundraise. However, fundraising is not the unique task of a board – it is not a governance task. It is essential to the well-being of any organization and must be a team effort. It is everyone’s job to fundraise – board, staff and volunteers. How these tasks get allocated will depend on the size of the organization and the amount of philanthropic funds needed to do the work. Large charter schools might employ development staff who can take on many, but not all, the fundraising functions. Small charter schools rely more heavily on volunteers, board members and consultants to do most of the fundraising, including perhaps grant writing.

The important criterion for fundraising success is whether the charter school is worth raising money for – does it make a difference and is it run in an ethical and prudent manner? The board’s job is to ensure the worthiness of the charter school by monitoring measures of success, monitoring adherence to policy and ensuring a future focus. If the

board does its job well, then it goes without saying that they will want to give and get. If board members are unwilling to give money to the charter school or ask others to give, this sends a disastrous message to other potential donors. Why should they consider giving or trust that the organization is worth giving to?

New charter school must clearly negotiate roles for fundraising tasks among staff, board, and volunteers. There is no perfect model; there is only the best distribution of tasks relative to your organization's distribution of available time, skill, and energy. Not discussing it ahead of time will only lead to confusion and missed opportunities.

### ***Setting A Board Agenda Which Does Board Work***

Typical board agendas are based on board structure rather than function. They include a Chairperson's report, Director's report, and committee reports. While this type of agenda can work well for an organization and is currently used extensively, there is a better alternative. The alternative structures the agenda around the work of the board. It ensures that every board meeting has some attention to policy, evaluation, and strategic planning.

#### **Sample Board Agenda:**

1. Consent Items (items which require board action but minimal discussion)
  - a. Minutes of the last meeting
  - b. Approval of grant acceptance
2. Policy Discussion & Monitoring
  - a. Board discussion of potential worry areas on the topic of student confidentiality (Policy Committee to facilitate discussion)
  - b. Board review and final approval of draft policy on budgeting
  - c. Monthly monitoring of financial status compared to board policy (AKA: Treasurers report)
  - d. Approval of expenditures.
3. Evaluation (Evaluation Committee to facilitate discussion)
  - a. Director's report on student progress to date
  - b. Discussion of the use of standardized test scores for evaluating success.
    - i. Is this an appropriate measure of success for our students?
    - ii. What level of achievement would indicate success and what would indicate failure?

4. Strategic Planning
  - a. Progress to date on goal to acquire new facility
  - b. Teacher presentation – long term implications of changing student demographics – an increase in non-English speaking students
  
5. Board Evaluation And Next Agenda
  - a. Nominating Committee Report on filling board vacancies
  - b. Deciding on priority policy, evaluation and strategic topics for next agenda

## **Personnel Policy** <sup>13</sup>

In order to write your application you will need to develop an outline of your school’s personnel policy. In order to open and operate your charter school you will need to develop a clearly written personnel policy, have it approved by the board and provide a copy to all employees. Without established procedures and consistency of their application, your school is at risk for both legal and operational difficulties. The authors of this guide strongly suggest that you acquire a well written existing personnel policy guide from an operating charter school or district in Maryland and use it as a basis for preparing your own guide. We also strongly recommend that you engage the assistance of an employment lawyer who is familiar with education law. In Maryland, you will have employees that are employed by the school district as well as the non-profit organization. Your personnel policy should reflect this.

When hiring staff it is vital that you communicate clearly both the mission and vision of the school you are creating. This includes a

### **Legal Principals**

- The Civil Rights Act of 1964 states that all applicants/employees must, by law, be given equal opportunity regard-less of race, religion, color, creed, national origin, gender, and age.
- Title VII of the Civil Rights Act prohibits discrimination in the work-place on the basis of race, religion, color, creed, national origin, gender, and age.
- The Civil Rights Act applies to the employee selection and termination process as well.
- The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibits employment discrimination on the basis of disability.
- The ADA states that “reasonable accommodation” must be made on behalf of an employee with a physical disability.
- The ADA prohibits any inquiry during an interview that is likely to lead to information about an impairment or disability, or the need for accommodation thereof, prior to offering an applicant a position. However, you may inquire about an applicant’s ability to perform specific essential (though not marginal) job functions (e.g., lifting up to 50 pounds).
- Title VII and the ADA cover all private employers, state and local governments, and education institutions that employ 15 or more individuals.

<sup>13</sup> Personnel Policy section was modified from Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory “Charter Starters Leadership Training” <http://www.nwrel.org/free/departments.asp?d=2>

thorough review of the school culture you are trying to create, the educational and other values you are trying to acculturate and the details of the school's design. All serious candidates should review the approved charter application and be familiar with its design elements. The process of hiring, training, start-up, and continuous employee training needs to be constantly reinforcing the school's mission, vision and design.

Under Maryland law, all personnel are employees of the district. As such they are subject to the district human resource policies. Although you can recruit and interview and select your staffing, the principal and teachers will need to be hired by the school system if they are not already school system employees and meet the requirements for hiring; including credentialing and certification requirements or progress towards those requirements

## ***Recruitment***

### ***Some recruiting ideas to consider:***

- Web based job posting platforms.
- Teacher fairs.
- Use student teachers and offer jobs to those who are most compatible with your school.
- Write recruitment literature to both explain and sell your school.
- Feature what is exciting about your school – its design, its opportunity for in-service training, its opportunity to share in creating a new learning environment.
- Include founders, community partners, parents, school support personnel, and students in recruitment activities (recruitment literature, seeking applicants, and participating in interviews)

### ***Now to the selection process:***

1. Select an interview panel. This may include the head of the school, teacher(s), parent(s), and even student(s). The selection panel must be aware of conflict of interest and/or nepotism laws; serving the school with one's personal interests driving decisions can be dangerous.

2. Develop job descriptions that state qualifications, duties, and responsibilities. Be sure to incorporate the district job descriptions unless a waiver has been granted.
3. Decide what you will ask for beyond the district application forms – in addition to the “obvious” questions such as employment history and credentials consider asking for a writing sample or ask a series of questions relating to mission and educational philosophy. It will save everyone a lot of time if you can screen out applicants with poor writing skills and/or obvious incompatibility with your school’s design.
4. ALL hiring will be finalized by the district Human Resource department.
5. Collect and review applications—then invite selected applicants for an interview.
6. Develop questions and a consistent protocol prior to the interviews.
7. Maintain consistency, asking the same general questions of all interviewees.
8. Outline what is expected of employees.
9. Explain the school’s vision and mission.
10. Ask interviewee if he/she has any questions.
11. Select finalists based on both their qualifications and their fit with the school’s design.
12. Perform reference and background checks on the finalists—check background, credentials, teaching experience, and all references. Be sure that you understand which responsibilities belong to the charter school and which belong to the district.
13. Maryland statute requires police fingerprinting and a criminal background check.
14. Checking references is tricky – former employers have reasonable concerns about litigation. You can learn information on dates of employment, rates of pay, and whether the reference would rehire the applicant.
15. ALL new employees should receive a thorough orientation. Include information about the school, names, and duties of staff members, administrative policies, curriculum, and school community. Consider having a welcoming event with all staff, parents, trustees, and key stakeholders invited.
16. Professional development should be part of the hiring process and continue thereafter.

## ***Performance Reviews***

Performance evaluation is an important part of staff retention. Experienced candidates may ask about your review process during their employment interviews. As district employees, all staff members will be subject to the same performance evaluation process as other district employees.

## ***Salary Schedule***

Salary is determined by the existing negotiated agreement. The employee organization and the public charter school may mutually agree to negotiate amendments to the existing agreement to address the needs of the particular public charter school.

## ***Tenure***

All teaching staff members, janitor and secretaries, who are either employed in the charter school shall acquire tenure according to the same criteria as stated in the existing collective bargaining agreement.

## ***School Assessment and Accountability***

When you create a charter school, the “deal” is:

1. that you are being granted an opportunity to develop an innovative public school,
2. allowed to have a some discretion in the schools design, and
3. to be governed by a self-selected board of trustees

***In exchange for all this, the charter school agrees  
to a HIGH standard of accountability***

One benefit of the charter school movement is that failing schools go out of business. Over time, this will guarantee that most surviving schools meet high standards of achievement.

This leads to the question: *“Who are charter schools accountable to and what are they accountable for?”*

**First, there is the government:**

- The local boards of education will monitor all aspects of your school’s performance to insure it fulfills the elements outlined in your application, state law, fiscal standards, and academic achievement.
- The school must have an annual audit.
- Your facility must meet all zoning, health and safety standards.

**Second, there are your parents and students:**

- The easiest way to fail and lose your charter is by empty seat syndrome – failing to satisfy students and parents resulting in untenably low enrollment.
- Parents and students need to feel ownership of the school. They need to feel respected and welcomed. They need to experience the school as a place of successful learning.
- Ultimately the founders of a charter school MUST know their community, understand their stakeholders’ needs, and respond appropriately.

**Finally, within the charter application** you will have to describe the standards and processes for evaluating both student achievement, and the school’s success as an institution. Charter schools are held accountable for academic achievement by their students on state and district-wide tests; meeting the goals and objectives described in your application; use of public funds; as well as compliance with all applicable laws and regulations not waived for charter schools.

## Critical Questions for Accountability:<sup>14</sup>

1. What is our school's mission?
2. What do we want our students to know and be able to do?
3. How will we know whether our students are achieving or attaining the goals and standards we specified in our charter?
4. How will we gather and monitor the necessary student performance information?
5. How will we set and measure progress toward school performance goals?
6. How will we use the student and school performance information we have gathered?

A summary of accountability issues can be seen in the following outline for a typical annual report.

An **Annual Report** may describe in detail the following:

- Achievement of the Schools Mission, Goals and Objectives.
- Efficiency in the Governance and Management of the School
  - Summary of Board Accomplishments
  - Board Policies
  - Board Meetings
  - Board Committees
  - Open Public Meetings Act Compliance
  - Board Training
- Attainment of the Common Core standards; and the Delivery of an Educational Program Leading to High Student Achievement
  - Incorporation of Content Standards
  - Summary of Progress
  - Planned Activities
  - Innovative Programs and Practices
  - Family Activities
  - Academic Programs: Math Program; Reading Program; Writing Program; Science Program; World Language Program
  - Technology Education
  - Professional Development/Support Provided for Teachers and Staff
- Maryland School Assessment Results and Local Assessment of Students
  - Summary of Assessment Plan

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<sup>14</sup> Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory "Charter Starters Leadership Training"  
<http://www.nwrel.org/free/departments.asp?d=2>



- Results from Standardized Assessment
- Reporting System
- Accountability
- Degree of Parental and Community Involvement in the School
  - Parental Involvement: Outreach Procedures; Organizations and Committees; Parent Satisfaction; Training and Support
  - Community Involvement: Outreach Procedures; School Community Activities and Plans.
- Public Relations and Outreach Efforts
- Student Admission Policies and Staff Recruitment Plan
  - Admission Policies: Timelines and Activities; Admission Results; Student Withdrawals and Exit Interviews
  - Staff Recruitment: Timelines; Application Review and Interview Procedures; Recruitment Results; Exit Interview Procedure and Results
- Contextual Factors Regarding Student Success Achievement
  - Diverse Learners: Students with Educational Disabilities; Bilingual/ESL Students; At-Risk Students.
  - Non-Academic Programs
  - School Culture
- Annual Financial Report
- Report from outside Evaluator.

## ***Chapter Five – Lessons Learned about Good Governance***

- Governance is about making sure that your school makes a difference.
- Governance is about making sure that your school is ethical.
- Governance is about planning for the future.
- Governance is not a casual process.

## Chapter Six

# Education Plan: The Heart of the Matter

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### ***Curriculum and Instructional Models***

One of the greatest autonomies of charter schools is their freedom to pick the curricula and instructional models that will allow their students to master the Common Core State Standards. A school's curriculum is the set of courses and content available to or required of students, usually including some indication of how the pupils will learn content, as well as the materials and resources their teachers will use to instruct them or facilitate learning (in the case of more online or blended learning models). Curriculum and instruction are the means to accomplish a school's goals. Learning standards are what students should be learning, and goals should be based on the standards.

### ***Curriculum***

Once your mission and vision for the proposed school are complete, then it is time to choose or develop an aligned curriculum. There are many choices available. The U.S. Department of Education even provides curriculum models that have been successfully implemented elsewhere.<sup>15</sup> Keep your mission and vision statements close by since they will guide your exploration of curricular models. The curricular model that you finally choose as a means to educate your chosen population must fit with your mission, vision of education, and the population you have chosen to serve. If there is misalignment anywhere between these four elements, your school will be subsequently less successful and may even fail.

Remember whatever curriculum you select must be aligned with the  
**Common Core State Standards (CCSS)**

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<sup>15</sup> See [www.ed.gov/admins/comm/choice/charter/report\\_pg6.html](http://www.ed.gov/admins/comm/choice/charter/report_pg6.html)  
Innovations in Education Successful Charter Schools

While your charter school will have wide latitude in **HOW** you educate students, it will have limited latitude in **WHAT** your students must learn. Your school **MUST** teach the content of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). It is OK, in fact highly desirable, to teach more than the CCSS, and this is where you have great discretion. Remember, however, that state mandated testing will both reflect the CCSS and be one of the primary measures of your schools' success and primary factors in its survival.

We **STRONGLY RECOMMEND** that you select a curriculum that has already been established as well aligned with the CCSS, or that you secure early in the planning stages the significant professional resources to modify your selected curriculum. You want to bring your curriculum into alignment with CCSS and to demonstrate that alignment. This is a requirement of the application process.

Please note that creating original curricula is a formidable task requiring tremendous resources. It is far more realistic to acquire existing curricula and then modify it to meet the unique elements of your proposed school mission and design. Any curricula model must be evaluated, mapped, and found to be in alignment with the CCSS. Many vendors will claim this alignment, but your school's very survival will depend on this alignment.

As mentioned early in this manual, charter schools are exempt from some of the requirements on traditional public schools, in exchange for increased accountability. These schools are still required to produce students capable to passing each state's assessment instruments. Charter schools may be able to choose the instructional design, but are still required to teach an aligned content. Charter schools will be evaluated primarily on the end result of this product.

Go to <http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/programs/Pages/MD-CCRS/index.aspx> and follow the links to download a copy of the current Common Core

State Standards. For curriculum resources for teachers on various subjects go to <http://mdk12.org/instruction/curriculum/index.html>

A *curriculum*, which includes the educational program, student activities, and assessment strategies, should agree with and amplify the school's mission statement. It is *your educational philosophy made real*. Curriculum should be diversified and balanced to help students as they proceed through levels of performance in all learning areas. Keep in mind that curriculum, teaching, and evaluation are interrelated—they support and reflect one another. Designing one component without thought to the others can do your school a disservice.

Since curriculum formats vary widely, it may be helpful to look at examples from your local school district or other charter schools. Having models always helps, even if they help you decide what not to do. For examples of curriculum approaches and pedagogy, go to Appendix E.

### ***Some Practical Steps toward Choosing/Developing Your Curriculum***

- Decide what a student needs by the end of school – the final year.
- Decide what a student needs within each grade level and how those levels can connect for continuity.
- Align these needs with the CCSS.
- Write inter-disciplinary curriculum units around a theme. For instance, math, reading, writing, science, and social studies can be integrated into a study of environment and the water we drink.
- Write units that are linked directly to assessments.
- Design ways to tell if the curriculum is actually working with regard to objectives.
- Allow enough time for staff to develop and improve the curriculum.
- Accommodate the autonomy and individual styles of teachers.
- Consider how your curriculum fits with those of other schools your students may come from or go to. For example, if you plan a K-8 school, prepare your students with qualifications for entry into the local high school.

In designing your curriculum, draw on available resources and materials, such as the following:

- Accelerated Schools
- Advantage Schools, Inc.
- American Advanced Placement courses
- Beacon Education Management Services
- Calvert Schools
- Carnegie Basic Schools
- Central Park East's Senior Institute
- Coalition of Essential Schools
- Core Knowledge Sequence
- Edison Project
- Expeditionary Learning
- Foxfire
- International Baccalaureate
- Marva Collins Education Method
- Modern Red Schoolhouse
- Montessori
- National Council of Teachers of Mathematics guidelines
- New American Schools
- Nova Learning, Inc.
- Paideia
- [Success Academy](#) Education Institute
- SABIS International
- Waldorf

## ***Instructional Design***

If charter schools have little choice regarding the content of their instruction, instructional design is where they can be most creative. This is not about where we are going (educationally), but how we are getting there. What is the manner in which we will instruct our students? These questions must be answered in terms of the population to be served. If the school is to serve a dropout recovery population, will an entrepreneurial approach meet their needs? If the school is to serve a largely disabled population, what curricular model would fit these students the best, and at the same time appeal to their non-disabled peers? Charter schools don't have the luxury of building a school and knowing the students will attend. If the Charter school doesn't have a program that appeals to students and families, then these students will not attend. No students equates to no money in the Charter school world.

## ***Educational Philosophy***

Often charter schools organize around a particular educational philosophy that unites the school community and provides the foundation for the curriculum. The Core Knowledge Sequence, the Ten Common Principles of the Coalition for Essential Schools, and the Edison Project's Ten Educational Keys are among the "off-the-shelf" materials charter school applicants have selected. Below are brief illustrations of how each of these educational philosophies drives curriculum.

- **The Core Knowledge Sequence** offers a planned progression of specific knowledge in history, geography, mathematics, science, language arts, and fine arts. It represents a first and continuing attempt to state explicitly the core of shared knowledge children should learn in grades K through 6. It is a guide to content from grade to grade, designed to integrate instruction in the classroom. The educational philosophy underlying this curriculum is *that broad content knowledge, more than cognitive skill development, should be the focus of education.*
- **The Coalition of Essential Schools** espouses a contrary approach, in which *cognitive skill development and "doing a few things well"* are more important than covering a host of topics. Adolescents are encouraged to use their minds well, master a number of essential skills and areas of knowledge, individualize

and personalize their goals, and motivate their own learning situations—a student-directed rather than teacher-directed education.

- **The Edison Project’s** educational philosophy falls somewhere in the middle. Edison’s curriculum *stresses both academic skills and broad content knowledge*. In part, it attempts to accomplish its objectives through longer school days, an extended school year, and accelerated learning. Edison’s curriculum is designed to cut across five “domains”: cognitive, creative, physical, character and values, and practical skills. The curriculum is “infused with ***The Greats***—great works of human imagination and invention; great performances of music, art, and drama.”

## ***Pedagogy***

Pedagogy is your teaching method. This differs from curriculum content and is not just about the charter school application. The method is how you will train your teachers and is basic to your vision. You can find examples of curriculum approaches and pedagogy in Appendix C.

Create an outline of teaching approaches, tools, and methods.

- Is the school using Progressive Education methods?<sup>16</sup> Or Direct Instruction?<sup>17</sup> Or Back-To-Basics?<sup>18</sup>
- Is the school using whole language or phonics or a blend?
- Is the school using an arts or music or ecology infused approach?

## ***Attributes of High Achievement Schools—Guiding Questions***<sup>19</sup>

We have learned that high performing schools have asked and answered the following questions.

