

MAKING A

COMMITMENT

TO QUALITY

A Blueprint for High-Quality New School Development



MISSOURI CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

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- ★ La Salle Middle School
- ★ The Biome Charter High School
- ★ Vernare Charter School

DEAR NEW SCHOOL PIONEERS,

The Missouri Charter Public School Association (MCPSA) is the voice of Missouri's charter public school sector. We are dedicated to serving the educational interests of all Missouri students and improving student achievement by increasing access to high-quality charter public education options throughout the entire State. As we state in our Missouri Charter Schools' Commitment to Quality, "we believe we have a unique opportunity to contribute to the policy direction of the charter school sector in Missouri. To be effective stewards of the sector, our top priority must be to ensure that charter schools **are high-performing, fiscally-responsible options accessible to all families**. That means we must be committed to the continued growth of our best examples, to seeding the next generation of high-performing schools, and to the closure or reconstitution of schools persistently unable to meet student needs."

Missouri's parents continue to demand more high-quality options in public education. Currently, there are 40 charter public schools with 71 individual school buildings serving over 22,000 students in Kansas City and St. Louis. Parents have noticed that charter schools within Kansas City and St. Louis are becoming many of the top performing public schools in their community. Many studies, including a 2013 Stanford University CREDO Report, note that charter schools have developed a track record of strong performance. With high school graduation rates and college enrollment rates steadily increasing, it's no wonder more and more of Missouri's families are raising their hand saying they too want a high-quality charter public school in their community. To that end, MCPSA is working to expand educational options to even more Missouri families. We help individuals learn more about starting a charter school and, through our CharterStart program, offer opportunities to support new school development groups, serving as a resource throughout the new school development process.

High-quality charter schools do not happen by accident. Students need talented, mission-driven leaders to start more excellent schools. They need a founding group ready to 'dig in' and commit hours of time and expertise to design an innovative public school model that will ensure students achieve at high levels. To that end, we **thank you** for reviewing the information and resources in Making a Commitment to Quality. If you have questions or are ready to move forward in the charter school design process, we encourage you to contact us for further guidance.

Finally, please visit our website, mocharterschools.org, to find a charter public school near you, learn more about MCPSA, and access additional information on the Missouri charter public school movement.

Committed to Quality,



Douglas P. Thaman, Ed.D
Executive Director

MISSOURI CHARTER SCHOOLS' COMMITMENT TO QUALITY

The current education system in Missouri is not preparing all students for the future demands of college, career, and the global economy. This is a challenge facing all communities as student needs become more complex and achievement gaps persist. The system is particularly broken for low-income students, providing them fewer opportunities and producing weaker results. Standing in strong contrast to these systemic failures, charter schools are beacons of hope for millions of families across our nation. Despite hundreds of proof points across the country – many coming to scale – too few high-performing educational choices are available to families.

We, members of the Missouri Charter Public School Association, have a unique opportunity to contribute to the policy direction of the charter school sector in Missouri. To be effective stewards of the sector, our top priority must be to ensure that charter schools are high-performing, fiscally responsible options accessible to all families. That means we must be committed to the continued growth of our best examples, to seeding the next generation of high-performing schools, and to the closure or reconstitution of schools persistently unable to meet student needs.

Collectively, we agree that:

- ★ Missouri's charter school sector's principle goal is to create high-performing, autonomous, innovative, publicly accountable charter schools for students;
- ★ The sustainable growth and strength of the State's charter school sector rests on the quality of the individual schools within the sector;
- ★ Many communities lack enough high-performing public schools to serve all students;
- ★ The continued operation of persistently underperforming charter schools is a failure for children; and

- ★ All stakeholders with advocacy and stewardship responsibilities for the sector should deliberately work to increase the number of high-performing charter schools and reduce the number of underperforming charter schools.
- ★ Accordingly, we the undersigned organization, commit to the following:
- ★ To develop an evaluation system or make use of a pre-existing system to assess the quality of charter schools;
- ★ To make others aware of the success, innovations, and best practices of those charter schools consistently performing among the best of Missouri's public schools;
- ★ To work for the renewal, expansion, and replication of those charter schools that are meeting their performance expectations;
- ★ To provide persistently low-performing charter schools with targeted assistance aimed toward significant improvement;
- ★ To support the closure, non-renewal, or reconstitution of those charter schools that are persistently failing to meet the needs of students;
- ★ To provide families with the information needed to make the best educational choices for their children and to offer transition assistance to the students, families, and charter school employees when applicable;
- ★ To support efforts to seed the next generation of high-performing, autonomous, innovative, publicly accountable charter schools; and
- ★ To commit advocacy and lobbying resources toward these efforts.

IA. WHAT ARE CHARTER SCHOOLS?

For more than twenty years, charter schools have been creating innovative models for American public education and developing practices that work best for 21st Century students. Charter schools.

Are tuition-free public schools, open to all students. Charter schools do not use selective admissions requirements. If there are more applications received than seats available, students are selected by lottery. Charter schools educate all student populations served by traditional district schools, including at-risk, English language learners and special education students.

Have freedom from many regulations that apply to other public schools. This allows charters greater flexibility and opportunity for innovation in the classroom. Mission-driven charter schools often create a unique culture, and school days and years are often longer than those of regular district schools. Many charters are small schools and use their flexibility to provide smaller classes.

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.

Are subject to strict accountability. A charter school is held to its charter agreement (contract) by their Sponsor, with clear standards for student performance, governance and financial management. Charter school students take statewide student achievement exams, and charter schools are subject to the same safety, health, civil rights and special education regulations as traditional district schools. Charter agreements are for five years and the school is evaluated for renewal during their 4th to 5th year, and can be closed at the conclusion of their five year term if not performing as promised.

May be new or may be conversions of existing public schools. In Missouri, a new charter must be sponsored by a university, local school district or the Missouri Charter School Commission, and authorized by the Missouri State Board of Education.

CHARTER SCHOOLS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Charter schools have become part of the fabric of American education. The first charter public school in America was launched in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1992. Since then, charters have opened all over the country. There are nearly 5,277 charter schools across the country enrolling 1,815,000 students or 3.7% of the national student population.

Each state that allows charter schools has its own charter law. While the basic form of charter schools is similar from state to state, the number of charter schools allowed to open, who can authorize a new charter school, what rules charters must follow, and more, can vary. In [Section 1B](#), “Charter Schools in Missouri,” we provide information about the specifics of our state’s charter requirements. Remember that other resources you use may be written for a national audience or for an audience in a different state.

Charter performance also varies by state. In Missouri, over the past five years, charter schools have demonstrated improved performance particularly with students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Again, when considering or discussing charters, we recommend focusing on local results, not necessarily national averages.

WHO CAN START A CHARTER SCHOOL?

To start the process of opening a new charter school, you don’t have to be an expert in education, a lawyer or a school finance guru, though you do need to recruit or access services and advice from experts in many areas. It’s important to include at least one experienced educator on your design team. Groups of dedicated teachers have started many successful charter schools, and coalitions involving parents, universities, social service agencies, businesses, nonprofit organizations and civic groups have also opened charters.