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<sup>16</sup> A set of reformist educational philosophies and methods that emphasize individual instruction, informality in the classroom, and the use of group discussions and laboratories as instructional techniques.

<sup>17</sup> The Direct Instruction Strategy is highly teacher-directed and is among the most commonly used. This strategy is effective for providing information or developing step-by-step skills.

<sup>18</sup> "Back to the Basics" schools for reading, writing and math. I.e., Usage of phonics for reading; correct grammar, spelling and punctuation for writing; math fundamentals; letter grades; and competition inside and out of the classroom.

<sup>19</sup> Maryland Charter School Network Training Series, 2004 prepared by Joni Berman, President Maryland Charter School Network and Jeffrey Lischin, Consultant.

- **Common Focus:** Describe the specific academic, intellectual goal(s) on which your school community will be focused. Include efforts that focus on literacy and reading. Describe the process and participants involved in defining these goals. What research-based instructional approach or model will your school use to support these goals? How will you align your use of time, tools, materials, and professional development to support your goals?
- **High Expectations:** How will you develop the belief among your staff members that all students can learn at high levels and meet state standards? How will this belief be communicated to the students? How will high expectations be reflected in your classrooms and implemented school-wide? What will the academic rigor and level of learning look like in your classroom?
- **Personalized:** Describe your planned school structure and how it is designed to provide personalized attention for each student. How will each student be provided a powerful and sustainable adult relationship and an adult advocate/mentor? How will personalized instruction be offered for each student that includes input from the student, parents, and teachers? How will it be used to monitor student progress?
- **Respect and Responsibility:** Describe your planned school environment. To what degree will it be safe, ethical, and studious? Describe the shared understanding and the common set of expectations you will create among students, staff, and parents. What are they? How will the school community regularly revisit the expectations? How will the staff teach and model respectful and responsible behavior? How will the students participate in the development and maintenance of a respectful, productive school environment?
- **Performance Based:** How will students demonstrate competencies and how will they be promoted to the next instructional level at your school? What kind of performance-based assessment (e.g., portfolios, exhibits, demonstrations, and group projects) will your teachers use in their individual classrooms? How will



they be used to monitor student achievement? To what extent will you have consistent school-wide standards? What kinds of support opportunities will be provided to accelerate learning for all students? How will data be used to inform instruction, scheduling, and to communicate to students their progress?

- **Time to Collaborate:** How will the schedule be structured to support ample and ongoing time for teachers to plan, collaborate, and develop skills to support school goals? How will teachers collaborate horizontally and vertically to ensure powerful student learning? How will professional development be structured/scheduled to result in meaningful adult learning that will have a significant and positive impact on student learning? What kind of structured partnerships will exist with parents, the business community, and higher education to support adult and student learning?
- **Technology as a Tool:** What kinds of engaging and imaginative curriculum will teachers use that is supported by technology? Give examples of how technology will be infused/integrated into curriculum content to support/enhance teaching and learning. How will technology be used to gather, organize, and interpret data in order to improve classroom practices? How will technology be used to publish your progress to parent and engage the community in continuous improvement?

## ***Developing Academic Standards***

**Step 1:** The charter school standards team (which could comprise a group of parents, teachers, and administrators) reviews the school’s mission to reflect on what its purpose is, whom it hopes to serve, and what its expectations of those students are.

**Step 2:** The team develops a list of exit outcomes, or “graduation standards,” of those qualities and skills it feels its graduates should achieve.

**Step 3:** The team creates a list of interim skills and “benchmark” outcomes that allow the students to demonstrate their progress in attaining the exit standards.

**Step 4:** Teachers develop lists of specific academic skills that students will demonstrate in each subject area and class.

## ***Special Education and Limited English Proficiency (LEP)***

Remember that charter schools are public schools that must admit students through open, non-discriminatory policies. Thus, you need to prepare for diverse students with a wide variety of special needs.

### ***Legal Issues Arising from IDEA:***

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the law that guarantees all children with disabilities access to a free and appropriate public education. You need to consider the following legal issues as you develop your plans and your charter school application.

- The charter school application should describe the methods and strategies for servicing students with disabilities in compliance with all federal laws and regulations.
- A charter school must determine with the district how the special education and related services mandated by each enrolled child's IEP will be delivered. Some Maryland districts will provide these services. Other districts have decided that the charter school is responsible for the delivery of these services directly or by contract with a qualified third party. The application should indicate which entity the charter school contemplates would provide the required services. It is likely, of course, that the charter school will provide some services while calling upon outside resources to provide the remainder.

### ***IEP and IDEA***<sup>20</sup>

Each public school child who receives special education and related services must have an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Each IEP must be designed for one

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<sup>20</sup> Special Education Reference Primer on Charter Schools  
[http://www.uscharterschools.org/cs/spedp/print/uscs\\_docs/spedp/home.htm](http://www.uscharterschools.org/cs/spedp/print/uscs_docs/spedp/home.htm) or Maryland Specific Primer  
<http://www.mdcharternetwork.org/documents/CSSpedEdResourceManual7306.pdf>

student only, and must be a truly *individualized* document. The IEP creates an opportunity for teachers, parents, school administrators, related services personnel, and students (when appropriate) to work together to improve educational results for children with disabilities.

The IEP is the cornerstone of a quality education for each child with a disability.

To create an effective IEP, parents, teachers, other school staff—and often the student—just come together to look closely at the student’s unique needs. These individuals pool knowledge, experience, and commitment to design an educational program that will help the student be involved in, and progress in, the general curriculum. The IEP guides the delivery of special education supports and services for the student with a disability. Without a doubt, writing and implementing an effective IEP requires teamwork.

The IEP process is one of the most critical elements to ensure effective teaching, learning, and better results for all children with disabilities. It is required by our nation’s special education law—the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*, or IDEA.

The IDEA requires certain information to be included in each child’s IEP. It is useful to know, however, that states and local school systems often include additional information in IEPs in order to document that they have met certain aspects of federal or state law. The flexibility that states and school systems have to design their own IEP forms is one reason why IEP forms may look different from school system to school system or state to state. Yet, each IEP is critical in the education of a child with a disability.

### ***The Basic Special Education Process Under IDEA***

The writing of each student’s IEP takes place within the larger picture of the special education process under IDEA. The following is a brief outline of how a student

is identified as having a disability and needing special education and related services and thus, an IEP.

***Step 1: Child is identified as possibly needing special education and related services.***

“Child Find.” The state must identify, locate, and evaluate all children with disabilities in the state who need special education and related services. To do so, states conduct “Child Find” activities. A child may be identified by “Child Find,” and parents may be asked if the “Child Find” system can evaluate their child. Parents can also call the “Child Find” system and ask that their child be evaluated.

Referral or request for evaluation. A school professional may ask that a child be evaluated to see if he or she has a disability. Parents may also contact the child’s teacher or other school professional to ask that their child be evaluated. This request may be verbal or in writing. Parental consent is needed before the child may be evaluated. Evaluation needs to be completed within a reasonable time after the parent gives consent.

***Step 2: Child is evaluated.***

The evaluation must assess the child in all areas related to the child’s suspected disability. The evaluation results will be used to decide the child’s eligibility for special education and related services and to make decisions about an appropriate educational program for the child. If the parents disagree with the evaluation, they have the right to take their child for an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE). They can ask that the school system pay for this IEE.

### ***Step 3: Eligibility is decided.***

A group of qualified professionals and the parents look at the child's evaluation results. Together, they decide if the child is a "child with a disability," as defined by IDEA. Parents may ask for a hearing to challenge the eligibility decision.

### ***Step 4: Child is found eligible for services.***

If the child is found to be a "child with a disability," as defined by IDEA, he or she is eligible for special education and related services. Within 30 calendar days after a child is determined eligible, the IEP team must meet to write an IEP for the child.

Once the student has been found eligible for services, the IEP must be written. The two steps below *summarize* what is involved in writing the IEP. This guide will look at these two steps in much greater detail in the following section.

### ***Step 5: IEP meeting is scheduled.***

The charter school staff schedules and conducts the IEP meeting. School staff must:

- Contact the participants, including the parents;
- Notify parents early enough to make sure they have an opportunity to attend;
- Schedule the meeting at a time and place agreeable to parents and the school;
- Tell the parents the purpose, time, and location of the meeting;
- Tell the parents who will be attending; and
- Tell the parents that they may invite people to the meeting who have knowledge or special expertise about the child.

### ***Step 6: IEP meeting is held and the IEP is written.***

The IEP team gathers to talk about the child's needs and write the student's IEP. Parents and the student (when appropriate) are part of the team. If the child's placement is decided by a different group, the parents must be part of that group as well.

Before the school system may provide special education and related services to the child for the first time, the parents must give consent. The child begins to receive services as soon as possible after the meeting.

If the parents do not agree with the IEP and placement, they may discuss their concerns with other members of the IEP team and try to work out an agreement. If they still disagree, parents can ask for mediation, or the school may offer mediation. Parents may file a complaint with the state education agency and may request a due process hearing, at which time mediation must be available.

Here is a brief summary of what happens after the IEP is written.

### ***Step 7: Services are provided.***

The school makes sure that the child's IEP is being carried out as it was written. Parents are given a copy of the IEP. Each of the child's teachers and service providers has access to the IEP and knows his or her specific responsibilities for carrying out the IEP. This includes the accommodations, modifications, and supports that must be provided to the child, in keeping with the IEP.

### ***Step 8: Progress is measured and reported to parents.***

The child's progress toward the annual goals is measured, as stated in the IEP. His or her parents are regularly informed of their child's progress and whether that progress is enough for the child to achieve the goals by the end of the year. These progress reports must be given to parents at least as often as parents are informed of their non-disabled children's progress.

### ***Step 9: IEP is reviewed.***

The child's IEP is reviewed by the IEP team at least once a year, or more often if the parents or school ask for a review. If necessary, the IEP is revised. Parents, as team members, must be invited to attend these meetings. Parents can make suggestions for

changes, can agree or disagree with the IEP goals, and agree or disagree with the placement.

If parents do not agree with the IEP and placement, they may discuss their concerns with other members of the IEP team and try to work out an agreement. There are several options, including additional testing, an independent evaluation, or asking for mediation (if available) or a due process hearing. They may also file a complaint with the state education agency.

### ***Step 10: Child is reevaluated.***

At least every three years the child must be reevaluated. This evaluation is often called a “triennial.” Its purpose is to find out if the child continues to be a “child with a disability,” as defined by IDEA, and what the child’s educational needs are. However, the child must be reevaluated more often if conditions warrant or if the child’s parent or teacher asks for a reevaluation.

## **Free Appropriate Public education (FAPE) under IDEA <sup>21</sup>**

FAPE includes special education and related services that:

- are provided at public expense, under public supervision and direction, and without charge;
- meet the standards of the SEA, including IDEA Part B requirements;
- include an appropriate preschool, elementary school, or secondary school education in the State involved; and
- are provided in conformity with an IEP.

Under IDEA, all students with disabilities, including charter school students with disabilities, must receive FAPE.

- The vehicle for ensuring the provision of FAPE to all students with disabilities, including charter school students with disabilities, is a properly-developed IEP.
- A charter school may not unilaterally limit the services it will provide a particular student with a disability.

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<sup>21</sup> <https://innovation.ed.gov/files/2017/01/Rights-of-children-with-disabilities-in-charter-schools.pdf>

- The responsible charter school LEA, or the LEA that includes the charter school, must provide a program of FAPE for the student in the least restrictive environment in which the student’s IEP can be implemented.

### ***LEP and ELL Students***

You must also prepare for students who are not disabled, but who are considered Limited English Proficiency (LEP) or English Language Learners (ELL). For a glossary of terms and resources for implementing these programs go to <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/ell/glossary.html> .

### ***Chapter Six – Lessons Learned About Education Planning***

- Educational planning is embodiment of your vision.
- You will be accountable for educating the children.
- You will have to educate to achieve standard skills and content knowledge.
- You will have to accommodate a diversity of children.



## Chapter Seven

# Student Assessment<sup>22</sup>

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The first questions you need to ask before designing a student assessment process for your charter school are:

- “Why are we assessing students?”
- “What exactly do we want to assess?”
- “What do we hope to accomplish through assessment?”
- “What is the most effective approach to student assessment?”

### “Why are we assessing students?”

Simply put – we assess in order to be accountable and to drive continuous improvement. In answering this question think about who your school is accountable to – students, parents, the district, the state, the federal government, your community, your partners.

Then identify the legitimate interests of each stakeholder and how they will use the assessment data you have developed. For example students need feedback in order to understand their progress. Teachers need to know what is working in their classroom and what improvements are needed. The district needs to monitor the overall success of your school. Add to this list until it is comprehensive and you will have a vision of why assess students.

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<sup>22</sup> This chapter is modified from materials published by the Northwest Regional Education Laboratory [www.nwrel.org](http://www.nwrel.org); NY Charter School Resource Center Guidebook 2005; **National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST)**. CRESST is affiliated with the Graduate School of Education & Information Studies at UCLA. <http://cresst.org/>

## **“What exactly do we want to assess?”**

The first place to look for answers to this question is the charter school’s goals and objectives. The best assessment methods, executed with the greatest level of skill, cannot compensate for inappropriate or inadequate goals. You will definitely want to measure academic progress. You will also want to measure progress related to your school’s theme; e.g. performing arts, technology, character education, service learning. You may want to measure other indicators of student growth in psycho-social areas, behavioral areas and health/hygiene. Most charter schools employ multiple assessment methods in a systematic fashion. The assessment methodology you choose is not inherently good or right. Any such methodology must be viewed in the context of assuring achievement of the school’s objectives.

## **“What do we hope to accomplish through assessment?”**

In answering this question, founders generally will point to continuous improvement for students, within each classroom and for the school as a whole. We strongly encourage you to create a testing process that documents where students are upon admission in order to create a context and valid comparison for measuring their progress.

A well-designed assessment process will also examine the impact of the assessment methods themselves—on both teachers and students. Whatever methods the teacher employs will necessarily modify his/her behavior. It is critical to align measurement with your school’s educational philosophy, content and pedagogy. Clearly, a progressive educational approach will dictate very different assessment techniques from those used by a back-to-basics school or a service learning school. “Techniques used to evaluate progress toward achievement of goals, in themselves, have the effect of focusing the teacher’s attention, determining purposes, and influencing directions for action. These effects are inevitable. They cannot be ignored simply because they are inconvenient. They must be taken into account in the selection of assessment techniques. Means of

assessment that fence teachers in, destroy initiative, or create debilitating anxieties may prove to be too great a price to pay ... Assessment techniques do not only measure learning, they also affect it. How students perceive assessment devices and what they learn from the employment of such devices must be matters of vital concern in the selection of evaluative instruments. Anyone who has ever observed how students react to different kinds of examinations can attest to the varied effects they produce. Evaluative techniques that threaten, destroy self-esteem, distort perceptions about what is really important, or encourage negative, hostile behavior may be no bargain when assessed in terms of their impact on the recipients. Students learn from all their experiences, including the experience of being evaluated, and those experiences must also be taken into account in determining accountability.”<sup>23</sup>

Many critics of the current emphasis on mandatory state-wide testing cite its unintended consequences as a serious problem. They point to a reduction in educational opportunities in the arts, music, and dance as a side-effect of mandatory high stakes testing. They point to “teaching to the test” as an unintended practice which may be harmful to students. While MAPCS cannot appropriately take a position on this controversy, we feel it is important that founders examine the impact of measurement when designing a charter school and choosing the assessment approach that the school will use to supplement mandatory testing.

### **“What is the most effective approach to student assessment?”**

All schools use an array of different assessment tools to evaluate students. In selecting assessment tools, you should seek the most efficient means of measuring achievement of the school’s goals and objectives. The best approaches provide reliable information with minimal unintended negative consequences and maximum efficiency in using scarce resources of time, training, and finances.

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<sup>23</sup> Northwest Regional Education Laboratory [www.nwrel.org](http://www.nwrel.org)

## ***Types of Assessment Tools***

### **Traditional Assessment uses**

- Teacher and textbook designed classroom tests and quizzes
- Grades on assignments such as book reports, laboratory reports, research papers, and homework
- Standardized tests

### **Nontraditional Assessment** (a.k.a. “authentic,” alternative) uses

- Portfolios
- Exhibitions and performances
- Holistic rubrics
- Graduation committees

Most charter schools use a blend of traditional and non-traditional methods. In Maryland, required testing makes it impossible for a charter school to rely exclusively on nontraditional evaluation. It is more difficult to establish the validity and reliability of nontraditional assessment tools. There is, however, some robust research available on how to conduct non-traditional evaluation that is scientifically proven.

<b>Descriptive Guide to Standardized Tests<sup>24</sup></b>	
<b>Types of Tests</b>	
<b>Type</b>	<b>Description</b>
Achievement Tests	Measure how much a student has learned, but not what a student is capable of learning. (See Aptitude Tests below.) Achievement tests are given after students have been instructed in a particular area of knowledge or trained in a specific set of skills.
Aptitude Tests	Measure what a student is capable of learning. Cognitive ability tests and IQ tests are examples of aptitude tests. These test scores are often used to predict future performance.

<sup>24</sup> **Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory**; “Charter Starters Leadership Training Workbook 3: Assessment and Accountability;” Rural Education Program, Dr. Joyce Ley, Director, July 1999 and **National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST)**.