People start charters for many reasons:

- ★ To provide new educational options to students and families in their communities
- ★ To improve achievement for students who have been underperforming in regular district schools, or help close achievement gaps between white and minority students or affluent and low-income students
- ★ To implement innovation in the school design, such as curriculum, instructional approaches, school schedules, or support for students to increase engagement and improve performance
- ★ To create schools in which professional educators are given the freedom and authority to do their best work with students
- ★ To bring national and community expertise and resources to public education, through partnerships with community-based organizations, businesses, national educational leaders and universities

Whatever your reason for starting a charter school, remember that charter school development is a serious responsibility. Charter school developers and operators assume the public trust to educate students, for which they receive public funds. In addition, charter schools are held accountable for academic results and financial responsibility. To open your school, you will need motivation, follow-through, attention to detail and a willingness to assemble the teams necessary to help with the varied and often complex facets of the application process. You'll also need patience and time.

The concept of “team” is an important one for creating a charter school. Developing a charter school is not something anyone can do alone. You will need to develop a strong team with skill and expertise in many areas to open a successful charter school. This handbook will guide you to develop a strong team, and with that team, to undertake the complex, exhilarating, and important work of developing a high-quality charter school.



TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

Two Missouri Charter Schools

Because charter schools have the autonomy to try innovative practices—and are usually created by developers with a personal vision—they can vary in many ways. Take a look at some of the underlying differences between these two successful schools in Missouri:

City Garden Montessori is a charter elementary school in St Louis. Started as an early childhood center that expanded to become a charter elementary school, City Garden Montessori is rooted in the community, committed to diversity, nonviolence, simplicity and sustainability. City Garden aims to cultivate compassionate and critically thinking young people who will make a difference in our world.

Crossroads Charter Schools is a network of three charter school located in downtown Kansas City, Missouri with a mission to prepare students to excel in high school by providing an academically rigorous K-12 education. Crossroads aims to be the premier urban school serving Kansas City's youth and a destination for other educators seeking inspiration and best practices. Immersed in the civic, artistic, financial and historic heart of Kansas City, Crossroads Charter Schools embraces the exceptional learning opportunities of their urban setting, and uses those to enhance the educational experiences of their students.

1B. CHARTER SCHOOLS IN MISSOURI

In the 20 years charter schools have existed in Missouri, the number of schools has expanded from the original 15, operating within the Kansas City Metropolitan School District boundaries, to 40 charter schools with 22 in Kansas City and 18 in St. Louis. No charter schools yet exist outside of Kansas City or St. Louis. Combined, Missouri's charter schools serve more than 22,000 students.

Due to a successful track record of meeting students' specific needs, parental demand for public charter schools is at an all-time high and charter school enrollment continues to increase.

CHARTERS EXHIBIT STRONG PERFORMANCE

Charter schools in Missouri are delivering lasting results. Statistics compiled by the Stanford University Center for Research on Education Outcomes show that the percentage of charter schools making gains in reading and math exceeds the percentage of non-charter schools making similar gains. According to their report, students in Missouri's charter schools are getting an extra 14 days of learning in reading and an extra 22 days of learning in math than their peers in the Kansas City and St. Louis school systems.

Between 2010 and 2015, 15 of 16 independent studies found that students attending public charter schools do better academically than their traditional public school peers. For example, one study by the Center for Research on Education Outcomes at Stanford University found that charter schools do a better job teaching low income students, minority students, and students who are still learning English than traditional schools. Separate studies by the Center on Reinventing Public Education and Mathematica Policy Research have found that charter school students are more likely to graduate from high school, go on to college, stay in college and have higher earnings in early adulthood.

RESOURCES

CREDO at Stanford University Charter School Studies credo.stanford.edu/research-reports.html

10. 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 don't have to follow the steps exactly as we outline them, but this should give you an idea of what needs to happen—and in an approximate order.

The time periods listed below are not exact. Each charter school design team will need to develop their own work plan and schedule, based on the time and skill of their members. However, we estimate that it takes a minimum of 18-24 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, when a charter application is submitted to a potential sponsor they legally have 90 days for review and decision-making. Following this, when a sponsor submits your application to the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, they legally have 60 days for review to ensure the application is compliant with State and Federal law. You must consider this five month window of time in your application planning process. Charter schools have been established in shorter timeframes, but teams should allow at least 18 months and, ideally, 30 months between the decision to create a school and school opening.

For the bulk of this publication, we explore aspects of a high-quality charter school - such as the education plan, governance, operations, and the facility - one at a time, and outline what needs to be done to create a comprehensive proposal and a successful school. The roadmap below, in contrast, is in roughly chronological order, mixing tasks to give an idea of what must be accomplished each step of the way.

ROADMAP FOR CHARTER SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT

(Adapted from U.S. Charter Schools “Steps to Starting a Charter School”, and the DESE Model Charter School Application)

1. Exploration Process

- ★ Investigate state laws, policies and available funding
- ★ Review state authorizing and sponsorship 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
- ★ Consider serving on an existing charter school governing board

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
 - Operations
 - 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)

- ★ Education Plan
 - Mission, Vision and Goals
 - Curriculum and Instruction
 - Assessment
 - School Calendar and Daily Schedule

- Target Population
- Special Student Populations
- School-specific Goals and Objectives
- School Climate and Discipline
- Optional Programs
- Career Education (if applicable)
- Virtual Education (if applicable)
- High-risk Alternative School (if applicable)
- Gifted Education
- Higher Education Affiliation
- ★ Organization Plan
 - Governing Body
 - Governing Board Composition
 - Management and Operation
 - Staffing and Human Resources
 - Student Recruitment and Enrollment
 - Parent, Community and Education Involvement
 - Joint Application (if applicable)
 - Educational Service Providers
- ★ Business Plan
 - Budget
 - Financial Management
 - Facility
 - Transportation
 - Insurance
 - Closure
- ★ 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 sponsor and provides a solid framework for a high-quality charter school
- ★ Within seven days of submitting to a potential sponsor you must also submit the completed charter school application to the local school district board

5. Potential Sponsor Submission, Pending a Decision (90 days) and Sponsor Submission to MO DESE (60 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
 - 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 sponsor
- ★ 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
 - Telecommunications and technology
 - Other
- ★ Confirm relationships with community groups, supporters, sponsor, the media, MCPSA, 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, sponsor, the media, MCPSA and other partners

EXAMPLE TIMELINE FOR CHARTER APPLICATION PROCESS FOR 2020 OPENING

*Where an item requires a submission/resubmission it is considered as occurring on the 1st day of the month.

November 2017

- ★ Review all documents in the New School Development Documents to Review File
- ★ Review The Missouri Charter School History
- ★ Review The Missouri Charter School Commission and the Role of Sponsorship
- ★ 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 the school
- ★ Form a core design team

10. OVERVIEW OF THE DESIGN PROCESS

- Assess skills, access experts
- Ensure that design team is diverse in skill and experience
- ★ Articulate initial vision for the charter school
- ★ Apply for nonprofit and tax-exempt status (501c3 Entity)
- ★ Develop clear vision and mission statements
- ★ Create a plan that maps out how the design team will prepare the major design areas of the application
- ★ Conduct research and reach out to experts in each major school design area, as needed, including:
 - Educational program design
 - School culture and climate
 - Governance
 - Budget/Finances
 - Facilities
 - Other
- ★ Create a basic written description of your ideas for a new charter school, including major design areas
 - Share this 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 ideally gaining district support

January 2018

- ★ Engage with the community
- ★ Begin drafting the charter application in preparation for submission to potential sponsor. The Missouri Model document can be accessed via the following link: dese.mo.gov/quality-schools/charter-schools/sponsor-resources

March 2018

- ★ Engage with the community
- ★ 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*

*In the State of Missouri the availability of MO DESE CSP Grant is in question and currently no funds are available.