<b>Descriptive Guide to Standardized Tests<sup>24</sup></b>	
<b>Types of Tests</b>	
Competency Tests	Achievement test designed to determine whether a student has met a minimum standard of skills and knowledge in a specific subject area.
“High Stakes” Tests	Nationally recognized standardized tests frequently used as college admissions criteria or for National Merit Scholarships. Both the SAT and ACT are examples of “high stakes” tests.
IQ (Intelligence Quotient) Tests	Ability tests are designed to compare the abilities of people who are the same age. Alfred Binet developed IQ tests early in the 20th century.
Performance-Assessment Tests	Alternative to standardized testing that requires a student to demonstrate knowledge of a particular subject. Also known as “open-ended” tests, these often include essay questions or applied math problems. Explicit definitions of what students must do to demonstrate proficiency at a specific level on the content standards. For example, the performance level “exceptional achievement” on a dimension “communication of ideas” is reached when the student examines the problem from several different positions and provides adequate evidence to support each position.
<b>Terms Used To Describe Tests and Student Performance</b>	
<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Accommodations and Adaptations	Modifications in the way assessments are designed or administered so that students with disabilities (SWD) and limited English proficient (LEP) students can be included in the assessment. Assessment accommodations or adaptations might include Braille forms for blind students or tests in native languages for students whose primary language is other than English.
Alignment	<p>The process of linking content and performance standards to assessment, instruction, and learning in classrooms. One typical alignment strategy is the step-by-step development of (a) content standards, (b) performance standards, (c) assessments, and (d) instruction for classroom learning. Ideally, each step is informed by the previous step or steps, and the sequential process is represented as follows: Content Standards - Performance Standards - Assessments - Instruction for Learning.</p> <p>In practice, the steps of the alignment process will overlap. The crucial question is whether classroom teaching and learning activities support the standards and assessments. System alignment also includes the link between other school, district, and state resources. Alignment supports the goals of the standards, i.e., whether professional development priorities and instructional materials are linked to what is necessary to achieve the standards.</p>
Alternative Assessment  (also Authentic or	An assessment that requires students to generate a response to a question rather than choose from a set of responses provided to them. Exhibitions, investigations, demonstrations, written or oral responses, journals, and portfolios are examples of “alternative assessment.” Ideally,

## Descriptive Guide to Standardized Tests<sup>24</sup>

### Types of Tests

Performance Assessment)	alternative assessment requires students to actively accomplish complex and significant tasks, while bringing to bear prior knowledge, recent learning, and relevant skills to solve realistic or authentic problems. Alternative assessments are often one key element of an assessment system.
Analytic Scoring	Evaluating student work across multiple dimensions of performance rather than from an overall impression (holistic scoring). In analytic scoring, individual scores for each dimension are scored and reported. For example, analytic scoring of a history essay might include scores of the following dimensions: use of prior knowledge, application of principles, use of original source material to support a point of view, and composition. An overall impression of quality may be included in analytic scoring.
Anchor(s)	A sample of student work that exemplifies a specific level of performance. Raters use anchors to score student work, usually comparing the student performance to the anchor. For example, if student work was being scored on a scale of 1-5, there would typically be anchors (previously scored student work), exemplifying each point on the scale.
Assessment	The process of gathering, describing, or quantifying information about performance.
Assessment System	The combination of multiple assessments into a comprehensive reporting format that produces comprehensive, credible, dependable information upon which important decisions can be made about students, schools, districts, or states. An assessment system may consist of a norm-referenced or criterion-referenced assessment, an alternative assessment system, and classroom assessments.
Benchmark	A detailed description of a specific level of student performance expected of students at particular ages, grades, or development levels. Benchmarks are often represented by samples of student work. A set of benchmarks can be used as "checkpoints" to monitor progress toward meeting performance goals within and across grade levels, i.e., benchmarks for expected mathematics capabilities at Grades 3, 7, 10 and at graduation.
Classroom Assessment	An assessment developed, administered, and scored by a teacher or set of teachers with the purpose of evaluating individual or classroom student performance on a topic. Classroom assessments may be aligned into an assessment system that includes alternative assessments and either a norm-referenced or criterion-referenced assessment. Ideally, the results of a classroom assessment are used to inform and influence instruction that helps students reach high standards.
Content Standards	Broadly stated expectations of what students should <i>know and be able to do</i> in particular subjects and grade levels. Content standards define for teachers, schools, students, and the community not only the expected

## Descriptive Guide to Standardized Tests<sup>24</sup>

### Types of Tests

	student skills and knowledge, but what schools should teach. An example of a language arts standard is: "Fourth-grade students will be able to gather information for a report using sources such as interviews, questionnaires, computers, and library centers."
Criteria	Guidelines, rules, characteristics, or dimensions that are used to judge the quality of student performance. Criteria indicate what we value in student responses, products, or performances. They may be holistic, analytic, general, or specific. Scoring rubrics are based on criteria and define what the criteria mean and how they are used.
Criterion-Referenced Assessment	An assessment where an individual's performance is compared to a specific learning objective or performance standard and not to the performance of other students. Criterion-referenced assessment tells us how well students are performing on specific goals or standards rather than just telling how their performance compares to a norm group of students nationally or locally. In criterion-referenced assessments, it is possible that none, or all, of the examinees will reach a particular goal or performance standard. For example: "All of the students demonstrated <i>proficiency</i> in applying concepts from astronomy, meteorology, geology, oceanography, and physics to describe the forces that shape the earth."
Dimensions	Desired knowledge or skills measured in an assessment and usually represented in a scoring rubric. For example, a measurement of student teamwork skills on a performance assessment might include six dimensions: <i>adaptability</i> (recognizing problems and responding appropriately), <i>coordination</i> (organizing team activities to complete a task on time), <i>decision making</i> (using available information to make decisions), <i>interpersonal</i> (interacting cooperatively with other team members), <i>leadership</i> (providing direction for the team), and <i>communication</i> (clearly and accurately exchanging information between team members).
Equity	Equity is the concern for fairness, i.e., that assessments are free from bias or favoritism. An assessment that is fair enables <i>all</i> children to show what they can do. At minimum, all assessments should be reviewed for (a) stereotypes, (b) situations that may favor one culture over another, (c) excessive language demands that prevent some students from showing their knowledge, and (d) the assessment's potential to include students with disabilities or limited English proficiency.
Exhibitions	Presentations by a student for a panel of faculty and experts. Exhibitions are designed to determine students' knowledge of a subject and their ability to explain what they have learned.
Holistic Scoring	Evaluating student work in which the score is based on an overall impression of student performance rather than multiple dimensions of performance (analytic scoring).
National Percentile	Compares one student's score with those of other students. For example, if a fourth-grader's national percentile is 82, that student outperformed 82

## Descriptive Guide to Standardized Tests<sup>24</sup>

### Types of Tests

	percent of the fourth-graders. The highest percentile is 99.
Norm Referencing	Performance measure based on the Bell curve. "Norm" refers to normal, or average, so that most of the scores will fall in the average range. In Norm referenced assessments, student performances are compared to a larger group. Usually the larger group or "norm group" is a national sample representing a wide and diverse cross-section of students. Students, schools, districts, and even states are compared or rank-ordered in relation to the norm group. The purpose of a norm-referenced assessment is usually to sort students and not to measure achievement towards some criterion of performance.
Portfolios	A portfolio is collection of work, usually drawn from students' classroom work. A portfolio becomes a portfolio assessment when (1) the assessment purpose is defined; (2) criteria or methods are made clear for determining <i>what</i> is put into the portfolio, <i>by whom</i> , and <i>when</i> ; and (3) criteria for assessing either the collection or individual pieces of work are identified and used to make judgments about performance. Portfolios can be designed to assess student progress, effort, and/or achievement, and encourage students to reflect on their learning. Portfolios are a type of alternative assessment.
Reliability	Measure of a test's consistency. For example, if a student takes a test one day and gets an 85 and then retakes the test a few months later and gets an 83, that indicates that the test has a high degree of reliability.
Sampling	Using the results of a group to predict the results of the whole. A school test can be given to a sample of students in such a way that the results accurately evaluate students in that category. If the sample is poorly chosen or self-selected (volunteers), the results would be meaningless. Sampling would allow school districts to save money, but is infrequently used because of political pressure.
Scale	Values given to student performance. Scales may be applied to individual items or performances. For example, <i>checklists</i> , i.e., yes or no; <i>numerical</i> , i.e., 1-6; or <i>descriptive</i> , i.e., "The student presented multiple points of view to support her essay." Scaled scores occur when participants' responses to any number of items are combined and used to establish and place students on a single scale of performance.
Standardization	A consistent set of procedures for designing, administering, and scoring an assessment. The purpose of standardization is to ensure that all students are assessed under the same conditions so that their scores have the same meaning and are not influenced by differing conditions. Standardized procedures are very important when scores will be used to compare individuals or groups.
Standards	The broadest of a family of terms referring to statements of expectations for student learning, including content standards, performance standards, and benchmarks.



<b>Descriptive Guide to Standardized Tests<sup>24</sup></b>	
<b>Types of Tests</b>	
Standards-Based Reform	A program of school improvement involving setting high standards for all students and a process for adapting instruction and assessment to make sure all students can achieve the standards.
Stanine	Test scores are also grouped in “stanines,” nine equal units. Scores of 1–3 are considered below average, 4–6 are considered average, and 7–9 are considered above average.
Validity	The degree to which the results of an assessment are dependable and consistently measure particular student knowledge and/or skills. Reliability is an indication of the consistency of scores across raters, over time, or across different tasks or items that measure the same thing. Thus, reliability may be expressed as (a) the relationship between test items intended to measure the same skill or knowledge (item reliability), (b) the relationship between two administrations of the same test to the same student or students (test/retest reliability), or (c) the degree of agreement between two or more raters (rater reliability). An unreliable assessment cannot be valid.

## ***Standardized Assessments***

Charter schools generally use standardized tests for benchmarking because they have been extensively documented as valid and reliable. This enables the school to document its achievements in a manner which has widespread acceptance. There are many standardized assessments available for purchase from private testing services. It is your responsibility to research available tests carefully to ensure alignment with the school’s performance indicators and curriculum as well as the Common Core State Standards.

## ***Gathering, Using, and Reporting Data***<sup>25</sup>

In planning how your charter school will collect student assessment data, always consider the multiple audiences who will be interested in using this data. Stakeholders include the students and their families, classroom teachers, school administrators, the Board, the authorizer, and the community. Each stakeholder has legitimate concerns which are overlapping but not identical. It is worth examining the possibility of adapting some of the same standardized tests used by the local district in order to facilitate comparisons of individual and aggregate progress.

You will need to integrate these aspects in your assessment data collection process:

- **Determine baselines for incoming students:** As part of a robust initial evaluation we advise you to both review students' records from their previous schools and administer a pre-test.
- **Assess annual student achievement:** Use the same instrument(s) and method(s) that you have chosen for the baseline assessment, as well as other assessment methods, to document year-to-year progress.
- **Plan to interpret and use data:**
  - Measure progress from the baseline
  - Compare academic progress to prior rates of progress in previous schools
  - Compare student achievement to your school's goals and objectives.
- **Plan to interpret data for critical student subgroups:**
  - Learn how to identify achievement for subgroups of students (e.g., males/females; breakdown by family income; special education groups; English language learners/native English speakers)
  - Disaggregated data can identify specific aspects of achievement to identify specific strengths and weaknesses in curriculum and instruction, set priorities for professional development, or reallocate resources.
- **Plan to report student progress to all stakeholders: Use some or all of the following:**
  - Grades and report cards

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<sup>25</sup> [www.USCHARTERSCHOOLS.org](http://www.USCHARTERSCHOOLS.org)

- Portfolios, narratives, and student-involved conferences
- Annual reports
- Informational brochures
- Annual "stakeholder meetings."

## Chapter 7 Lessons Learned

Before designing a student assessment process for your charter school ask:

- “Why are we assessing students?”
- “What exactly do we want to assess?”
- “What do we hope to accomplish through assessment?”
- “What is the most effective approach to student assessment?”

Integrate these aspects in your assessment data collection process:

- Determine baselines for incoming students
- Assess annual student achievement
- Plan to interpret and use data
- Plan to interpret data for critical student subgroups
- Plan to report student progress to all stakeholders

Finally, remember that an effective accountability system will use student assessment data in an ongoing improvement process with all of your school’s stakeholders. Student assessment is the core accountability program that drives the whole school improvement process.

## *Chapter Eight*

# **Facilities: Start Now to Find Your Space**<sup>26</sup>

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### ***Introduction***

The challenge of finding a suitable facility for your charter school has become an impediment to creating new charter schools across the country. It is so serious that we recommend that you have a strong plan for a facility when you apply for your charter. Local boards may accept a well-reasoned plan for how founders are going to find a site.

Remember that charter schools are both an opportunity to be creative and are public schools following significant regulations. We encourage you to think outside the box and consider converting or building nontraditional spaces. At the same time, remember that zoning, health and safety regulations are inflexible. In our opinion, creativity is a virtue but health/safety are NOT something we would like to compromise.

Failure to secure a facility has caused a number of approved charter schools to fail before they could open their doors. Make sure you are knowledgeable and well connected to your local decision makers – you’ll stand a much greater chance of success with them on your side.

Some of the easiest sites for your school are former public, private, or parochial schools that are either not being used or are underused. Having been built as schools, they will be, most likely, relatively inexpensive to make ready—unless they have significant problems such as the presence of lead, asbestos, or lack of handicap access.

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<sup>26</sup> This chapter was prepared using materials from Northwest Educational Laboratory and the Illinois Charter Developers’ Handbook

**Under Maryland law,**

*If, with the approval of the State Superintendent, a county board determines that a school site or building no longer is needed for school purposes and after the county commissioners or county council have provided the required notice under § 4-115 of this article, the county board shall inform the public charter schools in the county that the school site or building is available for occupation and use by a public charter school on the terms determined by the county board.*

*(2) Each county board:*

*(I) [shall] **SHALL** establish a procedure to determine which public charter school may occupy and use an available school site or building if more than one public charter school notifies the county board of an interest in occupying and using a school site or building;*

In research on charter schools, problems with facilities are inevitably near the top of the list of hurdles facing charter school founders. The key to finding a workable facility for your charter school is to start the planning process early, and be flexible in the first few years.<sup>27</sup>

## ***Planning for Facilities***

Before you can hunt for a facility you need to define what your needs are. Unless your founding group has in-house expertise, you will need the assistance of experts on real estate, architecture, and finance.

It is possible that “some architects may be willing to help find adequate space on a pro bono basis if the charter school’s mission is pitched to them convincingly (e.g., performing a community service for kids in need, etc.)”<sup>28</sup>

The following checklists offer guidance for working through the facility acquisition processes of needs assessment, site identification, site evaluation, and financing.

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<sup>27</sup> Northwest Ed Lab

<sup>28</sup> Northwest Ed Lab

## ***Phase I Facility Needs Assessment:*** <sup>29</sup>

1. What is the educational vision of the school, and how will the facilities reflect that vision?
2. How flexible are you willing to be in facility size and location?
3. What is your ideal student/teacher or student/adult ratio? What kind of spaces will you need to maintain that ratio?
4. Is it possible for the school to relocate in a year or two?
5. How many students do you have, or plan to have?
6. Will the student population change significantly in the next three to five years?
7. Do you understand the complexity of long-term leases and/or purchase financing under Maryland charter school regulations?
8. What kind of classroom spaces will allow the school to meet its educational goals?
9. What other kinds of spaces will be needed (recreation, art, library, science, office, lunchroom, etc.)?
10. What kinds of facilities would be ideal to have near the school that you don't have to own and maintain (parks, libraries, performing arts centers, etc.)?
11. What kind of technological capacity does your school facility need to have?
12. Where do the students that your school will serve live?
13. What transportation options will be available to your students?
14. How much total space is needed for the interior of the charter school?
15. How much total space is needed for the exterior of the charter school?

## ***Phase II Initial Site Identification:*** <sup>30</sup>

1. Give yourself plenty of time to consider the advantages and disadvantages of as many options as possible. Compare each of them to the Phase I results.
2. Do your homework. Find out about your local building and zoning codes, permits, and approval process. These are available at your city hall.

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<sup>29</sup> Northwest Ed Lab

<sup>30</sup> Northwest Ed Lab

3. Identify possible allies, partners, and champions. Consider seeking support from community based organizations, nonprofit affordable housing developers, faith-based organizations, local political leaders, chambers of commerce, civic groups, real estate agents.
4. Ask the school district for a list of existing, unused district or educational facilities.
5. Consider partnering with a local community college or existing private or alternative schools.
6. Consider existing community or public facilities that may not be used during the day.
7. Consider partnering with local community groups (YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs, community centers).
8. Inquire with the city for a list of vacant buildings currently owned by the city.
9. Consult with a real estate agent, architectural firm, local business, or corporate sponsor for support and options.
10. Network and use other relationships to identify possibilities, including: office space; retail space; donations of buildings; partnerships with local businesses (school-to-work relationship);
11. Modular units: Buy or lease, new or used, low cost. These take from 30-45 days to install plus time for utilities to be connected. Questions to ask: Is this a turnkey project? (I.e. is it user-ready?) Is the foundation included? What are flooring options? Carpet, tiles? Is plumbing included?
12. Finally, after you identify the best options for a site, explore your options more thoroughly by evaluating them on several factors. Architects can help facilitate this process (choose an architect with experience in this area).

**A Word About Contractors:**

Is the contractor bonded? You may purchase bonding insurance against contractor's work, which will protect you if the contractor goes out of business or he/she does not insure subcontractors.

### ***Phase III Evaluate the Site:*** <sup>31</sup>

1. **Evaluate your space requirement:** Is the space appropriate considering the mission of the school?
2. **Location:** Does the location fit your needs and the needs of your students?
3. **Building Status:** Is the building up to code? If not, how much will it cost to bring it up to code? Use professionals to answer this. Your town's building inspector may advise – however, you will need architects, engineers, and contractors to help with time/cost/feasibility analyses.
4. **Explore Liability Costs:** including insurance and maintenance/repairs.
5. **Plumbing and Wiring:** What will it cost to add needed plumbing, telephone lines, and so forth?
6. **Compliance Issues:** zoning; building codes; Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA dictates that you must provide easy access for individuals with disabilities); safety and health-related (hazardous materials, fire codes, number of entrances and exits, and their locations), lighting requirements, space requirements (bathrooms, space room).

### ***Phase IV: Facilities Financing***

Facilities represent perhaps the most significant cost for charter schools. Charter founders face a daunting challenge paying facilities costs. Unlike district schools, charters usually pay facilities costs out of operating funds. In addition, charter schools lack bonding authority and have restrictions on long-term borrowing.

Please reference the chapter on fundraising for guidance on ways to supplement operating funds in financing your facility.

Facilities financing is too complex to be adequately covered within the scope of this manual. In addition to seeking expert advice, you should develop the personal expertise of a well-prepared consumer. Therefore, there are numerous guides you can download on the

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<sup>31</sup> Northwest Ed Lab



subject. Comprehensive coverage of facilities financing is at <https://www.charterschoolcenter.org/category/focus-areas/facilities>.

Another helpful site is NCB Capital Impact, which is very interested in helping charter schools find and pay for buildings. They are both a financial services company and a development company with substantial technical assistance expertise. Their resource guide [\*The Answer Key: How To Plan, Develop and Finance Your Charter School Facility\*](#) and the [\*Sustainable Answer Key\*](#) (Green Schools) can be downloaded for free on their Website.

### Some Funding Options:<sup>32</sup>

- **Foundation Loans:** Available for short term needs such as minor renovations.
- **Bank Loans:** A traditional way to secure enough cash to undertake costs such as building renovations. You must determine in advance whether the amount and timing of per-pupil revenue will support loan repayments. In addition, because you don't yet have a financial track record, you face creditworthiness challenges.
- **Loans From Community Development Financial Institutions:** Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) provide nonprofits access to various forms of reduced interest financing.
- **Modular Buildings:** Several companies offer construction management and financing assistance to non-profit organizations that purchase their modular facilities. The modular units can be constructed as stand-alone facilities or additions to existing buildings.
- **Multi-use Facilities:** A multi-use facility can generate revenue, either through rental income or through proceeds from other operations, to offset some of the school's facility costs. It can also allow the school to grow by using a greater share of the building over time and renting out smaller portions. If a community development corporation (CDC) operates the building and rents at a low rate to the school, the school can avoid many of the hazards of real estate financing/development/operations. The CDC also can provide better credit with banks and the funding community.

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<sup>32</sup> Illinois Charter Developers' Guide

- **Occupancy in Existing School Facility:** The local school district may own buildings that are partially or fully unused. If you can develop the support of the district, you can avoid many start-up challenges. Obviously, you will need to show them how you are a resource for the community that doesn't harm the district.
- **Start Small and Grow:** Reduces your capital needs until you have a track record of success. It is always easier to sell yourself when funders can visit a successful reality. You can house your school in a temporary space for the first few years.
- **Partner with an Established Institution** to guarantee the loan or to float a bond to secure the capital needed to finance your building needs.
- **Combine Several Options:** for example, fundraising and a bank loan, to create the most affordable and appropriate facility financing package

To appreciate the financial choices a bit more, the table below offers a basic analysis.