July 2018

- ★ Engage with the community
- ★ Submit draft application for external evaluation (MCPSA can assist with coordinating the evaluation).

August 2018

- ★ Engage with the community
- ★ Prepare revisions to application based on external evaluation

September 2018 - January 2019

- ★ Engage with the community
- ★ Continue work on application
- ★ Continue work on facility acquisition
- ★ Continue work on fundraising

February 2019

- ★ Submit entire application for external evaluation (MCPSA can assist with coordinating the evaluation).
 - Section A - Education Plan
 - Section B - Organizational Plan
 - Section C - Business Plan

From Now Moving Forward -

- ★ Increase meetings with local leaders to discuss your charter application
 - 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
- ★ Continue building and demonstrating community support
 - Attendance at school board meetings
 - Phone calls and letters to school board
 - Letters to the Editor

May 2019

- ★ Submit charter application to potential sponsor (sponsor legally has 90 days to evaluate the application and consider sponsorship)
- ★ Continue recruiting board members as needed
- ★ Work with sponsor to revise charter application

August 2019

- ★ Sponsor submission of charter application to the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MODESE legally has 60 days to evaluate the application for compliance prior to making a recommendation to the State Board for approval). It should always be expected that MODESE will utilize their full 60 days.
- ★ Revise charter application as requested by DESE*

**MO DESE holds the legal authority to require application modifications only if related to the charter school's compliance with state and/or federal law. All other feedback from MO DESE are suggestions but not required.*

- ★ Begin head of school/principal/executive director search

October 2019

- ★ Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Recommendation to Missouri State Board of Education* for consideration during their November/December Meeting.

If final MOSBOE Approval Received - Preopening work begins toward a fall 2019 opening including:

- ★ Finalize charter agreement with the sponsor
- ★ 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 process
 - Refine detailed curriculum instruction, and assessment plans
 - Finalize choice of and purchase instructional materials

10. OVERVIEW OF THE DESIGN PROCESS

- Finalize detailed school calendar and daily schedule
- Create detailed professional development schedule based on overall plans
- ★ Arrange for facility and support services including (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 (if providing)
 - Food service
 - Insurance
 - Staff benefits
 - Telecommunications and technology
 - Other
- ★ Confirm relationships with community groups, supporters, the sponsor, the media, MCPSA, and other partners

**The State Board holds one meeting between November and December each year. As the charter must be approved by January 30th it is best to consider the November/December meeting as the target meeting allowing the January State Board Meeting as a final option if needed.*

2A. ASSESSING THE NEED FOR A CHARTER SCHOOL

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. You'll need many supporters besides yourself before the first day of school—advocates in the district, colleagues, teachers, investors, parents, and students. To be able to attract all of these allies, you must show that a charter school would be a compelling addition to the school district's current educational portfolio. Would a charter school help to ease overcrowding? Would it offer a different educational approach or school type? Would it focus on underserved student populations?

A solid assessment includes determining where you will create a charter school and gaining an understanding of the education needs within that area. In considering the needs of the students, district and communities, be sure to consider too what kinds of schools and organizations already exist. Ideally, a charter school will fill a gap in a community, and it will help create a stronger educational system overall.

THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT DOCUMENT

We suggest that you develop a 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 clearly presented, valid, empirical data
- ★ Includes a variety of sources of information (e.g. state databases of standardized test results, census bureau data, teachers, parents, students, administrators, counselors, newspapers and websites) and different kinds of data (e.g. cognitive, attitudinal, behavioral and demographic)

2A. ASSESSING THE NEED FOR A CHARTER SCHOOL

- ★ Is based on an 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, etc.)
- ★ What needs does the district or community have? (Is the district growing rapidly? How is the district doing on their Annual Performance Report?)
- ★ 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
 - 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

RESOURCES

A number of existing resources provide data to answer the questions in the comprehensive needs assessment guide. Be aware that some data may be hard to gather, such as college acceptance and attendance rates, other non-standardized indicators of student achievement, and social and emotional factors.

Missouri Public Charter School Association. mocharterschools.org

Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education school data portal
dese.mo.gov/school-data

Kauffman Foundation's EdWise database. EdWise catalogs 14 million records of K-12 Department of Education statistics from Missouri and Kansas.
kauffman.org/microsites/edwise

United States Census Bureau census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/MO/PST045216

IFF iff.org/our-services/research

While the resources above will give you invaluable information, the best way to assess the need for a charter school is by talking with parents, teachers, students, community members and other stakeholders in education. Be strategic about when and how to “go public” to district leaders with your plans for charter school development. You want to ensure you have thoroughly developed your model so you are speaking knowledgably about the purpose behind your school and the need for the school in the community. Some public and school officials, parents, teachers and others may not approve of charter schools and can derail chances to gather support or information before you even begin. Take the time to understand local politics and find key allies who can offer public support.

In general, at the very beginning, we suggest a more low-key process for talking with members of the public. In [Section 3D](#), “Engaging with the Community,” we provide advice on how to organize hearings and meetings in order to gain community input.

2B. IS DEVELOPING A CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOL THE RIGHT PATH FOR YOU?

Starting a charter public school is high-stakes work. Students need and deserve a high-quality education, and it is the purpose of charter schools to provide it.

Starting a charter school is a tough and complicated process that may or may not be right for you. A well thought out and informed decision requires that you carefully consider the mission and vision for your school, what student outcomes you hope to achieve, the needs of your community, whether the charter school you envision meets that community's needs, and whether you and your team have what it takes to start **AND SUSTAIN** a school. You should carefully consider why you want to create a charter school, and whether your goals are best served by "going charter." Keep in mind, the goal is to open a school that will be of high quality and operating for many, many years after you and others involved in planning have moved on.

Planning, designing and launching a charter school will require an immense amount of time, energy, resources, resiliency, and hard work. Moreover, other people's experiences have shown that the process often takes longer than they anticipated. In addition to the year or so needed to prepare a high-quality charter school proposal, you will need substantial additional time to prepare for the school's opening after the proposal has been approved. Most Missouri charters take at least two years to advance from a mere idea to an operating school. Year one is often spent creating a charter school proposal and otherwise working toward authorization. In year two, you will refine the school's educational program, raise additional funds, recruit, hire and orient staff, and prepare the facility to serve students.

If you can answer yes to the following questions, starting a charter public school may be right for you:

- ★ Is your interest in starting a school primarily about achieving high-quality outcomes for students? Are you convinced that starting a charter school is the best way for you to reach that goal?
- ★ Is the school you envision unique in your local district?

2B. IS DEVELOPING A CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOL THE RIGHT PATH FOR YOU?

- ★ Have you identified and researched school models that are similar to that of the school you envision?
- ★ Have you identified what factors will make your school innovative, successful, and well-received by the community?
- ★ Can you foresee any disadvantages to the charter route, and can you articulate what compromises you might have to make to achieve your educational vision and design?
- ★ Are you planning a school to which you would send your own child? If so, and if you intend to start a school for your own child or children, understand that there is no enrollment preference given to founders' children in the Missouri Charter Schools Law. In other words, founders' children are not guaranteed admission. Can you accept that risk?
- ★ Do you realize that you will have to devote a great deal of time and energy to the project?
- ★ What skill sets do you possess that will make your school a success? Many successful schools have teams whose members have expertise in real estate, finance and accounting, legal, and public relations, in addition to backgrounds in education and community engagement. If you identify skills gaps in yourself, do you know others who can fill those gaps as well as commit the time necessary to developing an application?
- ★ Do you realize that, in addition to the education work, your design team and school leaders will need to learn to prepare and stick to a budget, fundraise, manage payroll, buy insurance, deal with a landlord, as well as manage numerous other non-pedagogical issues.
- ★ Are you prepared to be a fund-raiser, even at the very beginning?
- ★ Are you willing to be the public face of a multi-million dollar enterprise? And to be held accountable for meeting the financial, organizational and academic goals of your school?

Daunting questions aside, if you feel that opening a charter can provide a needed educational resource for the children in your community, we hope this guidebook will help you to do so. We're glad that you've decided to embark on this exceptional journey. The rewards of opening a high-quality charter school are tremendous, for the founders, for the students, and for the community the charter school serves. A charter school can be an extraordinary place to learn.

20. RESEARCH AND RESOURCES TO GET YOU STARTED

The resources that we recommend in this section can help you explore the concept of charter school development before you take the steps of creating a design team, exploring the community, considering sponsorship, raising money, and planning a school. Many of these same resources will be useful once you get started. Throughout this guide, we'll also refer to specific sections of some of the publications and websites listed below that provide more detail on the task at hand.

LEARN FROM SUCCESSFUL CHARTERS

There is no reason to reinvent the wheel. We recommend that you become familiar with existing charter school models and information and resources available to inform charter school development. Most charter school developers have borrowed, adopted and adapted ideas from other charter schools. Charter developers can benefit from the lessons learned from both successful and unsuccessful charter school operators. The best innovators in any field have always learned from their predecessors and built upon (or intentionally diverged from) foundations already laid.

Research and read about successful charter schools in case studies, newspaper articles, websites and books that include descriptions of successful charter school models. A list of websites for charter school research—some of which include specific case studies—can be found at the end of this section.

Visit charter schools. Visiting schools is one of the best ways to gain a realistic view of what may be possible as a result of the charter school development process: you'll get ideas, learn about best practices and can form relationships with successful school leaders. You can find a list of all charter schools in Missouri on the MCPSA website (mocharterschools.org), and many of them host regular tours or open houses. Consider visiting charters in other states, as well. The Missouri Charter Public School Association is a good first stop to learn more about charter schools in Missouri. The Charter School Center website (noted in the [resources](#) list below) is a good first stop for learning about charters in other states.

Cultivate relationships with charter school leaders. Other charter school founders and operators possess a wealth of knowledge. Get to know some who are just getting started and others who have a long-term point of view—both will have useful perspectives, because the resources available to charters and the attitudes about charters have changed over the years. As with any such encounter, it will be important for you to respect the charter school leader’s time.

Review charter school applications. Charter school applications are public documents. MCPSA has copies of some applications on file, and others can be accessed via the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website. Remember: every application will be different, and, apart from the legally required components, it may be written to respond to district-specific requirements. Reviewing a completed charter school application will, however, give you a sense of what you are aiming for as you begin the charter school development process.

Attend charter school conferences. MCPSA hosts an annual statewide conference. Additionally, the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools and the National Association of Charter School Authorizers all hold conferences that address issues relevant to charter schools, and they often highlight successful models. Conferences can be a good option for learning broadly about the charter movement and connecting with charter school leaders and national experts.

Learn About and Consider the MCPSA CharterStart Membership.

This membership provides :

- ★ Assistance with timeline development;
- ★ Question and answer support during application development;
- ★ Assistance with the City of St. Louis Mayor's Charter Application Committee submission (St. Louis);
- ★ Assistance with Charter School Sponsor submission(s) and required revisions;
- ★ Assistance with Sponsor submission to the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
- ★ Weekly communications provided to all charter school members;
- ★ Participation in development of MCPSA Legislative Priorities Agenda;
- ★ Weekly legislative updates and opportunities for involvement through Legislative Session;
- ★ Advocacy support (Local, Regional, State, Federal);
- ★ Participation in MCPSA Business Partnerships offering discounted purchasing rates
- ★ Discounted rates on Consulting Services including Federal Programs and MO Learning Standards

Get on appropriate list-serves. Once you have researched models that align with your goals, and other charter-support organizations, be sure to get on those organizations' list-serves. The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools offers several list-serves that might be of interest.

RESOURCES

Many local and national charter school organizations provide information, tools and other resources that can help you throughout the charter school development process. When using resources that are not directly focused on Missouri, be mindful of policy differences in other states and seek further assistance when in doubt.

Missouri Charter Public School Association MCPSA is the statewide association and collective voice of charter schools in Missouri. MCPSA works to strengthen charter schools and the communities that they serve through advocacy, education and direct services to schools. The MCPSA website includes current information on Missouri charter school policy and law, a complete list of Missouri charter schools, and a “Charter Start” section featuring Missouri-specific tools and resources for charter school developers. As noted above, the MCPSA CharterStart Membership supports charter school developers and sponsors in Missouri. mocharterschools.org

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. ed.gov/programs/charter

National Alliance for Public Charter Schools The Alliance is a national policy organization committed to advancing the charter school movement. The group also provides assistance to state charter school associations. The website includes an excellent informational dashboard, links to publications, and background information on charter school issues, including many excellent resources created by CFNN and NAPCS. publiccharters.org

20. RESEARCH AND RESOURCES TO GET YOU STARTED

National Association of Charter School Authorizers NACSA supports high-quality charter school authorizing in districts across the country. This site includes publications, resources and other information on charter school authorizing. qualitycharters.org

Charter School Resource Center Initially created by the U.S. Department of Education, and now operated by several nonprofit advocates, this website provides a wealth of information and resources for charter school developers, operators, technical-assistance providers and the general public, including a comprehensive section on starting and running a charter school. charterschoolcenter.org

National Charter School Clearinghouse NCSC provides up-to-date information and links to charter school resources, funding opportunities, research and news. ncsc.info

National Charter School Research Project An initiative of the Center on Reinventing Public Education at the University of Washington, the NCSRPP “aims to bring rigor, evidence and balance to the national charter school debate.” The site includes a research library, as well as links to achievement studies, state data and NCSRPP publications. ncsrp.org

Keep in mind that there are many additional resources on charter schools and education. As you conduct your research and develop your school design, consider other resources that may help you, such as local and national universities, think tanks, and education organizations.