<b>Facilities Financing Options - Pros and Cons</b> <sup>33</sup>		
<b>Type of Funding</b>	<b>Pros</b>	<b>Cons</b>
Funding from Operating Funds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enables school to maintain autonomy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diverts funds earmarked for educational programs</li> </ul>
Capital Campaign	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can strengthen and broaden network of financial supporters</li> <li>• Mobilizes volunteer group to support school</li> <li>• Raises funds without adding bureaucracy to school's operations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time – can take four or five years to reach funding goals</li> <li>• Costly - Need to hire a dedicated professional staffer, fundraising consultant or securing significant pro-bono support to coordinate and monitor the campaign.</li> </ul>
Traditional Bank Loans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secure cash resources for large project, such as facilities purchase and/or renovation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Banks reticent to provide long-term financing to school with five-year charter</li> <li>• High interest rates</li> <li>• Banks may require “balloon financing.”</li> <li>• Burdensomely high loan repayment costs.</li> </ul>

<sup>33</sup> Illinois Charter Developers' Guide

## Facilities Financing Options - Pros and Cons <sup>33</sup>

Type of Funding	Pros	Cons
Loans Guarantee by other entities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More available lenders.</li> <li>• Guarantees loan against possibility of default</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adds risk to guarantor's operations</li> <li>• Invites regulatory control from guarantor</li> </ul>
Low-interest loans through community development financial institutions (CDFIs). <sup>34</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CDFIs offer access to loans for non-profit organizations unable to get loans approved elsewhere.</li> <li>• Loans at below-market rates.</li> <li>• CDFIs may provide technical assistance in organizational start-up, financial and facilities planning and other critical issues for charter schools.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CDFI loans are competitive, i.e. hard to get.</li> <li>• You must do your homework.</li> </ul>
Modular Buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modular structures are flexible.</li> <li>• Modular companies may provide financing.</li> <li>• Modular companies are often full-service construction management and financing firms.</li> <li>• Some modular companies specialize in charter school financing when other traditional lenders hesitate to lend to a charter school.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school must own/lease sufficient land to house the buildings.</li> <li>• Modular companies usually require the use of their contractors and do not allow a bidding process.</li> <li>• Possible above market interest rates</li> <li>• Some modular companies offer only a leasing program. This can be good or bad as modular facilities may have a limited functional life span.</li> </ul>
Multi-use facility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lowers credit risk because it mitigates risk of facility becoming inoperative. Thus, financing may be easier to secure.</li> <li>• Other facility uses generate revenues.</li> <li>• In a Community Development Corporation building the CDC provides credit and links the funding community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adds complexity to the operation of the school</li> <li>• Loss of control over site.</li> </ul>
Occupancy in existing school facility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some school districts have underutilized school buildings.</li> <li>• The cost of required renovations may be significantly lower than for other types of facilities.</li> <li>• The district could become a partner in a capital campaign.</li> <li>• May encourage the charter school to address competing interests of various constituencies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Districts may hesitant to share space with charter schools they perceive as competition.</li> <li>• Space available may require extensive, expensive renovations.</li> <li>• Needs support of the district.</li> <li>• Could invite regulatory control by the district.</li> <li>• Questions of responsible for building maintenance/repairs.</li> <li>• Logistics of sharing common areas</li> </ul>

<sup>34</sup> See the Capital Impact Partners at <https://www.capitalimpact.org/>

## ***Chapter Eight – Lessons Learned About Facility Acquisition***

- Do not postpone the search for a facility. You need a commitment in order to sign your charter agreement.
- Bring in expert assistance.
- Assess needs thoroughly.
- Explore community partnerships.
- Financing choices are complex, but available.

## *Chapter Nine*

### **Parental and Community Involvement:**

### **Making the School Sing**<sup>35</sup>

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This chapter is chock-full of ideas and suggestions for bringing parents and the community along as active supporters of the school and the education process. Don't be intimidated. You have a lot to do to plan and launch a school. But don't skip these areas. They are critical strategies to support your success. Begin. Learn. Keep going.

#### ***Parental Involvement***

Parents are the primary educators for their children. Diane Savona, a teacher with 30+ years' experience teaching impoverished, minority inner-city and special needs children, observed that "frequently you can predict which children will succeed in school by the extent to which they live with caring adults who actively support their education."

Because parental involvement is a key feature of most successful charter schools, parents should be invited to join in school activities—starting with an open-door policy for classroom involvement, and possibly by having the school provide (itself or with a partner) adult education classes, parenting skills classes and family activities. The parents frequently need nurturing and non-judgmental opportunities to enhance their own sense of self-worth. The charter school environment can provide opportunities for the entire family to become more functional on a variety of levels. This approach will create a dynamic process where success for the whole family is assured.

When successfully integrated into your charter school, parent involvement creates community; builds commitment to, and enthusiasm for, the school and its programs; and requires hard work and diverse skills to meet the school's many needs. Effective

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<sup>35</sup> Portions adapted from Illinois Charter School Resource Guide developed by Leadership for Quality Education.

strategies for involving parents in the school will vary widely according to the school's population. Determining and implementing strategies for your particular community requires a high level of cultural sensitivity. While little encouragement may be needed for one group of parents to become involved, another may require proactive efforts by school staff and administration to create a warm and welcoming atmosphere and to boost parents' confidence and sense of efficacy.

The possibilities for tapping into the vast wealth of knowledge, experience, and skills that parents offer reach far beyond the traditional PTA work of organizing fundraising and social events. An effective parent involvement program requires creative thinking and ongoing commitment in organizing the school's priorities and resources.

### ***Guiding Principles and Helpful Hints: Parent Involvement***<sup>36</sup>

1. **Clearly Communicate** your charter school's goals, expectations, and mission to prospective parents and students from the earliest stages of the school's development.
2. **Hire a Parent-Involvement Coordinator or Community Liaison** to conduct outreach efforts, coordinate parent volunteers, and serve as a link between parents and staff.
3. **Create and Distribute a Parent Policy Manual** containing the following information to all prospective parents:
  - A list of parent involvement expectations and responsibilities
  - A list of parent involvement opportunities
  - Suggestions on what parents can do at home to support student learning
  - Information on how parents can communicate and address issues and problems regarding the school
4. **Create and foster an atmosphere in which parents' perspectives and input are expected**, invited and incorporated in all aspects of decision-making, from researching after-school programs to participating in staff interviews.

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<sup>36</sup> Adapted from Illinois Charter School Resource Guide developed by Leadership for Quality Education.

- Develop and implement plans to ensure that school staff makes parents feel welcomed and encouraged to participate in decisions affecting their children.
- Make involvement in governance as convenient, accessible, and appealing as possible to parents: provide translation of written materials and meetings for non-English speakers, schedule meetings at convenient times, and offer refreshments and affordable childcare.
- Establish and publicize a wide variety of parent involvement opportunities to accommodate parents' diverse skills, interests, and work schedules.
- Create and distribute a parent newsletter to keep parents informed of and involved in the school's activities.

### ***Guiding Principles and Helpful Hints: Public Relations and Community Outreach***<sup>37</sup>

Strong, healthy public and community relations is critical through all phases of developing and operating a charter school. To develop the network of partners and supporters necessary for success, charter school developers should develop a specific set of short and long-range community outreach and marketing strategies. Your school can build strong relationships with critical stakeholders, and develop partnerships with parents, community groups, businesses, media, the local school district, higher educational institutions, and other organizations by:

- **Being Informed.** Credibility and impact reflects the quality of information you provide. Do extensive research before submitting your charter proposal. Consult resources listed in this guide and elsewhere to ask questions and verify information about charter schools.
- **Being Creative.** Presentation skills matter almost as much as the content of what you are communicating. How many politicians are elected despite their opponents being better qualified? How many inferior products are sold through effective

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<sup>37</sup> Illinois Charter School Resource Guide developed by Leadership for Quality Education.

advertisements? It is critical to identify resources for designing visually appealing, informative materials that will speak to your targeted audiences.

- **Being strategic** about how and where you present your charter school to the public.
  - Set up a committee to coordinate community outreach and marketing efforts.
  - Designate a contact person (founder, principal, board member, or other supporter) to respond to media and other official inquiries. This person should be widely familiar with the school at all levels and savvy to media and other public-relations concerns.
  - Reach out to a broad cross-section of the population.
  - Build a list of media contacts and develop a positive rapport with each.
  - Create materials to "get the word out" about your school using clippings, posters, flyers, brochures, newsletters, and an Internet website, if possible. Provide positive, clear, accurate messages about your school.
  - Establish and publicize mechanisms to facilitate and respond to questions, concerns, and suggestions from the community. Schedule meetings during convenient times and provide refreshments, childcare help, and language translation where needed, to make people feel comfortable and welcome.
  - Remember to recognize those that have helped or supported your school in any way.

### ***Guiding Principles and Helpful Hints: Fostering Positive Relations with the Local School District***

There are many areas of potential cooperation and mutual interest between charter schools and their local districts. There can be efficiencies in subcontracting with a district for services such as special education and food services. A charter school can help relieve overcrowding in district schools without the district investing in new or expanded facilities. A charter school can serve challenging populations that solve a problem faced by the district. A charter school can serve as a laboratory for innovation helping to improve the district. A charter school can provide a design choice for parents wanting a



different opportunity for their children. Make your own list and then build a positive working relationship based on mutual interest.

Here are some ideas about how to turn this into a productive and mutually beneficial relationship throughout the charter development process: <sup>38</sup>

- 1. Meet with the local superintendent (where possible) and /or top district staff before you start.** Seek out ways to work collaboratively with the district, complement/supplement programs that the district offers, and share or contract for services. Also, consider and discuss how the charter school could pool professional resources and knowledge with district teachers.
- 2. Do not criticize the district publicly.** Focus on the positive aspects of your charter, not the negative aspects of the local district or its schools. The message to stress is this: Charter schools are not "better than district schools"; they simply provide new educational options for students and the community. They represent another way of providing public education. Charter schools are strictly accountable to the public for delivering quality services.
- 3. Maintain open, courteous lines of communication.**
- 4. Provide clear, accurate information** to the local board and superintendent about charter schools in general and your proposal in particular.
- 5. Attend school board meetings, show sensitivity to the district's perspective and needs, and respond to questions and concerns as they arise.**

## ***Chapter Nine – Lessons Learned About Parents and Community***

- Parental involvement is an indicator of school success.
- Parents support the educational process.
- Parents are valuable resources.
- Community relations matter. Good relations are important.
- Reach out.

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<sup>38</sup> Illinois Charter School Resource Guide developed by Leadership for Quality Education.

## *Chapter Ten*

### **Financial Plan:**

#### **Sound Fiscal Policies**

#### **Avoid Trouble and Build Confidence**

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When starting a charter school, the development and implementation of fiscal (accounting) policies and procedures are critical to the success of the educational facility. When we discuss a charter school's fiscal policies, we are referring to more than just the manner in which we handle the dollars and cents that flow through the organization. We are referencing the comprehensive management of the entire operational structure of the accounting function. The creation of strong financial policies and procedures is a time consuming and highly technical task that includes a myriad of assignments. For a newly formed school, the thought process for establishing accounting rules and regulations must encompass all facets of financial management, such as:

- Gaining an understanding of the accounting rules and regulations that govern charter schools in Maryland. These regulations include, but are not limited to, Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (“GAAP”) and Governmental Accounting Standards Board policies;
- Properly developing an efficient and effective internal control structure to protect the school's assets;
- Understanding the tasks and responsibilities of a charter school's fiscal department such as:
  - Developing and reviewing the annual fiscal budget;
  - Managing the school's cash receipts and disbursements;
  - Ensuring proper compliance with grants and funding source requirements; and
  - Properly reporting on the fiscal operations of the school.

This chapter of the manual will help founders gain an understanding of how to build the foundation for a charter school fiscal, finance, or accounting department. This section is not intended to be a comprehensive accounting manual, as a complete accounting policies and procedures manual would easily be more than 100 pages in length. This is just a brief outline of the issues that must be considered when establishing an efficient department.

## ***Understanding the Applicable Accounting Rules and Regulations***

### ***GAAP and GASB***

In general, the primary method of accounting for the Maryland charter schools is GAAP (Generally Accepted Accounting Principles.) When a founder moves towards establishing a charter school, that individual must obtain at least what we call the “50,000 feet” level of understanding of the accounting rules and regulations that govern educational organizations. The level of understanding is referred to as 50,000 feet because, unless the founder is an accountant by trade, the regulations are somewhat difficult to grasp in totality at the outset. Therefore, the founder only needs to be familiar with the rules and does not need to become an accounting expert.

GAAP are the rules and regulations that prescribe how financial transactions of the school are recorded in the general ledger. The foundation of GAAP is the use of the accrual basis of accounting. Essentially, the accrual basis of accounting requires the school to recognize revenues as they are *earned* and expenses as they are *incurred* as opposed to recognizing revenues and expenses when the cash for these items are *received* or *disbursed*, respectively.

More specifically, the State of Maryland has mandated that all school districts, which include the new charter school, adopt and implement Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) Statement No. 34. While GAAP is a “method of accounting,”

GASB 34 is a “financial reporting model.” The GASB-issued Statement No. 34 in June of 1999 as a way to improve the manner in which state and local governments report on the financial results of their ongoing operations. The primary goal of this statement was to make “reading” the financial statements easier. Under GASB 34, financial statements of governments and schools resemble more closely the financial statements of traditional commercial entities. As a result, the users of the school’s financial statements find the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (“CAFR”) more useful and much more meaningful.

Again, understanding and properly implementing GASB 34 into your school’s fiscal department is a major undertaking. The use of an independent accounting professional or consultant who is experienced in implementing the principles of GAAP and GASB is highly recommended. To obtain GASB Statement No. 34 in its entirety visit [www.GASB.com](http://www.GASB.com).

## ***Developing an Internal Control Structure***

### ***What Are Internal Controls?***

The internal controls of a charter school are the policies, procedures, rules, and regulations that are developed and implemented in order to protect the assets of the organization. Many factors and characteristics that are present within the newly formed school will influence the internal control structure employed by the administration. Some of these factors and characteristics are:

- The size of the organization in regards to human capital;
- The technical knowledge and experience of the accounting/finance department staff;
- The financial resources available to the school; and
- The Administration’s (Founders’) attitude.

Here are some brief thoughts regarding these factors and characteristics.

## ***Size of the Organization***

Segregation of duties is the primary concept behind an effective internal control structure. Briefly stated, the segregation of duties is the assigning of similar fiscal tasks to separate individuals in order to eliminate the opportunity for misappropriation of the school's assets due to intentional acts or simple human errors.

For example, if the same individual is responsible for receiving, recording, and depositing checks that arrive to the school in the daily mail delivery, it would be very easy for that individual to divert payments to their own personal account. However, if management establishes proper segregation of duties, three different employees would perform the three tasks detailed in the previous example, and the ability and chance of diversion is greatly reduced.

Using the same scenario, instead of an intentional act of diversion, let's imagine that the same individual responsible for these activities mistakenly transposed numbers on a \$21,000 check that was received in the mail. Instead of recording the check as \$21,000 in the accounting system, the employee records it as \$12,000. Now, the charter school assumes that they have a shortfall of \$9,000. If we had proper segregation of duties, a second individual would review the transaction, most likely catching the transposition error, thus eliminating a problem that could linger on for many months.

Obviously, in a perfect world, a newly formed charter school would have enough employees that such a situation could not occur. But, as we all know, most newly formed charter schools have a limited number of staff members in the fiscal department, making proper segregation of duties virtually impossible. Therefore, we can clearly see how limited human resources can affect management's ability to create a strong, effective internal control structure. Some charter schools sub-contract out to an accounting service to provide back-end financial services.

## ***Technical knowledge and experience***

The internal control structure of any organization is strengthened when the accounting department is staffed with knowledgeable, well-educated, and highly trained employees. When employees are strong fiscal professionals, the chance of undetected errors passing through the accounting system is greatly reduced, thus making assets “safer.” As we have said, the rules and regulations that govern the accounting practices of a newly formed charter school are very hard to understand and implement. Therefore, inexperienced individuals are more likely to make erroneous entries into the school’s accounting systems or disregard signs of potential problems within the financial records. We reiterate—*internal controls are there to protect the assets of the school.*

Therefore, if the accounting staff is not properly trained or educated in the rules and regulations that govern the charter school’s fiscal operations then the frequency of recording errors are increased. In addition, if assets, such as cash and revenues are not properly accounted for, they can easily be misappropriated.

Strong financial professionals, who truly understand the underlying accounting concepts, will frequently identify unusual items before they can be perpetuated over several weeks or months. When this level of expertise is available to the school’s administration, the review processes that exist over financial operations become more efficient and much more effective, thus strengthening the school’s ability to build a strong internal control structure.

## ***Available Financial Resources***

In the previous sections, it was noted that a larger, more educated accounting staff is a major component in building a strong internal control structure. The problem with this concept is that a large staff made up of highly experienced individuals is very expensive to maintain. Therefore, if the newly formed school only has access to limited financial resources, the administration will not be able to fully staff the accounting department. Because of these limitations, the internal control structure over financial

transactions will not be as strong as desired. For this reason, management's visible concern for strong fiscal responsibility is especially important.

### ***The Administration's Attitude***

We mentioned in the initial paragraph of this chapter that establishing accounting policies encompasses all facets of financial management. The overall work environment and morale of the department's employees are a significant part of developing the internal control structure. When the administration projects an image of control over financial reporting, the employees that work under their tutelage will make a greater effort to ensure fiscal reporting accuracy. If the staff is concerned with accuracy and completeness, the chance of errors or misappropriations are decreased significantly. The founder must display a sense of urgency when it relates to financial management. The founder must have an active role in reviewing the financial operations of the school. When a process of checks and balances exist within the organization, staff members tend to be more diligent in their assigned tasks. If the administration takes a lax attitude towards fiscal management, the strength of the internal control structure is compromised.

### ***How do We Develop a Strong Internal Control Structure?***

The primary step in developing a strong internal control structure is to address the issues described above. In addition, the school's founder should develop control activities that create a level of duty segregation sufficient enough to satisfy the needs of the organization. More specifically, to create a foundation for a strong internal control structure, the founder should at least:

- Adopt an attitude that exudes a "sense of urgency" as it relates to the proper treatment of financial transactions and matters;
- Establish an accounting department made up of properly educated and sufficiently trained staff members. In addition, ensure that the size of the department is consistent with the needs of the school and that the department size provides the administration with the ability to maintain the proper segregation of duties;
- Develop a review process that ensures that multiple staff members examine all financial transactions on a regular basis;

- Develop support documentation that substantiates fiscal transactions. This can be done by creating items such as checklists, request and authorization forms, purchase order forms, and timesheet & attendance records.
- Develop rules and regulations that restrict access to assets to a limited number of individuals. All employees should not have unlimited access to the assets of the school.

Again, the aforementioned bullet points are examples of the types of issues that should be addressed. In order to properly create an effective internal control structure, each individual charter school must examine their unique situation and development control activities that are consistent with their needs.