2D. UNDERSTANDING THE LAW AND AUTHORIZATION PROCESS

Charter school law is a product of state, not federal, lawmaking. The provisions of the Missouri Charter Schools Law creates a set of parameters that will affect your charter school application as well as aspects of how your school operates. You will need to read and become familiar with the law in its entirety as you progress through the charter school development process. You will note the State's model charter school application cites the pieces of law you must reference.

In Missouri the General Assembly holds a Legislative Session annually. This means there may be changes to the Missouri Charter Schools Law and/or public education laws. Be sure to pay attention to the Missouri Charter Public Schools Association website for legal updates (mocharterschools.org).

We recommend you thoroughly review the law, which can be found at: moga.mo.gov/mostatutes/ChaptersIndex/chaptIndex160.html

Pay close attention to the following statutes:

- 160.400. Charter schools, defined, St. Louis City and Kansas City school districts--sponsors--use of public school buildings--organization of charter schools--affiliations with college or university--criminal background check required.
- 160.403. Sponsoring a charter school, annual application and approval, contents of application, approval requirements.
- 160.405. Proposed charter, how submitted, requirements, submission to state board, powers and duties--approval, revocation, termination--definitions--lease of public school facilities, when--unlawful reprisal, defined, prohibited.
- 160.410. Admission, preferences for admission permitted, when--study of performance to be commissioned by department, costs, contents, results to be made public--move out of school district, effect of.
- 160.415. Distribution of state school aid for charter schools--powers and duties of governing body of charter schools.

- 160.417. Financial stress, review of report information by charter school sponsor, when--criteria for financial stress.
- 160.420. Employment provisions--school district personnel may accept charter school position and remain district employees, effect--noncertificated instructional personnel, employment, supervision.
- 160.425. Missouri charter public school commission created, members, duties--funding.

RESOURCES

Missouri Charter School Law:

moga.mo.gov/mostatutes/ChaptersIndex/chaptIndex160.html

3A. THE CORE DESIGN TEAM

Charter school development cannot be completed by an individual working alone. The process is complex, time-consuming and challenging. It requires collaboration. The core design team drives the charter school development process. A small group of thoughtful, committed citizens, the core design team, creates a shared educational dream and works together to plan for the charter school and complete the charter school application process.

Starting a charter school in Missouri entails three challenges: operating (1) a start-up organization, (2) a 501(c)3 non-profit corporation, and (3) a public school that is strictly accountable to its sponsor, the state and the public at large. Developing a strong proposal for a charter school requires a team with diverse skills and experience.

Even more important, your team (including core design team, founding board and identified school leaders) will play a key role in your success in gaining sponsorship and launching the school that you envision. As they evaluate your charter proposal, sponsors will place considerable weight on your team's credibility, capacity and track record (academic and operational) to operate an effective school. So too will community members, parents, investors, and other stakeholders.

THE CORE DESIGN TEAM'S JOB

This guidebook is written with the core design team in mind. We've assumed that your design team is truly a team, working together to accomplish the many tasks that the application process requires. The main jobs of the core design team are to:

- ★ Develop the vision and mission of the charter school.
- ★ Enlist community support and build lasting partnerships with community members.
- ★ Design the charter school plan, including the educational program, governance and management structure, and financial and facilities plans.
- ★ Develop a productive relationship with the potential sponsor.
- ★ Write the charter application and present the school model in interviews with the potential sponsor and in public hearings during the sponsorship process.
- ★ Once approved, transfer governance to a non-profit board of directors and transfer management to the school's staff.

The tasks (and related capabilities) of the design team will change over time. Initially, design team members will need to focus on networking to identify resources and supporters to help them complete the charter school design. They must be consensus builders who can develop a shared vision and mission for a new charter school. As they develop the major design areas of the charter school proposal, they will need to exercise (or enlist) skill and knowledge in educational program design, financial management, board development, facilities planning, and other areas. Throughout the process, team members should engage in community relations work, building relationships with community members, organizations, businesses, and the local political establishment, addressing opposition, and presenting the concept of their school to the media and the general public.

HOW DOES THE CORE DESIGN TEAM DIFFER FROM A FOUNDING BOARD?

Core design teams often function like a founding board—defining the mission and goals of the organization, making key decisions about the school model, recruiting a school leader (if that person isn't already part of the group), raising funds, and serving as ambassadors for the school. Most founding groups build their team intentionally as a working board that will make the transition to become the governing board once the school opened. Others include a mix of founding board members, the founding school leader, and others who may become staff of the school. Finally, many teams include members who are supporting the design process but who will have no formal role in the school (staff or board) following authorization.

If the core design team does not begin as a founding board, it is a key responsibility of this group to develop the founding board. We recommend that the board begin meeting formally prior to authorization, even if these meetings occur less frequently than they will post-authorization.

WHO SHOULD BE ON THE CORE DESIGN TEAM?

Many groups begin with one or two people who together develop the initial concepts of mission and vision, then recruit additional team members. Most core design teams will be small—four to six individuals is probably an ideal number. However, many core design teams will bring on additional individuals to help with specific tasks or to serve on specific committees. In these instances, by the end of the charter school design process, the number of individuals contributing may be quite large, even as a core group drives the process and makes key decisions.

It is essential that core design team members share a strong belief in, and commitment to, the school's mission and vision.

3A. THE CORE DESIGN TEAM

In addition to this non-negotiable requirement, other key attributes to look for include:

- ★ “Worker Bee” orientation: dependability and commitment to completing work
- ★ Adequate time to commit to the work
- ★ An entrepreneurial spirit
- ★ Creativity and a propensity for innovation
- ★ Leadership and project management skills
- ★ An ability to network effectively and to engage other people and resources in your efforts
- ★ Strong connections in the target community
- ★ Success teaching/working with the target student population
- ★ Skills and knowledge in a variety of areas, spanning education, leadership, organizational development, business and operations, community relations, and communications

The Core Design Team Skills Inventory is designed to help you assess the skills within your group and to identify any gaps. Don't worry too much about checking off every box in the skills inventory. It's important to create a relatively small, committed group who work well together and whose members complement each others' backgrounds and work-styles. As a rule, the larger the group, the more diffuse the vision becomes, the more time it takes to make decisions, and the more likely it is the group will spend time negotiating and endlessly discussing every idea.

That said, we believe it is essential to have experienced educators on the team—and equally important to ensure that these educators share the team's vision and are able to think outside the box. We also strongly recommend that if team doesn't include members with strong connections to the school's target community, they redouble their efforts to build relationships in the community and/or early in the process bring on one or more members from the community. This action will help to ensure that you are creating a school that addresses authentic community needs and interests, and strengthens your team's credibility.



TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

Vetting Potential Team Members

Hawthorn Leadership School for Girls founder, Mary Stillman, networked extensively to identify the founding team for her school. A key part of the recruitment process was one-on-one meetings (often over coffee) in which she would make a point of asking questions and listening to prospective team members describe themselves, their experiences in the community, on school visits, in their volunteer work, why they are interested in supporting a new charter school, etc. Many people may say they agree with a mission statement on paper, but through these meetings, she could better assess whether they truly shared her vision and beliefs.