### ***Understanding the Tasks and Responsibilities of the Fiscal Department***

When the founder establishes a new charter school, we mentioned that they must have a basic understanding of accounting concepts such as GAAP and GASB 34, which address that manner in which financial transactions are recorded and presented in the form of financial statements. However, these principles and statements do not inform the founder of the many operational tasks that must be performed on a regular basis. These tasks include activities such as creating operational and capital budgets, reviewing grants contracts and other financial based agreements, preparing financial statements to be used as an effective management tool, and reconciling certain general ledger accounts.

Therefore, the founder must become familiar with the reporting requirements prescribed by local, State, and Federal authorities. Normally, a charter school's fiscal department is responsible for, but not limited to, the following tasks:

- **Developing the annual budget.** The fiscal department should develop the initial draft of the annual budget using the chart of accounts prescribed for charter schools by the State of Maryland. The annual budget describes in detail the revenues and expenditures that are expected to be recorded during the upcoming fiscal year. Budgets are created then reviewed by the charter school's Board of Directors.



- **Managing the school’s cash receipts and disbursements.** The fiscal department primary responsibility is to oversee the daily financial operations of the school. The foundation of operations is the receipt and disbursement of cash in order to maintain operations. Managing daily operations entails ensuring all transactions are properly recorded in the general ledger in accordance with GAAP.
- **Ensuring compliance with grant and funding source requirements.** The fiscal department is responsible for ensuring all disbursements of funds received as the result of a grant award are in compliance with the grant or funding source contracts. Essentially, when charter schools receive funds from third parties, those financial resources are earmarked for specified activities. It is the fiscal department’s responsibility to ensure that the funds are used as intended. They do this by reviewing support documentation that substantiates all financial transactions related to specific grant contracts and agreements.
- **Proper financial reporting.** After all the transactions are properly recorded by the accounting staff during the year, the charter school is responsible for reporting the results of operations to various oversight agencies. These reports, which are required annually, are in the form of:
  - Audited financial statements (The format is prescribed by GASB 34)
  - A Comprehensive Annual Financial Report
  - Federal Informational Forms

In closing, the main point of this chapter is to introduce the founder to the primary elements necessary to establish a functional fiscal department. Again, this is a broad overview of the total process needed to accomplish this goal. In order to fully establish a viable and effective accounting department, the founder may need to consult with a qualified accounting professional that fully understands GAAP, GASB, the State of Maryland reporting requirements, and the Federal reporting requirements as they relate to the disbursement of Federal funds.

## ***Chapter Ten – Lessons Learned About Managing Finances***

- Develop a top-level appreciation for accounting rules and regulations.
- Develop an internal control structure with segregation of duties.
- Adopt a “sense of urgency” for proper financial behavior.
- Remember that charter schools are accountable to the public.

## *Chapter Eleven*

# **Lessons and Recommendations for Starting and Running a Charter School** <sup>39</sup>

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The experience of charter schools across the country has shown governance, facilities, and financing to be the top three stumbling blocks to school start-up. In addition to these challenges, clear, comprehensive accountability planning—defining, measuring, and reporting student and school achievement—is a critical responsibility that school founders, to their great disadvantage, too often fail to undertake seriously from the beginning of their charter planning.

Without a doubt, starting and operating a successful charter school entails diverse challenges, requiring equally diverse expertise from a high-energy coalition of school founders and supporters. Each of the above four challenges is addressed in greater detail in individual sections of this handbook. To begin, however, we offer the following planning tips that should guide and infuse your overall effort to plan, start up, and operate an effective charter school.

### **1. Start with a strong team that holds a common vision and brings diverse expertise.**

Starting and running a charter school requires a wide range of knowledge and abilities, including visionary leadership, educational expertise, strong business and management skills, and political savvy. Common vision provides the foundation and driving force of successful charter schools. Group members' varied technical expertise and opinions inform all of the decisions about curriculum, hiring, student enrollment, and evaluation and assessment stemming from this vision. Consensus on every issue is not

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<sup>39</sup> Illinois Charter School Resource, *Guide Leadership for Quality Education*, adapted from recommendations published by the University of Washington/RAND Program on Reinventing Public Education.

necessary, as long as the group agrees on the common principles and vision guiding the school's direction and lines of authority for final decision-making are clear.

## **2. Use outside experts.**

Even with a strong, balanced team of founders, most charter schools will need additional technical support organizations, educational expertise, and professional financial, legal, and facilities planning assistance as they develop and refine the school's design plan and get the school off the ground. An important role of the core team is to identify what they do not know, find experts to address these areas, and integrate their advice into your charter planning.

## **3. Be flexible and willing to adapt to changing needs.**

The skills required of the founding group will change through the various phases of developing a charter school.

- During the team-building phase, the potential applicant must build a strong core team, "network" to identify potential sources of political, financial, and technical support, and create a shared vision of the school's mission.
- During the planning phase, the team must establish a management structure and follow effective practices to ensure the smooth operation of the school, nurture individual commitment, and use outside assistance and specialized expertise wisely.
- Throughout the school development process, the school's founding coalition will need to engage in high-quality, community relations work, negotiating with public agencies and the local political establishment, dealing with political opposition, and presenting their school to the media and the general public. Group members should select skillful spokespersons, develop common positions on controversial issues, and exercise discretion, discipline, and diplomacy.
- After the charter is approved, business management skills and clear lines of financial authority are needed for a broad range of economic decisions concerning the allocation of resources, purchases, loans, contracts, and staffing.
- To determine when to release control and delegate authority, the core team members must recognize their individual skills and expertise, as well as their limitations. Founders should never give up control where decisions have a direct

influence on the school's mission or financial viability. All else should be delegated. As the process continues and as the school and its staff matures more decisions can be given over to others.

- View the charter application as a critical planning tool rather than a “hurdle” on the way to obtaining a charter.

Applicants should not approach the charter proposal as a grant application. A quality charter proposal must include much more than broad, ambitious promises of what the school will deliver. This document should cover the major planning issues facing the applicant, providing a detailed school design plan that will ensure a viable school. While the principles, philosophy, and goals guiding the school constitute important components of the proposal, applicants must also clearly and thoroughly address practical matters regarding cost and feasibility.

#### **4. Establish well-defined roles and procedures.**

A qualified board of directors and clearly written, well-understood by-laws, related governance policies and operational procedures will minimize potential confusion over roles and responsibilities, and facilitate efficient and wise decision-making during crises.

#### **5. Be proactive: seek out constructive criticism and anticipate potential problems rather than wait to solve them after they arise.**

A well-prepared applicant group will enhance the school's credibility, prevent problems before they arise, and limit the impact of potentially destructive situations when they do occur. School facilities and special education costs are two areas where careful, knowledgeable planning by charter school founders is especially crucial.

#### **6. Always maintain focus on the school's mission.**

Over time and through transitions, it is likely that the founding group will change in composition as members move on to other projects and the needs of the school shift. These transitions can be extraordinarily challenging to the integrity of the school as new

people bring in new ideas and priorities. While some of the above recommendations concerning clear leadership roles and policy guidelines can help address this issue, it is crucial to inculcate the school's founding mission throughout the school community continually so that it remains the central guiding force behind all decisions affecting the school.

**6. Act as a trustee of the state's responsibility for public education.**

Charter schools are public schools operated by private individuals. Charter school applicants and operators must honor and safeguard the public trust and fulfill the special obligations of providing public education. This includes, for example, recognizing and avoiding potential conflicts of interests. Likewise, policy decisions should always be made in the best interests of the students and the future of the school, not the adults involved in founding or operating the school.

School founders and operators must take responsibility for gaining a clear understanding of their legal obligations as guardians of the public trust through charter schooling.

Following are additional practical lessons learned by charter school teachers, directors, founders, and trustees during the first year of charter schools operation in New Jersey. The lessons are excerpted from *New Jersey Charter Schools: the First Year 1997-98*, led by Professor Pearl Rock Kane of Teachers College, Columbia University.

## Early Lessons from New Jersey Charter Schools: the First Year 1997-98

What lessons have charter school constituents learned that would be helpful for others founding charter schools?

### Early lessons learned by Charter School Teachers:

- Understand job demands
- Be flexible

### Early lessons learned by Charter School Directors:

- Expect long hours
- Set limits
- Provide staff development
- Budget your time
- Plan and revise
- Build relationships

### Early lessons learned by Charter School Founders and Trustees

- Teamwork is essential
- Develop thick skin
- Too much to do, too little time
- Hire the right director as soon as possible
- Listen to parents
- Expect a steep learning curve
- Cultivate a relationship with the local district
- Recruit a working board
- Hire professional expertise

## Chapter Twelve

### **High-Quality Charter Schools: Creating and Operating an Excellent School**

We all want the best possible schools for our children. We can assume that all founders intend to create a high quality charter school. If we are going to achieve this lofty vision the questions we must ask are:

*What constitutes a High Quality Charter School when we see one?*

*How do we create a High Quality Charter School?*

*How do we sustain High Quality once it is achieved?*

It is important not to conflate the appraisal of a particular mission or vision with an examination of quality. Whether creating a back-to-basics elementary school for low-income children, an ecology-themed school, a second-chance vocational high school for dropouts, or a school emphasizing any one discipline, the critical difference is between strong and weak implementations of a given design.

As has been discussed in this manual, a core principle in creating a charter school is accountability. Your school will be held accountable to many stakeholders, it will be held accountable for many elements; however, your school's success is ultimately determined by the academic achievement and personal development of its students whose education is entrusted to your care. Ultimately, the charter school should always know the measures to which they will be held accountable and make decisions accordingly. They should never be surprised by the authorizer's evaluation of their performance. This is the role of an accountability plan. Some charter applications require that you create one.

#### ***The Basics About Accountability***

An **accountability plan** essentially summarizes the progress your school is making on several fronts. Because a charter school is responsible for many more facets of operation than a traditional district school—from educating the students to making payroll—there must be some way to measure how well the school is performing and whether it is in sound shape. An



accountability plan is like a car's dashboard: it gives information on several concurrent aspects of the school's progress at once. Most accountability plans encompass:

- Student achievement
- Fiscal soundness
- Effective governance
- Operations (and, specifically, compliance with applicable laws and regulations)

School districts typically have other agreements within the charter agreement to ensure the school is performing well, and these measures are included in the renewal.

If the school district you are working with does not currently have an operating charter school, it is likely that the district officials have not yet created a point-by-point accountability plan that outlines its expectations. In that case, it is in your best interest to create the basic outline of how you would like your school to be measured and considered for charter renewal when that time comes. The advantage of creating an accountability plan up-front is that you will have a voice in how your charter school will be evaluated by the district. You can shape the process, rather than waiting for the district to define what you will be held accountable for and how you will be held accountable.

If your district does have existing accountability requirements, it is important that the core design team understands how the school will be judged and makes clear plans at the outset to meet these standards and report on progress.

## ***Organizing Your Accountability Plan***

There are many different ways to create a template for an accountability plan. We recommend that whatever you choose, pick a simple system that illustrates the connection between goals and measurements, as well as indicates how you will monitor your progress and take corrective action to ensure you are on track. For example, if your goal relates to improving student achievement in reading, corrective actions might include identifying students who need extra help and providing individualized tutoring to those students; instituting regular parent/teacher conferences; and double-blocking English/Language Arts classes.

Think of your accountability plan in the same terms as articulating goals for any sort of project: What is the goal? What will you do to achieve it? How and when will you measure your achievement?

Here’s one basic structure:

Goal	Measures (Assessments to be used)	Achievement/ Completion Date	Corrective Action

As the charter school movement matures, it is insufficient in Maryland to merely add numbers to our ranks. We have achieved great success at bringing the movement to scale, and a growing track record of successes and failures can yield valuable lessons.

The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) and the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools co-convened the Consensus Panel on Charter School Academic Quality, a national working group consisting of leaders and key stakeholders in the charter school sector – including charter operators, authorizers, charter school support organizations, policy leaders, researchers, and charter school funders and lenders. The Consensus Panel has launched a grassroots, quality standards-setting initiative to strengthen and advance the charter school sector. In a report entitled “[A Framework for Academic Quality](#),”<sup>40</sup> The Consensus Panel recommends **Four Essential Indicators Of Academic Quality**:

1. **Student Achievement Level (Status)** – How students have performed at a single point in time on particular assessments (typically including, but not necessarily limited to, state standardized tests). In other words, a “snapshot” of student performance.
2. **Student Progress Over Time (Growth)** – How individual students have improved over time on particular assessments.

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<sup>40</sup> “[A Framework for Academic Quality](#),” 2/08, funded by a National Leadership Activities grant from the U.S. Department of Education’s Charter Schools Program. Collaborating organizations: The Colorado League of Charter Schools; CREDO at Stanford University; The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, and NACSA.

3. **Postsecondary Readiness and Success (for High Schools)** – Student preparation for postsecondary education, training, workforce participation, or military service.
4. **Student Engagement** – Basic, objective measures of student engagement in schooling, such as attendance and continuous enrollment.

The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, in its report “Renewing the Compact: A Statement by the Task Force on Charter School Quality and Accountability,”<sup>41</sup> describes the following quality principles and recommendations for achieving them:

### **Seven Principles of Quality Chartering**

1. Quality is more important than quantity. Growth is not an end in itself.
2. The primary aim of charter schools is to pursue academic achievement for all students. Non-academic goals are important but do not by themselves justify charter renewal.
3. Charter schools must achieve at high levels—not just offering something marginally better than failing neighboring schools, but providing the kind of education that equips graduates for success in postsecondary education, fulfilling work in the 21st century economy, and responsible citizenship.
4. Charter accountability must be both internal and external. State-mandated standardized tests are a necessary and appropriate condition of public accountability, but are not sufficient. Charter schools should embrace more frequent and expansive student assessment as a source of feedback that guides professional practice.
5. People make the difference. There is no foolproof “charter model” and a high priority must be placed on recruiting, mentoring, and evaluating those who lead and teach in charter schools.
6. Since charter schools are public schools, the students who attend them are entitled to the same level of financial support as students in other public schools.
7. Every kind of organization that supports or represents charter schools should be a force for quality, including authorizers, resource centers, state associations, lenders, and national advocacy groups.

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<sup>41</sup> “Renewing the Compact: A Statement by the Task Force on Charter School Quality and Accountability”, National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, Washington, DC, [www.PublicCharters.org](http://www.PublicCharters.org)

## Summary of Recommendations:

- **Let Evidence Drive Operations:** Charter schools are about outcomes, and operations must be informed by constant feedback about student achievement and operational performance. Leaders, staff, and parents must monitor progress on many fronts and push for improvement where the evidence points. Charter schools must make data-driven decision-making the center of their instructional culture.
- **Embrace Assessment:** Assessment is essential to accountability and to instruction. If you see testing as an impediment to innovation; overcome the impediment by measuring student growth over time and by augmenting standardized assessments with measures that show attainment of your charter school's specific *mission*.
- **Measuring Mission:** If your mission includes student competencies not covered in mandated state assessments, don't neglect to measure whether students attain core academic knowledge and skills needed to compete at the next level of education. Supplement standard measures with those that authenticate your added competencies by finding ways to describe and measure them.
- **Spread Effective Practices:** Share lessons learned.
- **Build a High-Quality, Sustainable Teacher Force**
- **Build High-Quality, Sustainable Charter Leadership**
- **Develop the Capacity of Charter School Boards of Trustees**
- **Strengthen Authorizer Competence and Responsibility:** One good resource is The National Association of Charter School Authorizers' (NACSA) [\*Principles and Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing\*](#)
- **Fully Fund Charter Schools**
- **Public and Private Funders Bring Quality to Scale**
- **Charter School Laws Emphasize Quality:** The entire enterprise of quality chartering must rest on the foundation of a good charter law. In our view, a “strong” charter law is one that supports academic achievement, not just more charter schools.

## Effective Schools Movement

We are restating the obvious in order to create a context for some critical information. Charter schools are part of an overall movement to reform and improve schools. They benefit from the rich resource of experiences and research into the task of educating children. In this chapter, we will review the parameters of success within the charter school movement and the “Effective Schools” movement. We examine the confluence of factors in creating/maintaining

effective schools consistent with the needs of at-risk students. We provide an example of Charter School Quality Standards.

Research has revealed a series of very specific characteristics which distinguish effective schools, e.g. those in which all students master priority objectives. A review and synthesis of the effective schools research by Northwest Regional Education Laboratory (NWREL) identified factors that contribute to high levels of student performance under the broad categories of in-school effects, teacher effects, instructional leadership, curriculum alignment, program coupling and educational change/implementation. NWREL summarized the research findings into:<sup>42</sup>

**School Leadership:** The role of the school principal is to focus the whole school on instruction and use this focus as a means of establishing and acting upon priorities in the school. The principal and all others in the school know the school is a place for learning.

**School Climate:** All staff and all students share the expectation that all students can learn. Effective schools exhibit equity in terms of learning. Learning takes place in a safe, orderly environment, and students are expected to behave according to established, fairly executed rules of conduct.

**Classroom Instruction and Management:** All teachers are highly skilled in and use a variety of instructional methods and techniques. There are clear instructional objectives, activities are tied to objectives, and there is frequent monitoring and evaluation of student progress toward those objectives.

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<sup>42</sup> Northwest Regional Education Laboratory (<http://educationnorthwest.org>) School Improvement Research Series (SIRS) Topical Synthesis #1 “Effective Schooling Practices and At-Risk Youth: What the Research Shows” November 1987, Greg Druian and Jocelyn A. Butler

## The Basic Beliefs of the Effective Schools Movement

(Dr. Lawrence W. Lezotte)

*All children can learn and come to school motivated to do so;*

*Schools control enough of the variables to assure that virtually all students do learn;*

*Schools should be held accountable for measured student achievement;*

*Schools should disaggregate measured student achievement in order to be certain that students, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status are successfully learning the intended school curriculum;*

*The internal and external stakeholders of the individual school are the most qualified and capable people to plan and implement the changes necessary to fulfill the Learning for All mission.*

Dr. Lawrence W. Lezotte states that “Researchers found that ... effective schools had strong instructional leadership, a strong sense of mission, demonstrated effective instructional behaviors, held high expectations for all students, practiced frequent monitoring of student achievement, and operated in a safe and orderly manner. These attributes eventually became known as the Correlates of Effective Schools.”<sup>43</sup>

Ron Edmonds states “while schools may be primarily responsible for whether or not students function adequately in school, the family is probably critical in determining whether or not students flourish in school.”<sup>44</sup> Edmonds stated that all effective schools had:

- “the leadership of the principal notable for substantial attention to the quality of instruction;
- a pervasive and broadly understood instructional focus;
- an orderly, safe climate conducive to teaching and learning;
- teacher behaviors that convey the expectation that all students are expected to obtain at least minimum mastery;
- the use of measures of pupil achievement as the basis for program evaluation.”