Other charter leaders recommend asking prospective design team or board members to join a committee or participate in a smaller volunteer project, like providing support on a fundraiser. You can then assess their work ethic, dependability, interpersonal skills and commitment to the mission to determine if they would truly be a good fit.

CORE DESIGN TEAM SKILLS INVENTORY: TABLE 1

Insert the name of your current core design team members in the columns, and check (or “X”) each skill the person possesses in the rows below. Add areas of expertise in the rows as fits your situation. Where do you need more assistance? List those in [Table 2](#) (“Gaps & Areas for Recruitment”). Track potential volunteers (and current volunteers’ contact info) in [Table 3](#). A sample is completed in italics.

Core Design Team Members or Prospects			
Include Name, Affiliation and Job Title/Role			
Name:	<i>Jane Doe</i>		
Affiliation:	<i>YMCA</i>		
Job Title:	<i>Assistant Controller</i>		
Status:	<i>Design Team</i>		

3A. THE CORE DESIGN TEAM

Skills			
Education			
Teaching Experience			
School Leadership			
Standards and Assessment			
Curriculum Development			
Instructional Practices			
Special Education			
English Language Learners			
Professional Development			
Teacher Recruitment and Induction			
Community Relations and Communications			
Public Relations, Community Relations	X		
Media and Communications, Social Media, Design			
Proposal Writing and Editing			
Parent and Family Engagement, Parent Relations			
Community Organizing			

3A. THE CORE DESIGN TEAM

Skills			
Knowledge of School District			
Political knowledge and skill			
Operations and Organizational Leadership			
Leadership and Management			
Organizational Development			
Startup experience			
Board Governance			
Human Resources, Staff Recruitment			
Finance	X		
Accounting	X		
Fundraising, Grant Writing			
Law (preferably education or civil rights law)			
Facilities, Real Estate, Architecture, Construction			
Other Areas:			

Adapted from the Northwest Regional Education Laboratory's "Charter Starters" Leadership Training Workbook: Start-Up Logistics.

CORE DESIGN TEAM SKILLS INVENTORY: TABLE 2

Use the chart below to prioritize needed skills, identify prospects for recruitment, and track Outreach to prospects.

Gaps / Skill Areas for Recruitment					
Priority Level	Skill	Prospects/ Leads	Outreach Lead	Outreach Plan	Status
High Priority					
Medium Priority					
Low Priority					

CORE DESIGN TEAM SKILLS INVENTORY: TABLE 3

Volunteer Tracker			
Name	Contact Info	Primary Skills	Potential Role: Design Team, Board Advisor, Other
	Potential Committee Assignment	Status	Notes

CORE DESIGN TEAM SKILLS INVENTORY

When a group of passionate teachers began planning to start a charter school, they realized they possessed a wealth of knowledge related to curriculum and instruction. However, they lacked expertise in areas such as law and budgeting.

To address these gaps, the core design group organized a community meeting at a local library to recruit volunteers with the needed expertise. The team circulated a flyer to their personal and professional networks that included a brief description of their charter school concept and the areas of expertise needed. At the meeting, after a brief presentation on the charter school and development process, small groups formed based on areas of need, and the core design team was successful in attracting some very helpful volunteers.

Another school developed an advisory council of ‘movers and shakers’ in the community—not a board of directors, but a group of willing individuals from the community who met regularly to provide advice on the development of the charter proposal (and continued to meet after the school was established to provide advice on the ongoing development of the school).

Charter leaders have found that there are advantages in creating formal structures, and even in giving volunteers formal-sounding titles, like “Advisor,” to help them feel invested in the work and a part of the team.

You probably won’t be able to check off every box in the expertise chart for core design team members, so you will likely ask for help from the local business community, colleges/universities, parents, and other community members at times during the application process. Don’t feel like you need to have a group that is entirely self-sufficient. There may be times when you will consider hiring an expert to supplement the skills of your team as you are developing and running your charter school. Here are a few suggested avenues for finding the right team members:

- ★ **Network, network, network!** We can't emphasize enough the value of tapping into and expanding your network—to recruit design team or board members, to identify advisors or consultants who can provide additional help, and to build your network of supporters more generally. This can include:
 - Old-fashioned one-on-one meetings
 - Talking up the school in your everyday interactions
 - Email introductions
 - Social media tools like LinkedIn or Facebook
 - Asking friends, colleagues, acquaintances and every new contact, “Who else should I talk to?”
- ★ **Partner with established organizations/groups.** Establish relationships and/or partnerships with resources that already exist in your community (e.g., schools, colleges and universities, businesses and volunteer organizations). Additionally, many groups are able to access pro bono help in some areas, for example, designing logos and marketing materials or providing legal advice on the 501(c)3 application. Management consulting firms have also provided valuable support to design teams. Finally, sometimes design teams receive in-kind support such as office space to use while planning the school.
- ★ **Recruit university and college students as volunteers or student interns.** Students learning how to be accountants or public relations executives, for example, can be a great resource. Several teams have tapped into graduate school volunteers (often in already-organized groups seeking a great project). Think business school, public policy, urban planning... not just education departments.
- ★ **Access leads through professional associations and resource centers.** Directories of member organizations and conference agendas full of expert presenters can be great resources for identifying consultants and other service providers in your areas of need. Many directories and conference agendas can be found online.

The bottom line is that, whether specifically recruiting volunteers, identifying paid professionals to support your work or talking with community members and potential parents, core design team members are ambassadors for the charter school you are creating. Talking up the school and sharing the work you are doing can lead to new connections and opportunities that you haven't imagined.



TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

It Takes a Village

City Garden Montessori Charter School developed partnerships with multiple community organizations, including social service organizations that now provide counseling services to students and their families.

WORKING TOGETHER

Like any group that comes together to accomplish a task, your core design team will have to learn to work as a team to ensure the work is accomplished. Be prepared to answer the following questions, either formally at the start of your initiative, or early in the process of working together.

Define decision-making processes and working norms. Without getting overwhelmed by process, create a structure for making decisions that includes who is ultimately responsible for key decisions, and a system for conflict resolution and consensus. Be sure everyone agrees to the structure before big questions arise.

In addition, everyone should be on the same page when it comes to how often the group will meet, whether the procedures are informal or formal, how best to communicate with other members of the group, etc. We recommend that groups explicitly discuss and agree to working norms early in the design process and revisit these as needed throughout.

Make meetings effective. In particular, we recommend agreeing on effective meeting practices, such as having clear objectives, agendas and follow-up steps for each meeting, and thinking through which meetings are necessary for which people. It's easy for team members to burn out if they are attending meetings where work isn't moving forward. But, team members can also become disengaged if they never meet together or don't have the opportunity to see how the work is coming together overall.

Structure the group for effective project management. We strongly recommend identifying a project manager within your team (or possibly a very small executive committee) who has an eye on the big picture and keeps the development process moving. This person tracks and holds the group accountable to key work streams, activities or tasks, owners and deadlines.