<sup>43</sup> “Revolutionary and Evolutionary: The Effective Schools Movement” by Dr. Lawrence W. Lezotte

<sup>44</sup> “Programs of School Improvement: An Overview” 1982 quoted in “Revolutionary and Evolutionary: The Effective Schools Movement” by Dr. Lawrence W. Lezotte

## The Correlates of Effective Schools<sup>45</sup>

The core tenets of the **Effective Schools Movement** are found in a series of “correlates” (statements of what characteristics are most likely to be found in a high-quality school) with the corollary premise that these characteristics should guide a school’s development, evaluation, and continuous improvement. These correlates are:

**Instructional Leadership.** In the effective school, the principal acts as an instructional leader and effectively and persistently communicates the mission of the school to staff, parents, and students. In addition, the principal understands and applies the characteristics of instructional effectiveness in the management of the instructional program.

*The extent to which the Correlates are in place in a school has a dramatic, positive effect on student achievement.*

*Correlates are not independent of one another, but are interdependent.*

(Dr. Lawrence W. Lezotte)

**Clear and Focused Mission.** In the effective school, there is a clearly articulated mission of the school through which the staff shares an understanding of and a commitment to the school’s goals, priorities, assessment procedures, and accountability. The staff in the effective school accepts responsibility for the students’ learning of the essential curricular goals.

**Safe and Orderly Environment.** In the effective school we say there is an orderly, purposeful, business-like atmosphere, which is free from the threat of physical harm. The school climate is not oppressive and is conducive to teaching and learning.

**Climate of High Expectations.** In the effective school, there is a climate of high expectations in which the staff believes and demonstrates that all students can obtain mastery of the school’s essential curriculum. They also believe that they, the staff, have the capability to help all students obtain that mastery.

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<sup>45</sup> “Revolutionary and Evolutionary: The Effective Schools Movement” by Dr. Lawrence W. Lezotte

**Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress.** In the effective school, pupil progress over the essential objectives are measured frequently, monitored frequently, and the results of those assessments are used to improve the individual student behaviors and performances, as well as to improve the curriculum as a whole.

**Positive Home-School Relations.** In the effective school, parents understand and support the basic mission of the school and are given opportunities to play important roles in helping the school to achieve its mission.

**Opportunity to Learn and Student Time on Task.** In the effective school, teachers allocate a significant amount of classroom time to instruction in the essential curricular areas. For a high percentage of this time, students are actively engaged in whole-class or large-group, teacher-directed, planned learning activity.

*In summary, the Correlates of Effective Schools provide school improvement teams with a comprehensive framework for identifying, categorizing, and solving the problems that schools and school districts face. And because the Correlates are based upon the documented successes of effective schools, they offer hope and inspiration to those struggling to improve. If the schools from which the Correlates are drawn can do it, so can you!*

(Dr. Lawrence W. Lezotte)

The Maryland State Department of Education Office of School Innovation has distributed a self-evaluation checklist based on Lezotte's "Correlates of Effective Schools," with the following indicators:

### **I. Safe and Orderly Environment**

- Students, parents, teachers, and visitors feel that the school environment is orderly, purposeful, business-like, and free from the threat of physical harm.
- Teachers, students, and staff feel that the school climate is not oppressive and is conducive to teaching and learning.
- Expectations for students are very clear and supported by all building staff consistently.
- Positive and cooperative behavior is clearly demonstrated with all staff and students.

### **II. Climate of High Expectations**

- Teachers believe and demonstrate that all students can master essential school skills and content through their classroom practices (all students can learn with the right supports and learning environment – all kids can learn).
- Teachers articulate and demonstrate confidence in their ability to help all students attain mastery of essential learning (teachers hold high expectations for themselves- this is called teacher sense of efficacy).



- School leader keeps track of teacher efficacy and provides the training to increase the teacher's confidence in effectively meeting the learning needs of all his or her students.
- School leader offers teachers models of successful practices and opportunities to improve their practice (i.e., culture of learning).

### **III. Instructional Leadership**

- The principal acts as the instructional leader and understands and applies the characteristics of instructional effectiveness in the management of the instructional program.
- The principal ensures that all the instructional systems (curriculum, materials, assessments, teaching strategies, classroom practices) are aligned and support learning for all students.
- The principal develops the ownership and commitment of all staff, students, and parents to the vision for the school.
- The principal models distributive leadership by instilling leadership in the staff to lead improvement and development efforts for the school.

### **IV. Clear and Focused Mission**

- The mission of the school clearly indicates its main purpose.
- All staff can articulate what the mission is and how they are working to achieve it.
- School goals, targets, and performance measures are aligned in forwarding the mission.
- All school policies, practices, and procedure are clearly linked to and support the mission.

### **V. Opportunity To Learn and Time on Task**

- The school is structured to insure a strong learning environment. Instructional time is valued and protected.
- There are different levels of supports offered to students to support their individual learning needs: in the classroom, during the school day, after the school day, during summers, recesses, or weekends (out of school time) and extended to the home environment.
- Teachers demonstrate the ability to do learning and task analysis, to take the learning goals apart in ways that can help scaffold student learning and make meaningful connections. They provide models of what is expected, give students immediate feedback, and offer re-teaching using varied instructional strategies to meet the needs of students. They maintain high expectations of learning and achievement, but achieve those standards by using different strategies with different students, as appropriate.
- Student engagement is always observable in every classroom.

### **VI. Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress**

- Student academic progress is measured frequently using a variety of assessment procedures:
  - Teacher generated assessments
  - Curriculum end-of-unit assessments
  - Portfolios of student work linked to learning standards, assessed through rubrics and containing teacher commentary related to students' demonstrated progress to meet and exceed standards

- Performance benchmarking assessments
- Project- or performance-based assessments
- Standardized testing.
- Teachers use assessment results to guide planning of lessons, adjust teaching strategies, classroom practices, develop learning supports and seek additional intervention supports.
- The principal and teachers are able to articulate and demonstrate how many students are meeting, exceeding, or not meeting learning standards.
- The principal and teachers can share what academic intervention has been implemented for students who are not meeting standards.

**VII. Home School Relations**

- Communication with parents regarding school events, development, and student progress occurs through various means.
- The school has clearly articulated the expectations of home learning supports and has provided parent training to help them provide these supports.
- Parent involvement in school life (classrooms, events, activities, committees etc.) is encouraged and opportunities are created.
- Parent satisfaction is valued and optimized.

The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools<sup>46</sup> cites the California Charter School Association's “quality statements” as a model.

<b>California Charter School Association</b>	
<b>Quality Standards for Charter School Operations<sup>47</sup></b>	
<b>Quality Standard 1: Student Academic Achievement First:</b>	
A charter school promotes student learning through a clear vision and high expectations. It achieves clear, measurable program goals and student learning objectives, including meeting its stated performance standards and closing	Achieves clear, measurable program goals and student learning objectives, including meeting its stated performance standards
	Demonstrates high expectations for student achievement
	Provides a challenging and coherent curriculum for each individual student
	Implements and directs learning experiences (consistent with the school's purpose and charter) that actively engage students
	Allocates appropriate resources in the way of instructional materials, s <sup>t</sup> affing and facilities to promote high levels of student achievement
	Supports students in a safe, healthy and nurturing environment characterized by trust, caring and professionalism

<sup>46</sup> “Renewing the Compact: A Statement by the Task Force on Charter School Quality and Accountability”, National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, Washington, DC, [www.PublicCharters.org](http://www.PublicCharters.org)

<sup>47</sup> California Charter Schools Association Quality Standards are adopted and modified from WASC/Charter Schools Focus on Learning (2004), the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards for School Leadership (1996), and the California Charter Schools Association Membership Council (2004).

achievement gaps of students.	Productively engages parental and community involvement as a part of the schools support system
	Shares its vision among the school community and demonstrates its mission in daily action and practice
<b>Quality Standard 2: Ethical Leadership</b>	
The leaders of a charter school are stewards of the charter's mission and vision and carry out their duties in a professional, responsible and ethical manner. Charter school leaders use their influence and authority for the primary purpose of achieving student success.	Effectively communicates and engages stakeholders in the vision and mission of the school
	Consistently puts into practice the educational program outlined in its charter
	Generates and sustains a school culture conducive to student learning and staff professional growth
	Regularly monitors and evaluates the success of the school's program
	Provides regular, public reports on the school's progress towards achieving its goals to the school community and to the school's authorizer
	Makes management decisions with the goal of optimizing successful teaching and learning experiences
	Treats all individuals with fairness, dignity and respect
	Has a cogent understanding of the laws that govern charter schools and monitors the trends, issues and potential changes in the environment in which charter schools operate
	Uses his/her influence and authority for the primary purpose of achieving student success
	Abstains from any decision involving a potential or actual conflict of interest
	Respects diversity and implements practices that are inclusive of all types of learners consistent with the school charter
Engages community involvement in the school	

<b>Quality Standard 3: Continuous Focus On Increasing Quality</b>	
A charter school engages in a process of continuous self-improvement in order to increase the effectiveness of its educational program. The school regularly assesses and evaluates student learning based on stated goals.	Uses information sources, data collection and data analysis strategies for self- examination and improvement
	Establishes benchmarks and a variety of accountability tools for monitoring student progress
	Establishes both long and short term goals and plans for accomplishing the school's mission as stated in its charter
	The school has well-defined long and short-term goals that are clearly linked to its mission and vision
	Uses student assessment results to improve curriculum and instruction
	Uses the results of evaluation and assessment as the basis for the allocation of resources for programmatic improvement
	Involves staff, students, parents and other stakeholders in its accountability for student learning and in the school's program evaluation process
<b>Quality Standard 4: Responsible Governance</b>	
A charter school board and administration establish and implement policies that are transparent and focused on student achievement. Charter school board members and administrators have a cogent understanding of and comply with the laws that govern charter schools.	Ensure that policies are implemented in a fair and consistent manner
	Monitor the trends, issues and potential changes in the environment in which charter schools operate
	Seek input from impacted stakeholders
	Enact policies that respect diversity and implements practices that are inclusive of all types of learners consistent with the school charter
	Actively engage the school's authorizer in monitoring the school's educational program and its fiscal status
<b>Quality Standard 5: Fiscal Accountability</b>	
A charter school fulfills its fiduciary responsibility for public funds and maintains publicly accessible fiscal records. The school conducts an annual financial audit which is made public.	Creates and monitors immediate and long-range financial plans to effectively implement the school's educational program and ensure financial stability
	Conducts an annual financial audit which is made public
	Establishes clear fiscal policies to ensure that public funds are used appropriately and wisely
	Ensures financial resources are directly related to the school's purpose: student achievement of learning goals

## Effective Schooling Practices and At-Risk Youth

Charter schools are open to all students living in the district, however, there is a strong trend to target students living in distressed communities, on those at-risk of failing due to a history of academic underachievement, substance abuse, juvenile justice issues, truancy, or dropping out of school, etc. Many approaches to meeting the needs of at-risk students are being used by charter schools across the country. Examples include an emphasis on character education for students facing educational barriers but not yet failing, back-to-basics curricula for underperforming students and YouthBuild comprehensive employment training high schools for dropouts and/or adjudicated youth. Research has shown that the same quality indicators apply regardless of school design model or targeted student population. In fact, given that at-risk students are unlikely to overcome low-quality schooling, quality indicators are even more critical in serving this population.

While best practices for creating and operating effective schools are fairly universal, can these techniques, processes and procedures transfer wholesale to at-risk youth? If so, it increases the likeliness that effective schools research can be applied in providing quality education to at-risk students.

Some researchers fear that the effective schools movement could constitute a threat to the education for at-risk youth if not accompanied by supports that address the special needs of those likely to be dropouts (Hamilton 1986; McDill, Natriello and Pallas 1985a, 1985b, 1986; Levin 1986). Levin warns that “the unique needs of the educationally disadvantaged cannot be fully or effectively addressed by reforms of a general nature ... they should not be viewed as a substitute for direct and comprehensive strategies to solve the problems of the disadvantaged.”<sup>48</sup>

A school only has access to its students for about 1,000 hours in a year. A student’s home, family, and community are powerful influences. In serving an at-risk student population, a

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<sup>48</sup> Northwest Regional Education Laboratory (NWREL) [www.nwrel.org](http://www.nwrel.org), School Improvement Research Series (SIRS) Topical Synthesis #1 “Effective Schooling Practices and At-Risk Youth: What the Research Shows” November 1987, Greg Druian and Jocelyn A. Butler

school must strong ties with families as well as with the community. Many such schools engage a web of third-party supports to ensure that families receive social services, healthcare, substance abuse services, adult education, and parenting education. Many of the strongest charter schools were created in partnership with community-based, faith-based, and/or post-secondary education institutions that can leverage the additional supports needed by at-risk youth and their families.

A school's inability to fully counteract societal barriers to education does NOT excuse it from combining the best principals of effective school research and at-risk intervention. Northwest Regional Education Laboratory (NWREL) surveyed the available research and concluded that "there is substantial overlap between what works with at-risk youth and what works in effective schools: the effective schools research may provide a useful framework for working with students who might otherwise receive poor or no education."<sup>49</sup>

## **Going the Distance**

At the beginning of this chapter we asked three questions. Previously we have provided descriptions of and theoretical backings for an understanding about what are the characteristics of High Quality Charter Schools. We hope that as Founders you will use this to help in designing and opening a High Quality Charter School.

Best practices and guiding principles may seem lofty and burdensome when faced with the daunting task of building a functional school from scratch. The more immediate challenges of ensuring enough desks for students or scheduling and staffing the cafeteria may trump self-assessment in the first months... or years. But since your charter school was founded on the notion that it is separate and distinct from most public schools, it is critical to maintain that integrity in the interest of your singular student population. To do so, a culture of self examination and continuous quality improvement must inhabit your school's staff, parents, and community stakeholders.

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<sup>49</sup> Northwest Regional Education Laboratory (NWREL) [www.nwrel.org](http://www.nwrel.org), School Improvement Research Series (SIRS) Topical Synthesis #1 "Effective Schooling Practices and At-Risk Youth: What the Research Shows" November 1987, Greg Druian and Jocelyn A. Butler

# Quality Indicators at a Glance

## Seven Correlates of Effective Schools

1. **Instructional Leadership** effectively communicates the mission to staff, parents, and students and applies effective instructional methodology.
2. **Clear and Focused Mission** through which the staff shares understanding and commitment to the school's goals, priorities, assessment procedures, and accountability.
3. **Safe and Orderly Environment** is an orderly, purposeful, business-like atmosphere, free from the threat of physical harm and conducive to teaching and learning.
4. **Climate of High Expectations** where the staff believes and demonstrates that all students can obtain mastery of the school's essential curriculum.
5. **Student Progress** towards stated objectives is measured and monitored frequently, then used to improve student behaviors/performances, and to modify the curriculum.
6. **Positive Home-School Relations** help parents understand and support the school's mission and play important roles in helping achieve the mission.
7. **Opportunity To Learn and Student Time on Task**, whereby students are actively engaged in whole-class or large-group, teacher-directed, planned learning activity.

## Four Essential Indicators of Academic Quality

1. **Student Achievement Level (Status)** – Student performance at a single point in time on particular assessments.
2. **Student Progress over Time (Growth)** – Student improvement over time on particular assessments.
3. **Postsecondary Readiness and Success (for High Schools)** – Student preparation for postsecondary education, training, workforce participation, or military service.
4. **Student Engagement** – Basic, objective measures of student engagement in schooling, such as attendance and continuous enrollment.

## Three Critical Recommendations

1. **Let Evidence Drive Operations:** Operations must be informed by constant feedback about student achievement and operational performance. Monitor progress and push for improvement where the evidence points. Make data-driven, decision making the center of your instructional culture.
2. **Embrace Assessment:** Assessment is essential to accountability and to instruction. Measure student growth over time.
3. **Measure Mission:** Supplement standard measures with those that authenticate your added competencies by finding ways to describe and measure them.

## Chapter Thirteen

### Resources and Links

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There is a wealth of resources available that focus specifically on charter schools, and innovative educational models. Each of the following provides extensive information, resources, and links through their own online materials and websites. When using resources that are not directly focused on Maryland, be mindful of policy differences in other states and seek further assistance if in doubt. Maryland's charter school law has many provisions that are different than in other states. For more detailed information about all the requirements for operating a charter school under state law, go to Appendix A.

You, as founders, will need to do a lot of research. We hope you study the work made available by the following and use them to build a resource library for your charter school endeavor.

**1. National Charter School Resource Center**

The NCSRC is dedicated to helping charter schools reach their aspirations and furthering understanding of charter schools. To meet those goals, they offer a diverse selection of objective resources on every aspect of the charter school sector. These resources are compiled from trusted sources and also originally produced by the NCSRC. <https://charterschoolcenter.ed.gov/>

**2. U.S Department of Education- Charter Schools Program**

This website provides information on the Federal Charter Schools Program, which provides funding for charter school start-up and implementation. The website also provides valuable guidance on how federal law applies to charter schools and offers links to charter school resources and publications. [www.ed.gov/programs/charter](http://www.ed.gov/programs/charter)

**3. National Alliance for Public Charter Schools**

The Alliance is a national policy organization committed to advancing the charter school movement. The website includes an excellent informational dashboard, links to publications and background information on charter school issues. [www.publiccharters.org](http://www.publiccharters.org)

**4. Special Education in Charter Schools: A Resource Primer for the State of Maryland**



This primer was developed to provide guidance to Maryland’s local school systems (charter school authorizers) and charter school developers (operators) as they confront the unique challenges in developing and implementing effective practices to ensure the access and success of students with disabilities in charter schools.

<http://archives.marylandpublicschools.org/NR/rdonlyres/15D2BCE6-9869-43B6-8E4F-D37A7FFCBC5F/10489/CSSpecEdResourceManual7306.pdf>

5. **Center on Reinventing Public Education**

Models, tools and design guides for implementing school incubators, charter school start-up, accountability, curriculum and strategic planning. <http://www.crpe.org/>

6. **Opening Procedures Handbook: A Guide for Boards of Trustees and Leaders of New Charter Schools**

Published by **Massachusetts Department of Education**, the Handbook summarizes the opening procedures process, identifies the action items that must be completed prior to the school’s opening, lists documents that must be submitted to the Charter School Office as part of the opening procedures process (as well as their due dates), and lists additional resources available to the school founders as they prepare to open the school’s doors to students.

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/new/?section=handbook>

7. **Education Northwest**

“Our mission is to improve learning by building capacity in schools, families, and communities through applied research and development.”

<http://educationnorthwest.org>

8. **U.S. Department of Education's Innovations in Education Reports: Successful Charter Schools**

Elements of effective charter schools and stories of eight successful charter schools are presented in this report.

<https://www2.ed.gov/admins/comm/choice/charter/report.pdf>

9. **Annenberg Institute for School Reform**

<http://www.annenberginstitute.org/>

Toolkits and guide are wide ranging and broad in topics including standards of practice, building successful partnerships, school capacity worksheets, teacher performance review, and literacy benchmarks.

## **10. Building Excellent Schools**

<http://www.buildingexcellentschools.org/>

BES trains high-capacity individuals to take on the demanding and urgent work of leading high-achieving, college preparatory urban charter schools.

## **11. Center for School Reform**

<http://pioneerinstitute.org/center-for-school-reform/>

The Center for School Reform seeks more school choice for parents and an accountable system of public education for all students. The Center's work builds on Pioneer's legacy as a leader in the charter public school movement and champion of greater academic rigor in Massachusetts' schools.

## **12. Center on Reinventing Public Education**

<http://www.crpe.org/>

Provides guides, working papers, models, and professional publications oriented to school innovation and reform including charter schools.