We also recommend identifying roles and specific responsibilities for all team members. In many cases, teams break the work into committees and appoint a committee lead (who is responsible for the committee's work) and committee members. Other teams just identify owners for specific tasks. Possible design team committees include:

- ★ Education Program
- ★ Finance and Operations
- ★ Facilities Search
- ★ Community Outreach
- ★ Marketing
- ★ Fundraising
- ★ Board Governance

Manage time wisely. The design process is time-intensive. Groups that have the luxury of a team member who can devote significant time to the process have found it to be extremely helpful. In some instances, team leaders leave employment to devote themselves full-time to planning the school.

Other teams have launched charters while all or most founders work full time. If this is the case for your team, know upfront that effective time management will be essential—and problem-solve upfront about how and when you'll complete work and how to address the competing demands on your time.

Anticipate challenges and obstacles. A well-prepared core design group will prevent problems before they arise, and limit the impact of potentially destructive situations when they do occur. Many of the tips above relate to this idea—like setting working norms and problem-solving in advance for time management challenges. Effective project management can also help the group identify design areas that will likely be challenging or time consuming for the group—such as finding an appropriate facility—so that they can identify strategies and resources upfront to address these challenges.

It's equally important for school designers to anticipate that additional challenges will emerge during the process and prepare themselves personally to weather them, adapt and adjust course as needed. Charter design never proceeds in a tidy, straight line.



TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

Taking Advice

When the school leadership at DeLaSalle Middle School (an independent Catholic school) formed a core design team to create what became LaSalle Middle School (a charter public school), they reached out to many others for advice—founders of several other charter schools, people from colleges of education and colleagues from the institutions where they were working, who in turn were able to suggest lawyers and businesspeople for guidance.

While all those consultants were crucial to learning how to create a school, they also brought a lot of different points of view. “Be prepared to receive conflicting advice and to make tough decisions about what advice to take,” says Melissa Brickey, one of LaSalle’s founders. “Always weigh advice against the mission.”

Charter school applicants are hoping to create a public school. As such, the core design group needs to operate in the same way the law requires of the charter holder. Members of the applicant group should recognize and avoid potential conflicts of interest. Lawyers who help found the school, for example, should not become its counsel without an open bidding process. Teachers who found the school should not automatically become employees. Parents should know that their child has no special status; he or she must enter the lottery like any other applicant.

CREATE A WORK PLAN

To keep on top of all the research and decisions that need to be made, we suggest developing a work plan that includes the major tasks of school design. This guide's [Roadmap](#) for Charter School Development in [Section 1C](#), "Overview of the Design Process," can serve as a guideline, but adapt it to fit the unique factors of your situation. A well-thought out project plan includes tasks within the major areas, as well as individuals responsible for each task. Talk with your team about the process you will use to make adjustments, if needed, once work is underway.

To establish your timeline, begin by setting a goal for when you plan to open the school. Then, plan backward from that start date. Be sure to take into account the actual time that individuals on the core design team can devote to charter school development, including whether a project manager can devote significant time to the enterprise.

Goal	Task	Person(s) Responsible	Start Date	End Date
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TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Various project management tools are available, including Excel and Google Drive templates, and tools like Basecamp and Trello. Find or develop one that works well for your team, and ensure that any tool you use incorporates these Non-Negotiables of Project Management:

- ★ Category of Work/Work stream
- ★ Task
- ★ Due Date
- ★ Owner

If you are seeking a start that is less than 18 months away, we strongly encourage you to carefully evaluate your plan. While it may be possible to gain community and sponsor support, plan a school, secure a facility, set up the operations, hire staff and complete all the other tasks of charter school design in a shorter amount of time, experts advise charter school developers to take more time in order to ensure that they are developing a sound school plan and fully supporting its implementation. It may make more sense to shoot for the following school year, or at least include the possibility that you will need to adjust your plans once they are underway to allow more time. Opening a school in less than 18 months will likely require additional resources, including individuals' time and additional money. Potential costs may include hiring consultants and writers to assist in the completion of the charter proposal as well as increased costs for operational needs, like a fast-tracked facility search and renovation process.

EDUCATIONAL SERVICES PROVIDERS AND SCHOOL MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATIONS

In recent years, many local and national groups have launched to offer school management services to charter schools. These groups include education management organizations (EMOs) and charter management organizations. The services that these groups provide vary. Some undertake the full management of the school, including the educational program and back-office management, others provide just the educational program and some allow the school to choose among a range of services.

Partnering with an EMO or a CMO is a big decision, especially if you will use this organization to run the education program of the school, which is central to the school's mission. Here are some things to keep in mind before making a decision to work with an outside group:

- ★ Firmly establish the school's mission before shopping for service providers. If the core design group doesn't clearly understand what you're looking for before venturing into the education marketplace, you might make an "impulse" choice you will regret. Knowing what the school is created to accomplish and the big picture of how it will be done means that the core design group can focus on finding the right match.
- ★ Carefully consider the potential benefits, challenges and tradeoffs involved in hiring an educational service provider. Potential benefits include gaining access to educational, human, and financial resources, avoiding the need to "reinvent the wheel," and boosting the school's credibility by partnering with an established organization. Potential challenges or tradeoffs include losing some flexibility and day-to-day control, increased financial costs, and blurred or weak accountability if the relationship is poorly structured.

- ★ Shop around. Even if you think a specific group is a great match, it's worth learning about other organizations—even if it just ends up helping your team learn more about how to create a strong relationship with the service provider you first heard about. Also, conduct due diligence by researching any potential providers to understand their current schools' performance.
- ★ Take your time. Don't enter into contracts quickly or lightly. It is essential to think through and clearly negotiate the roles and responsibilities of each party in order to avoid problems later and ensure the success of the school.

You may wish to consider this choice from the beginning, and research potential EMO or CMO matches. Note that while some EMOs and CMOs are eager to move into new locations, others operate primarily in certain regions or in major cities.

RESOURCES

“Charting a Clear Course: A Resource Guide for Building Successful Partnerships between Charter Schools and School Management Organizations” by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) is a resource guide addressing the key issues a charter school board (or core design team) should consider in finding and contracting with a school management organization
publiccharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/file_Charting_a_Clear_Course_2005_final_20110402T222339.pdf

3B. LEGAL STATUS

Charter schools in Missouri must be organized as nonprofit corporations authorized by the state of Missouri. During the design phase, a new charter can become a nonprofit by filing Articles of Incorporation with the Missouri 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. Charter schools may also be exempt from sales and property 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 is in your best interest to establish a new nonprofit and independent board that is associated with the existing group but is specifically created to operate the charter school. See [Section 4F, “Governance,”](#) for more information.

Below we outline the basic steps for incorporating in Missouri and applying for tax-exempt status. As the title of this section suggests, incorporation and gaining tax-exempt status are legal matters, and we strongly recommend that you consult with an attorney throughout the process.

ARTICLES OF INCORPORATION

Establishing a Missouri not-for-profit corporation is a relatively quick and inexpensive process. It usually takes less than three weeks, and as of October 2017, the filing fee is \$25.