## **13. Charter Schools Development Corporation (Washington, D.C.)**

[www.csdcc.org](http://www.csdcc.org)

CSDC provides charter schools with the information, procedures, and resources for acquisition and financing of educational facilities and capital improvements; as well as assistance in making capital and credit available. CSDC provides a variety of financial and technical services, including credit enhancement and loan guarantees.

## **14. Educational Excellence Network**

[www.edexcellence.net](http://www.edexcellence.net)

The Thomas B. Fordham Foundation provides support to education reform and the charter school movement through technical support, research, publications, and projects of national scope in elementary and secondary education reform. The web site highlights charter school research reports, as well as information on accountability, teacher quality, and other initiatives.

**15. Minnesota Charter School Resource Center at the Center for School Change at the Humphrey Institute (University of Minnesota)**

<http://centerforschoolchange.org>

<http://centerforschoolchange.org/publications/minnesota-charter-school-handbook/>

Minnesota Charter School Resource Center focuses on support for developers of charter schools. Technical support included information on charter school community projects, research, and publications.

**16. National Charter Schools Institute (NCSI)**

<http://www.nationalcharterschools.org>

This national organization offers wide-ranging services, technical support, and training to charter school community developers, administrators, boards, and other stakeholders. The Institute facilitates access to a library of publications and articles that includes education reform resources, teacher training information, school models for success, curriculum, and program information.

## **APPENDICES**

- A. Senate Bill 595, Public School Charter Improvement Act of 2015
- B. Charter School Development Roadmap
- C. Sample Mission and Vision Statements
- D. Sample Maryland Charter School Application
- E. Examples of Curriculum Approaches
- F. Local School System Charter School Contacts
- G. MD Charter School Application Deadlines

# Appendix A- Maryland Charter School Law

You can find the Statute online here

<http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/webmga/frmStatutesText.aspx?article=ged&section=9-101&ext=html&session=2016RS&tab=subject5>

Chapter 311

**(Senate Bill 595)**

AN ACT concerning

## **Public Charter School Improvement Act of 2015**

§9-101.

(a) There is a Maryland Public Charter School Program.

(b) The general purpose of the Program is to establish an alternative means within the existing public school system in order to provide innovative learning opportunities and creative educational approaches to improve the education of students.

9-102.

In this title, "public charter school" means a public school that:

- (1) Is nonsectarian in all its programs, policies, and operations;
- (2) Is a school to which parents choose to send their children;
- (3) Except as provided in §§ 9-102.1, 9-102.2, and 9-102.3 of this title, is open to all students on a space-available basis and admits students on a lottery basis if more students apply than can be accommodated;
- (4) Is a new public school or a conversion of an existing public school;
- (5) Provides a program of elementary or secondary education or both;
- (6) Operates in pursuit of a specific set of educational objectives;
- (7) Is tuition-free;
- (8) Is subject to federal and State laws prohibiting discrimination;
- (9) Is in compliance with all applicable health and safety laws;
- (10) Is in compliance with § 9-107 of this title;
- (11) Operates under the supervision of the public chartering authority from which its charter is granted and in accordance with its charter and, except as provided in §§ 9-104.1 and 9-106 of this title, the provisions of law and regulation governing other public schools;
- (12) Requires students to be physically present on school premises for a period of time substantially similar to that which other public school students spend on school premises; and
- (13) Is created in accordance with this title and the appropriate county board policy.

§9-102.1.

(a) The State Board may grant a waiver from § 9-102(3) of this title to a public charter school if the public charter school:

- (1) Is located on property within a federal military base in the State; and
- (2) Will admit students with parents who are not assigned to the base to at least 35% of its total available space as part of the initial cohort of students in a grade.

(b) If a public charter school is granted a waiver under subsection (a) of this section, subject to the requirement set forth in subsection (a)(2) of this section, the public charter school shall:

- (1) Admit all students on a lottery basis in accordance with § 9-102.2 of this title; and
- (2) Take reasonable steps to maintain the 35% to 65% ratio intended as part of the initial cohort of students in a grade.

§9-102.2.

(a) A public charter school may give greater weight to a student's lottery status as part of a lottery held under § 9–102(3) of this title and in accordance with an application submitted under § 9–104 of this title if the student is:

- (1) Eligible for free or reduced price meals;
- (2) A student with disabilities;
- (3) A student with limited English proficiency;
- (4) Homeless, as defined under the federal McKinney–Vento Homeless Assistance Act; or
- (5) A sibling of a student currently enrolled in the public charter school for which the sibling is

applying.

(b) Notwithstanding § 9–102(3) of this title, a public charter school may give priority to the sibling of a student admitted through the lottery process or a currently enrolled student for any spaces in the school that become available throughout the school year.

(c) (1) Subject to the approval of the public chartering authority and § 9–104 of this title, a public charter school may propose a geographic attendance area with a median income that is equal to or less than the median income of the county for the public charter school.

(2) Subject to paragraph (4) of this subsection, a public charter school may provide guaranteed placement through a lottery to students who live within the geographic attendance area for up to 35%, as proposed by the public charter school and approved by the public chartering authority, of the available space of the public charter school.

(3) Subject to paragraphs (2) and (4) of this subsection, the public charter school shall:

- (i) Admit students on a lottery basis to its remaining available space; and
- (ii) Take reasonable steps to maintain the ratio intended under paragraph (2) of this

subsection as part of the initial cohort of students accepted through the lottery process.

(4) If a public charter school does not fill 100% of its available space under paragraphs (2) and (3) of this subsection, the public charter school may admit more than the percentage of students established under paragraph (2) of this subsection from the geographic attendance area established under this section.

(d) (1) Subject to the approval of the public chartering authority, paragraph (2) of this subsection, and § 9–104 of this title, a public charter school may provide guaranteed placement through a lottery to up to 35%, as proposed by the public charter school and approved by the public chartering authority, of the available space of the public charter school to students who attended a public charter school during the previous school year that is operated by the same operator.

(2) A public charter school shall qualify under paragraph (1) of this subsection if:

- (i) The operator operates two or more public charter schools in the county; and
- (ii) When combined, the public charter schools operated by the operator form an

integrated multiyear academic program.

(3) Subject to paragraph (1) of this subsection, the public charter school shall:

- (i) Admit students on a lottery basis to its remaining available space; and
- (ii) Take reasonable steps to maintain the ratio intended under paragraph (1) of this

subsection as part of the initial cohort of students accepted through the lottery process.

(4) If a public charter school does not fill 100% of its available space under paragraphs (1) and (3) of this subsection, the public charter school may admit more than the percentage of students established under paragraph (1) of this subsection.

### §9–102.3.

(a) In accordance with § 9–104 of this title, a county board may grant a waiver from § 9–102(3) of this title to:

(1) A converted public charter school that:

(i) Subject to subsection (b) of this section, provides guaranteed placement through a lottery to students who live within the geographic attendance area established by the county board;

(ii) Is a low–performing school as identified by the county board;

(iii) Is above the county average rate for the percentage of students who are eligible for free and reduced price meals; and

(iv) Meets a strategic need of the local school system, as identified in the county board's public charter school policy developed under § 9–110 of this title, that shall include at least one of the following elements:

1. Serving a high–need population;
2. Increasing student performance;
3. Increasing enrollment; or
4. Increasing student diversity; or

(2) A converted public charter school that is seeking renewal of an existing charter contract that was granted under item (1) of this subsection.

(b) If a public charter school does not fill 100% of its available space under subsection (a)(1) of this section, the public charter school shall admit students on a lottery basis to its remaining available space.

§9–103.

The public chartering authority for the granting of a charter shall be a county board of education.

§9–104.

(a) (1) An application to establish a public charter school shall be submitted to the county board of the county in which the public charter school will be located.

(2) An application to establish a public charter school may be submitted to a county board by:

- (i) The staff of a public school;
- (ii) A parent or guardian of a student who attends a public school in the county;
- (iii) A nonsectarian nonprofit entity;
- (iv) A nonsectarian institution of higher education in the State; or
- (v) Any combination of persons specified in items (i) through (iv) of this paragraph.

(3) An application shall include:

(i) A plan to provide a rigorous program of instruction that includes an equivalent method for satisfying any requirements from which the public charter school operator intends to seek a waiver under § 9–106 of this title; and

(ii) A description of how a weighted lottery or the provision of guaranteed placement will be implemented under §§ 9–102.2 and 9–102.3 of this title.

(4) A public chartering authority may not grant a charter under this title to:

- (i) A private school;
- (ii) A parochial school;
- (iii) A home school; or
- (iv) A school that operates fully online.

(5) (i) Except as provided in subparagraph (ii) of this paragraph, the county board shall review the application and render a decision within 120 days of receipt of the application and in accordance with the application procedures adopted by the county board.

(ii) For a restructured school:

1. The county board shall review the application and render a decision within 30 days of receipt of the application;
2. The county board may apply to the State Board for an extension of up to 15 days from the time limit imposed under item 1 of this subparagraph;
3. If an extension is not granted, and 30 days have elapsed, the decision may be appealed to the State Board in accordance with § 4–205(c) of this article; and
4. If an extension has been granted, and 45 days have elapsed, the decision may be appealed to the State Board in accordance with § 4–205(c) of this article.

(6) (i) A public chartering authority may approve an application to operate a public charter school on a contingent basis subject to the conditions of subparagraph (ii) of this paragraph.

(ii) The contingent approval granted under subparagraph (i) of this paragraph may be contingent on:

1. A public charter school's ability to meet any timelines established by the public chartering authority for the securing of a facility; and
2. Final approval by the public chartering authority regarding the suitability of the facility secured by the public charter school.

(b) (1) If an application to establish a public charter school includes a description of the implementation of a weighted lottery that gives priority to students in a specific geographic attendance area in accordance with § 9–102.2 or § 9–102.3 of this title, the public chartering authority may approve or reject this provision separately from the application as a whole.

(2) A decision of a public chartering authority under paragraph (1) of this subsection may not be appealed to the State Board.

(c) (1) An application to establish a public charter school may include a staffing model, including provisions for staff recruitment, training, evaluation, and professional development.

(2) A public charter school may submit a staffing model as provided in paragraph (1) of this subsection with a renewal application or with an amendment to an existing charter.

(d) (1) If the county board denies an application to establish a public charter school, the applicant may appeal the decision to the State Board, in accordance with § 4–205(c) of this article.

(2) The State Board shall render a decision within 120 days of the filing of an appeal under this subsection.

(3) If the county board denies an application to establish a public charter school and the State Board reverses the decision, the State Board shall remand the matter to the county board and may direct the county board to grant a charter and may, if necessary, mediate with the county board and the applicant to implement the charter.

§9–104.1.

(a) In this section, “eligible public charter school” means a public charter school that has been in existence for at least 5 years and demonstrates to the public chartering authority a history of:

- (1) Sound fiscal management; and
- (2) Student achievement that exceeds the average in the local school system in which the public charter school is located on:

- (i) Statewide assessments; and
- (ii) Other measures developed by the State Board.

(b) The State Board shall develop standards and criteria by which an eligible public charter school shall be assessed by a public chartering authority.

(c) (1) An eligible public charter school may submit to a public chartering authority:

(i) An application for renewal of an existing charter contract that incorporates the provisions of subsection (e) of this section; or

(ii) Subject to paragraph (2) of this subsection, an application for an addendum to an existing charter contract that incorporates the provisions of subsection (e) of this section.

(2) An eligible public charter school may not submit an application under paragraph (1)(ii) of this subsection more than one time during the duration of an existing charter contract.

(d) If the public chartering authority determines that a public charter school is not an eligible public charter school, the public charter school may appeal the decision to the State Board in accordance with § 4–205(c) of this article.

(e) If an eligible public charter school and a public chartering authority mutually agree to an alternative means by which the eligible public charter school will satisfy the intent of the policies of the public chartering authority, an eligible public charter school is exempt from:

(1) Textbook, instructional program, curriculum, professional development, and scheduling requirements;

(2) A requirement to establish a school community council;

(3) Except for Title I schools, a requirement to establish a school improvement plan;

(4) Except for schools with a school activity fund, a requirement to provide school activity fund disclosure statements; and

(5) Except for prekindergarten classes, class size or staffing ratios.

(f) A public chartering authority and an eligible public charter school may jointly develop and mutually agree to a communication process and supervision methodology that flows among the county board, the operator, and the administration of the eligible public charter school.

(g) (1) An eligible public charter school may not be assigned a principal without the written consent of the operator of the eligible public charter school.

(2) (i) Staff members shall be assigned or transferred to an eligible public charter school if the staff member expresses in writing that the staff member wants to work in that eligible public charter school and the eligible public charter school requests in writing that the staff member be assigned or transferred to the eligible public charter school, provided there is an existing vacancy.

(ii) A transfer authorized under subparagraph (i) of this paragraph shall take place as designated by the agreement of the local bargaining unit in the local school system.

(h) Nothing in this section may be construed to take precedence over an agreement of a local bargaining unit in a local school system.

(i) Except as otherwise provided in this section, an eligible public charter school is subject to the provisions of this title.

§9–105.

A member of the professional staff of a public charter school shall be subject to the same certification provisions established in regulations for the professional staff of other public schools.

§9–106.

(a) Subject to subsection (b) of this section, a public charter school shall comply with the provisions of law and regulation governing other public schools.

(b) Subject to subsection (d) of this section, a public charter school may seek a waiver of the requirements under subsection (a) of this section from:

- (1) A county board for policies that are the policies of the county board; and



- (2) The State Board for policies that are the policies of the State Board.
- (c) If a waiver is denied under this section, the county board or the State Board, as appropriate, shall provide the reason for the denial in writing to the public charter school.
- (d) A waiver may not be granted from provisions of law or regulation relating to:
  - (1) Audit requirements;
  - (2) The measurement of student academic achievement, including all assessments required for other public schools and other assessments mutually agreed upon by the public chartering authority and the school; or
  - (3) The health, safety, or civil rights of a student or an employee of the public charter school.

§9-107.

- (a) A public chartering authority may not grant a charter to a public charter school whose operation would be inconsistent with any public policy initiative, court order, or federal improvement plan governing special education that is applicable to the State.
- (b) A public chartering authority shall ensure that the authorizing process for a public charter school and the charter application address the roles and responsibilities of the county board and the applicants and operators of the public charter school with respect to children with disabilities.
- (c) The public chartering authority shall ensure that, prior to opening a public charter school, the operators of the school are informed of the human, fiscal, and organizational capacity needed to fulfill the school's responsibilities related to children with disabilities.

§9-108.

- (a) Employees of a public charter school:
  - (1) Are public school employees, as defined in §§ 6-401(e) and 6-501(g) of this article;
  - (2) Are employees of a public school employer, as defined in §§ 6-401(f) and 6-501(h) of this article, in the county in which the public charter school is located; and
  - (3) Shall have the rights granted under Title 6, Subtitles 4 and 5 of this article.
- (b) If a collective bargaining agreement under Title 6, Subtitle 4 or Subtitle 5 of this article is already in existence in the county where a public charter school is located, the employee organization, public school employer, and the public charter school may mutually agree to negotiate amendments to the existing agreement to address the needs of the particular public charter school, including amendments to work days, work hours, school year, procedures for transfers that are consistent with the instructional mission of the school, and extra duty assignments.

§9-109.

- (a) A county board shall disburse to a public charter school an amount of county, State, and federal money for elementary, middle, and secondary students that is commensurate with the amount disbursed to other public schools in the local jurisdiction.
- (b) The State Board or the county board may give surplus educational materials, supplies, furniture, and other equipment to a public charter school.

§9-110.

- (a) (1) Each county board shall develop a public charter school policy and provide it to the State Board.
- (2) The policy required under paragraph (1) of this subsection shall include guidelines and procedures regarding:
  - (i) Evaluation of public charter schools;
  - (ii) Revocation of a charter;
  - (iii) Reporting requirements; and
  - (iv) Financial, programmatic, or compliance audits of public charter schools.
- (3) The policy required under paragraph (1) of this subsection, including any updates or amendments made to the policy, shall be provided to the Department and made available on request and posted on the Web site of the county board.
- (b) (1) The Department shall designate a staff person to function as a contact person for the Maryland Public Charter School Program.
- (2) The staff person designated as a contact person under paragraph (1) of this subsection shall:
  - (i) Provide technical assistance to the operator of a public charter school to help the school meet the requirements of federal and State laws, including 20 U.S.C. § 1400, et seq. and § 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. § 794; and
  - (ii) Gather information from public charter schools in the State regarding innovative approaches to education and best practices taking place at public charter schools that may be shared with and disseminated to other public schools in the State.

(c) The Department shall report annually by December 1 to the General Assembly in accordance with § 2–1246 of the State Government Article regarding:

(1) Any updates or amendments made to a public charter school policy under subsection (a) of this section; and

(2) Implementation of this title.

§9–111.

(a) (1) If, with the approval of the State Superintendent, a county board determines that a school site or building no longer is needed for school purposes and after the county commissioners or county council have provided the required notice under § 4–115 of this article, the county board shall inform the public charter schools in the county that the school site or building is available for occupation and use by a public charter school on the terms determined by the county board.

(2) Each county board:

(i) Shall establish a procedure to determine which public charter school may occupy and use an available school site or building if more than one public charter school notifies the county board of an interest in occupying and using a school site or building; and

(ii) May consider the utilization rate of surrounding school sites and buildings when authorizing a public charter school to occupy a school site or building.

(b) A public charter school that occupies or uses a school site or building under subsection (a) of this section may not sell, dispose of, or otherwise transfer the school site or building.

§9–112.

Any portion of a building or property occupied and used by a public charter school shall be exempt from property taxes under § 7–202 of the Tax – Property Article for the duration of the occupation and use of the building or property as a public charter school

# Appendix B- Charter School Development Roadmap

## Charter School Development

(Adapted from US Charter Schools “Steps to Starting a Charter School”)

### 1. Exploration Process

- Investigate state laws, policies and available funding
- Review state authorizing process
- Visit charter schools
- Conduct research on charter schools, school models and design, and related areas
- Begin community engagement
- Assess community assets and needs
- Research district

### 2. Initial Design Process (3–6 months)

- Engage with the community
- Identify community members (including planning group members, community leaders, and parents/families) who are interested in education in the community
  - Solicit input from community members
  - Hold community meetings
- Work with community members to collaboratively develop vision for school
- Form a core design team
  - Assess skills, access experts
  - Ensure that design team is diverse in skills and experience
- Articulate initial vision for the charter school
- Apply for nonprofit and tax-exempt status
- Develop clear vision and mission statements
- Create a plan that maps out how the design team will prepare the major design areas below
- Conduct research and reach out to experts in each major school design area, as needed
  - Educational program design
  - Governance
  - Budget/Finances
  - Facilities
  - Other
- Create a basic written description of your ideas for a new charter school, including major design areas
- Share prospectus with community members, school board leaders, potential funders and others to engage them and solicit further input for your school design
- Develop a strategy for gaining district support
- Identify possible facilities for the school
- Identify and apply for available local and national charter school start-up funding; begin to raise additional funds, if needed

### **3. Major Design Areas (6–12 months)**

- School culture and climate
  - Articulate vision for school culture and climate, and a strategy for developing them for both students and teachers
- Educational program
  - Define educational approach and goals
  - Consider whether you will contract with a nonprofit charter management organization (EMO or CMO)
  - Define school academic standards
  - Develop or select curriculum and instructional methods
  - Develop or identify assessment methods
  - Develop special education plan
  - Develop professional development plan
  - Develop instructional calendar and daily schedule
- Parent and community engagement strategy
- School governance
  - Draft board bylaws and policies
  - Create an administrative structure
  - Identify school leaders and/or recruitment strategy
  - Identify board members and/or recruitment strategy
- School staffing
  - Identify staffing needs and develop recruitment plan
- Budget and finances
  - Develop school budget and financial plans
- Facilities and operations
  - Tentatively secure possible facilities for the school
  - Develop operations plans
- School accountability plan
  - Write an accountability plan that incorporates accountability for academic achievement, sound fiscal management, and governance
- Address other application requirements (including plan for liability and insurance coverage, transportation plan, and other areas)
- Continue building community and school board support for your charter school proposal

### **4. Applying for the Charter**

- Draft the charter application
  - Incorporate all elements required by law
  - Address any application requirements of your district
- Provide detailed information on each major design area for your school
- Review, review, review
  - Ensure that your charter school proposal is comprehensive, addresses all required areas, adequately addresses concerns identified by the school board/authorizer, and provides a solid framework for a high-quality charter school
- Assess whether you have gained sufficient school board support
- Submit completed charter school proposal to local school board

## **5. After Submission, Pending A Decision (45–120 days)**

- Meet with school board members and other local leaders to discuss your charter proposal
  - Understand and address individual concerns
  - Show respect for opposition
  - Assess likelihood of approval
- Disseminate information about charter proposal
  - Meet with local media
  - Meet with church and community groups
  - Letters to the Editor
- Build and demonstrate community support
  - Attendance at school board meetings
  - Phone calls and letters to school board
  - Letters to the Editor
- Prepare for appeal if necessary

## **6. Pre-Operations/Incubation: Getting Ready to Open (8–12 months)**

- Finalize charter agreement with the authorizer, including,
  - for local districts, identification of services the district will provide and the terms under which they will be provided
  - Recruit and hire staff
  - Recruit any necessary additional board members
  - Recruit and admit students
  - Orient staff and bring them into the planning process
  - Provide board governance training
  - Formalize the instructional program
    - Refine detailed curriculum, instruction and assessment plans
    - Finalize choice of and purchase instructional materials
    - Finalize detailed school calendar and daily schedule
    - Create detailed professional development schedule based on overall plans
- Arrange for facility and support services (note that these services should be priced and budgeted earlier in the process; this step involves actually contracting for them)
  - Fiscal support (accounting, budget, payroll, banking, auditing, purchasing)
  - Transportation
  - Food service
  - Insurance
  - Staff benefits (non-profit employees)
  - Telecommunications and technology
  - Other
- Confirm relationships with community groups, supporters, the sponsor district, the media, MAPCS, and other partners

## **7. Operating: Opening the Doors**

- Formally open the doors and celebrate the commencement
- of the school

- Transition school's governance structure from initial "start-up" stages to one of ongoing policymaking and oversight
- Deepen relationships with community groups, supporters, the authorizer, the media, MAPCS, and other partners

## **Appendix C – Sample Mission and Vision Statements**

*The Maryland Alliance* has been assisting founding groups in applying for charters since 2003. We are including Mission and Vision statements from three of the schools that we have assisted. The **Monocacy Valley Montessori Public Charter School**, which has been operating since 2002 and **City Neighbors Charter School** and **Patterson Park Public Charter School**, which opened in 2005.

### **City Neighbors Charter School**

#### **Mission Statement**

The mission of City Neighbors Charter School (CNCS) is to provide an extraordinary public school education with high academic achievement for all students. Our ultimate goal for our school is that through innovative curriculum, parental involvement and community outreach, the students leave enlivened, with deep awareness of themselves, their families and the outside community, and with the capacity to be good citizens.

#### **Vision Statement**

The CNCS vision is to design a school whose classrooms serve as individual model communities where issues are discussed, differences in perspectives are welcomed and children work cooperatively, rather than competitively. The CNCS governance model – including parents, business and community leaders, teachers, students and School Director – reflects our commitment to cooperative governance, based on the principles of human dignity, consensus, and freedom. Our belief and experience is that when given a strong structure to support generative thinking and meaningful activities to perform, all children and adults strive for excellence. Because of this focus, CNCS' impact on the lives of students and families and the community will be powerful, positive and long lasting.

### **Patterson Park Public Charter School**

#### **Mission Statement**

The mission of PPPCS is to develop well educated, community-minded children by providing high-quality, community-based education that capitalizes on the diversity of nearby neighborhoods and the resources of Patterson Park. Central to this mission is a school culture based on students, staff, parents, and guardians functioning as one community. We envision parents, guardians and community members devoting time to help with the school's policies, educational agenda, and community building ambitions.

#### **Vision Statement**

Our vision for educating students at Patterson Park Public Charter School (PPPCS) is to unite students, parents, educators, and the Patterson Park area through an educational environment that rewards creativity and builds community ties. Strong academic standards and community/arts-related partnerships will encourage PPPCS students to become independent and responsible thinkers. PPPCS aspires to socioeconomic, racial and ethnic diversity in its student population and will incorporate the many attendant cultures into its curriculum and daily life.

### **Monocacy Valley Montessori Public Charter School**

#### **Mission Statement**

The Monocacy Valley Montessori School is a small, intimate and democratic learning community where children learn actively, think critically, and solve problems creatively. Students' innate desire to learn is fostered using the Montessori approach: a prepared environment, hands-on materials, mixed age classes, and self-directed learning. We empower students to become responsible, confident, caring citizens who possess strong academic skills and an enduring love of learning



## Appendix D - Examples of Curriculum Approaches<sup>50</sup>

Your school does not have to follow any of these, and in practice there may be considerable overlap. For example, even a traditionally organized school may involve students in projects part of the time. Adopting an established approach allows you to focus on a proven strategy that you can document effectively in the charter application. We present this list to help your team identify approaches about which it would like to learn more.

**Blended Learning** A blended learning model is one in which a portion of in-person, face-to-face, instruction is replaced with online learning. Generally, a student in a blended learning school receives 30–70% of his or her instruction online.

**Project-Based** Students learn to find information on a topic from a wide range of sources, organize their findings and make presentations. Two alternatives are used in the project-based program: Teachers determine projects for students or students decide on topics that interest them. Most learning is interdisciplinary, and often the presentations are organized as exhibitions for the public. Many schools use this approach in one subject area, such as social studies, instead of across the board.

**Montessori** The Montessori method focuses primarily on younger children, emphasizes the uniqueness of each child, and recognizes that children differ from adults in the way they develop and think (they aren't just "adults in small bodies"). Montessori differs from a playbased approach in the very early grades. It features the use of authentic measures of student progress and pushes students toward mastery on a set of activities.

**Core Knowledge** A national program for pre-K through 8th grade, begun by E. D. Hirsh Jr., the Core Knowledge program has specific ideas and skills spelled out in considerable detail for each subject and grade level. The program emphasizes the importance of students learning a large body of "common knowledge" that an educated person would be expected to know.

**Constructivist** derives from research about learning and knowledge or the "construction of learner-generated solutions." Constructivist schools guide students to develop their own understanding of "big ideas" or primary concepts. They aim for relevance to the learner, modifying and adapting that content to meet what students need and/or want to improve their own individual circumstance. Lucy Calkins (founding director of the Reading and Writing Project at Teachers College/Columbia University), Ted Sizer (founder of the Coalition of Essential Schools) and Deborah Meier (educational reformer and founder of multiple small schools) are leading proponents of constructivism.

**Direct Instruction** A national program mostly for elementary grades designed by Siegfried Engelmann, Direct Instruction includes tightly scripted, sequenced lessons that teachers use to lead students to give specific responses, frequently oral, often chorally. The model emphasizes

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<sup>50</sup> Excerpt from *Paving a New Path*, INCS

well-developed and carefully planned lessons designed around small learning increments and clearly defined and prescribed teaching tasks. It is based on the theory that clear instruction eliminating misinterpretations can greatly improve and accelerate learning.

**Thematic schools** emphasize a particular subject area, such as math, science, STEM or the arts. For example, in an arts school, perhaps half of the day will be devoted to areas of the arts (music, visual arts, and technology) and the other half will be for the remaining subjects of the typical curriculum. Alternatively, a thematically-based curriculum may integrate the theme into most or all subjects throughout the day, as well as into co-curricular or extra-curricular activities.

**Social Justice** A social justice-focused school may read many texts related to social issues in English classes and include the topic in other core classes, require students to volunteer in the community and offer extra-curricular clubs such as Model U.N. that relate to the social justice theme.

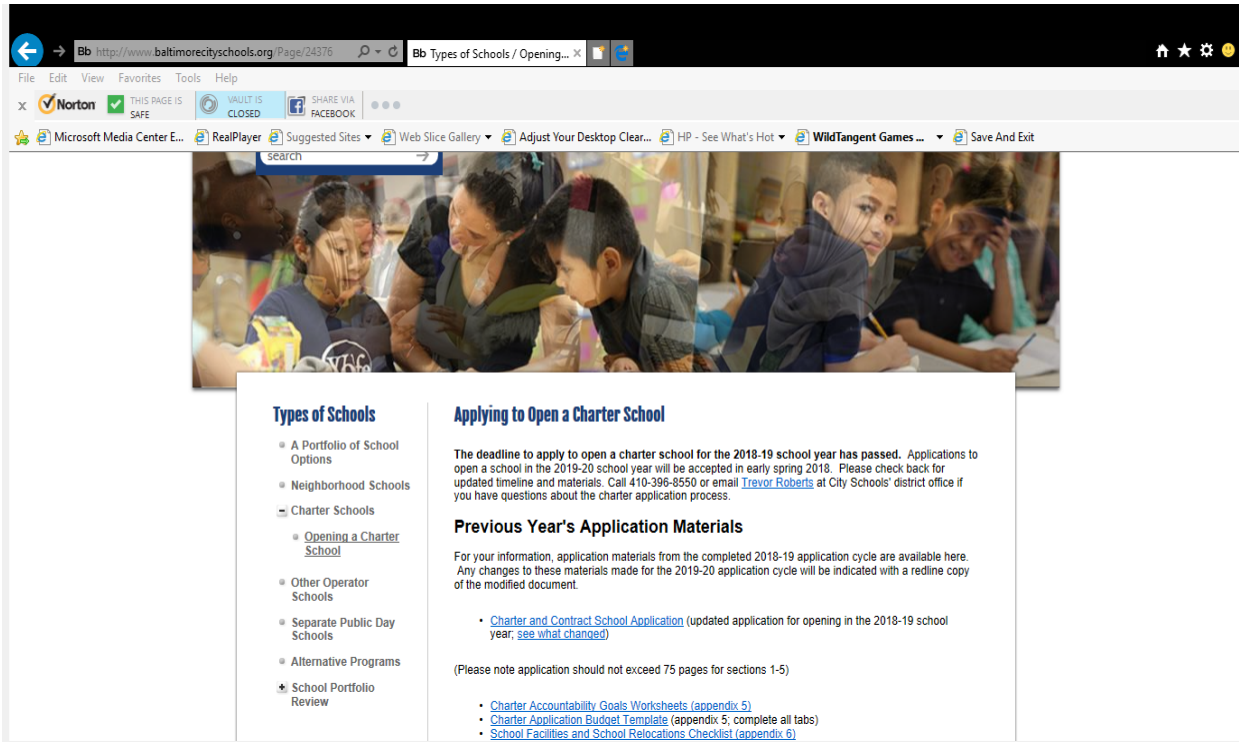
**Experiential Learning** Also described as schools that utilize hands-on learning or active learning, these schools exemplify “learning by doing.” The emphasis is on students setting goals for themselves and establishing learning experiences that help them accomplish their goals. Perhaps the most extensive application of this approach is found in the Big Picture high schools, begun in Providence, RI. These schools are not organized around traditional courses. Instead, students arrange internships with businesses, nonprofits or other agencies, and their learning is built around these.

**Traditional or Conventional** These schools are what most of us have experienced. Students are taught in grade levels, and the curriculum is organized into specific subjects of language arts, social studies, math, science, physical education, health, music, art and electives such as foreign language and others. Classes are taught mostly through lecture and tests rather than experiential activities or student inquiry.

**Classical** education uses history, from ancient to modern, as its organizing theme, offering programs based on the ancient pattern called the trivium, which correlates to what is asserted are the natural developmental stages of children. Students learn through written and spoken words instead of through images such as pictures and videos. The ultimate goal of this type of education is to develop students who think logically and who express themselves convincingly.

# Appendix E—Sample Maryland Charter School Application

<http://www.baltimorecityschools.org/Page/24376>



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the address bar displaying <http://www.baltimorecityschools.org/Page/24376>. The page content includes a search bar, a large image of students and a teacher, and a sidebar menu. The main content area is divided into two columns: 'Types of Schools' and 'Applying to Open a Charter School'.

**Types of Schools**

- A Portfolio of School Options
- Neighborhood Schools
- Charter Schools
  - [Opening a Charter School](#)
- Other Operator Schools
- Separate Public Day Schools
- Alternative Programs
- School Portfolio Review

**Applying to Open a Charter School**

The deadline to apply to open a charter school for the 2018-19 school year has passed. Applications to open a school in the 2019-20 school year will be accepted in early spring 2018. Please check back for updated timeline and materials. Call 410-396-8550 or email [Trevor Roberts](mailto:Trevor.Roberts@cityschools.org) at City Schools' district office if you have questions about the charter application process.

**Previous Year's Application Materials**

For your information, application materials from the completed 2018-19 application cycle are available here. Any changes to these materials made for the 2019-20 application cycle will be indicated with a redline copy of the modified document.

- [Charter and Contract School Application](#) (updated application for opening in the 2018-19 school year, [see what changed](#))

(Please note application should not exceed 75 pages for sections 1-5)

- [Charter Accountability Goals Worksheets \(appendix 5\)](#)
- [Charter Application Budget Template \(appendix 6, complete all tabs\)](#)
- [School Facilities and School Relocations Checklist \(appendix 6\)](#)

## Appendix F—Local School System Charter School Contacts

### **Allegany County Board of Education**

John Logsdon  
301-759-2064  
John.logsdonjr@acps.k12.md.us

### **Anne Arundel County Public Schools**

Megan Lewis  
410-225-8572  
mclewis@aacps.org

### **Baltimore City Public Schools**

Trevor Roberts  
Charter and New Schools  
410-396-8550  
TLRoberts@bcps.k12.md.us

### **Baltimore County Public Schools**

Casey Kirk  
ckirk@bcps.org

### **Calvert County Public Schools**

Susan Johnson  
410-535-7804  
johnsons@calvertnet.k12.md.us

### **Caroline County Public Schools**

Lindsey McCormick  
Mccormick.lindsey@ccpsstaff.org

### **Carroll County Public Schools**

Jonathan O'Neal  
jdoneal@carrollk12.org

### **Cecil County Public Schools**

Carolyn Teigland  
cteigland@ccps.org

### **Charles County Public Schools**

Christine Miller  
cmmiller@ccboe.com

### **Dorchester County Board of Education**

Regina Teal  
tealr@dcpsmd.org

### **Frederick County Public Schools**

Frederick County Public Schools  
Charter Liaison  
Dr. Daniel Lippy  
Director of School Management  
301-644-5000  
Daniel.lippy@fcps.org

### **Garrett County Public Schools**

Nicole Miller  
nicole.miller@garrettcountyschools.org

### **Harford County Public Schools**

Susan Brown  
susan.brown@hcps.org

### **Howard County Public Schools**

Genee Varlack  
410-313-6870  
charterschools@hcpss.org

**Kent County Public Schools**

Gillian Spero  
gspero@kent.k12.md.us

**Montgomery County Public Schools**

Niki Hazel  
240-740-5600  
charterschools@mcpsmd.org

**Prince George's County Public Schools**

Loretta White-Khaalid  
Charter School Liason  
Loretta.white@pgcps.org

**Queen Anne's County Public Schools**

Michael Bell  
Supervisor of Instruction  
410-758-2403 ext. 138  
Michael.bell@qacps.org

**St. Mary's County Public Schools**

Lisa Bachner  
lebachner@smcps.org

**Somerset County Public Schools**

Brandy Brady  
bbrady@somerset.k12.md.us

**Talbot County Public Schools**

Lynne Duncan  
Supervisor, Student Services  
410-822-0330 x119  
lduncan@tcps.k12.md.us

**Washington County Board of Education**

Peggy Pugh  
pughpeg@wcps.k12.md.us

**Wicomico County Board of Education**

Brian Raygor  
braygor@wcboe.org

**Worcester County Board of Education**

Nicole Selby  
naselby@mail.worcester.k12.md.us

## Appendix G—MD Charter School Application Deadlines

*(Always check these deadlines with the authorizing School District Liaison or on the district website, since they may change)*

### ***Allegany County Board of Education***

January 15-March 15

### ***Anne Arundel County Public Schools***

Rolling Basis  
Application on website

### ***Baltimore City Public Schools***

March  
Application on website

### ***Baltimore County Public Schools***

Letter of Intent proposal must be received by  
May 1, two years preceding the proposed  
opening of the school; Application due Jan 2

### ***Calvert County Public Schools***

Rolling Basis

### ***Caroline County Public School***

Rolling Basis

### ***Carroll County Public Schools***

Rolling Basis

### ***Cecil County Public Schools***

Contact your district

### ***Charles County Public Schools***

Intent Form & Prospectus submitted w/in 30  
days  
Application Rolling Basis

### ***Dorchester County Board of Education***

Letter of Intent- Due first Monday in February,  
Concept Proposal- due last Monday in March,  
Application- due first Monday in September

### ***Frederick County Board of Education***

Concept proposal must be received by January 1  
of the year preceding the proposed opening of  
the school  
Application – May 1

### ***Garrett County Board of Education***

Rolling Basis

### ***Harford County Public School***

September 26

### ***Howard County Public Schools***

Intent form and Prospectus due -TBD,  
application due TBD

### ***Kent County Public Schools***

Rolling Basis

### ***Montgomery County Public Schools***

April 3

### ***Prince George's County Public Schools***

January  
Letter of Intent and Prospectus: First Monday  
Annually in August  
Full Application (only approved prospectus):  
Second Friday Annually in January  
Board of Ed Decision Announced: Annually in  
May

### ***Queen Anne's County Board of Education***

Preliminary Contact – at least three months prior  
to the March 1<sup>st</sup> concept proposal deadline  
Letter of Intent & Concept Proposal - March 1  
Application due May 15

### ***Somerset County Public Schools***

February 1

***St. Mary's County Public Schools***  
Rolling Basis

***Talbot County Public Schools***  
Prospectus Application due January 1  
Final application due September 1

***Washington County Board of Education***  
Letter of Intent to apply- September 1.  
Concept Proposal -November 1  
Final Application due Between March 1 & May 1

***Wicomico County Board of Education***  
Rolling Basis

***Worcester County Board of Education***  
Rolling Basis