501(c)3

In contrast to the Articles of Incorporation, the time it takes to apply for and receive 501(c)3 tax exempt status is unpredictable—estimates range from six months to a year or more, and it costs \$850. To apply for 501(c)3 status, you will need to fulfill several requirements, including:

- ★ Develop and receive approved Articles of Incorporation
- ★ Developing board bylaws
- ★ Creating income and expense projections for your school

Some charter developers apply for tax-exempt status early in the development process in order to get things moving. Others wait until later in the process or even until after their charter is approved to apply. The decision will depend on your individual circumstances. Again, consulting with an attorney may be the best way to decide what makes sense for your core design team. Note that some sponsors require you to have, or have applied for, 501(c)3 status before a charter will be granted.

Having non-profit status means you will need to meet certain government requirements, including

- ★ Filing your approved Articles of Incorporation with the Recorder of Deeds in your county
- ★ Registering with the Office of the Missouri Attorney General
- ★ Filing an Annual Report with the Missouri Secretary of State
- ★ Filing IRS form 990 annually with the IRS
- ★ Filing form IL990-AG annually with the Missouri Attorney General

If you wish to be exempt from Missouri sales tax, you must apply separately to the Missouri Department of Revenue.

RAISING FUNDS AS A 501(C)3

Charter school developers can raise funds during the charter school development process, but there are specific rules and regulations that govern soliciting and accepting charitable donations. Contact the Missouri Attorney General's Office or an attorney to learn the specifics.

The value of having tax-exempt status is two-fold: you don't need to pay income taxes on the funds you receive (with certain exceptions), and your donors may deduct their gifts as charitable contributions on their own income tax forms. Once you have received 501(c)3 status, donations made to your organizations after the date of application are retroactively deductible but, of course, your donors may not want to take the chance you will not be approved.

In order to accept tax-deductible donations before you receive your own tax-exempt status, you may wish to explore "fiscal sponsorship." Fiscal sponsorship is a relationship in which another nonprofit organization that has 501(c)3 status serves as a recipient of grant dollars and then redistributes them to the organization without tax-exempt status. Sometimes, fiscal sponsors keep a small percentage of all grants they receive for another organization as a fee. Although this is not an uncommon way for a new organization to operate at the start, it is a good idea to negotiate a contract with your fiscal sponsor up-front for clarity.

RESOURCES

The Missouri Secretary of State is the website for filing articles of incorporation and beginning the process of establishing a 501(c)3. s1.sos.mo.gov/business/corporations/forms.asp#nonprof

The Internal Revenue Service resources for 501(c)(3) status: irs.gov/charities-non-profits/application-for-recognition-of-exemption

3C. CULTIVATING YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH A SPONSOR

In Missouri, a charter school must seek sponsorship from an approved sponsor before seeking approval and authorization from DESE.

SPONSORS IN MISSOURI

The following institutions are approved charter school sponsors, as of December 2017.

- ★ Kansas City Public Schools
- ★ Lindenwood University
- ★ Missouri Charter Public School Commission
- ★ Saint Louis Public Schools
- ★ Saint Louis University
- ★ Southeast Missouri State University
- ★ The University of Central Missouri
- ★ The University of Missouri, Columbia
- ★ The University of Missouri, Kansas City
- ★ The University of Missouri, St. Louis
- ★ Washington University in St. Louis

THE ROLE OF THE SPONSOR

Sponsors have several roles outlined by the State Board of Education and Missouri Charter Law, referred to as Standards for Charter School Sponsorship. The primary role of the sponsor is to provide accountability to the charter school in several areas. Each standard refers to an area of accountability and monetarization.

Standard 1 – Sponsor Commitment and Capacity

The sponsor must have the capacity to successfully monitor a charter school and ensure its success, and commit the necessary human and financial resources necessary to conduct its sponsoring duties effectively and efficiently.

Standard 2 – Application Process and Decision Making

A quality Sponsor implements a thorough application process that includes clear application and guidance; follows fair, transparent procedures and rigorous criteria; and grants only those charter applications that demonstrate a strong capacity to establish and operate a quality charter school.

Standard 3 – Board Support

The Sponsor will implement steps to offer ongoing support, including but not limited to: training, organization, ethical conduct, knowledge, commitment, compliance, leadership oversight, contract management, accountability, transparency, and the interpretation of the Missouri public charter school statutes/rules for charter school board(s).

Standard 4 – Academic Performance

The Sponsor will take steps to closely monitor state performance standards defined by DESE and included in the sponsor/charter contract. The sponsor will ensure that performance contracts are aligned to academic standards, establish clear procedures and consequences for failure to meet said requirements and outcomes, and not approve additional sites or grade level expansion for a charter school identified as persistently low achieving (according to its APR).

3C. CULTIVATING YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH A SPONSOR

Standard 5 – Fiscal Management

The sponsor will closely monitor the charter school's performance management and financial actions that support a solvent fiscal status.

Standard 6 – Reporting

A sponsor monitors all reports/data required by Missouri and federal law, and ensures that they are completed and submitted in a timely manner for DESE and/or the legislature.

Standard 7 – Oversight and Education

The sponsor conducts oversight and evaluates performance for both federal and state compliance, including non-discrimination as required by federal and state laws, and compliance with all statutes and guidelines, including but not limited to: special education; all title programs; food service; services for foster, homeless, migrant, and English language learner students, etc.

Standard 8 – Intervention, Renewal, Revocation, and Closure Decision-making

The Sponsor will implement steps to closely monitor transparent and rigorous processes that use comprehensive academic, financial, and operational management data to make decisions about intervention, renewal, revocation, and closure.

Cultivating a relationship with a sponsor When considering a potential sponsor, it is important to think through each possible organization and which would be the best match. Submitting an application to multiple sponsors at the same time is known as 'sponsor shopping' and a practice that should be avoided. Meeting with potential sponsors, sharing information about your school model and learning about their reasons for sponsorship can be very helpful. These meetings will also allow you to learn more about their application submission process. It is vital to keep in mind that the role of the sponsor is to monitor and provide oversight. It is NOT the role of the sponsor to provide funding, resources or to make school governance decisions.

3D. ENGAGING WITH THE COMMUNITY

ENGAGING WITH THE COMMUNITY

Because a charter school serves the public and thrives by attracting students, you will need to work closely with members of the community at many times during the charter school design process. You need a thoughtful and truthful answer to the question: “What will your school do to support the community?”

Choosing, understanding and becoming part of the community where your school hopefully will be located is not only essential to being approved for a charter but also to becoming successful once you open your doors. Critics of charter schools talk about the charter operators who just “parachute” into their community out of the blue. This is a model that does not bode well for success.

You will need to show authentic evidence of community support as a component of a charter school application in Missouri to help your sponsor see the value of your school. And community engagement should continue to be part of your operating procedures once the school is opened.

It’s important not only to elicit support, but to learn about community members’ needs and available resources. The suggestions in this section can be used throughout the charter application process. However, use your judgment about which strategies you should employ during the different phases of community engagement. Some strategies may be too time-consuming, reveal too much about your plans too soon, or otherwise not match the kind of community outreach that is needed earlier or later in the design process.

WHY WORK WITH THE COMMUNITY

Charter schools are public schools, and as a public entity, you have a responsibility to listen to and engage with the community your school will serve. In addition, building the support of parents, community organizations, local government and the local school district for your school’s vision and design is critical for a successful charter school. Bringing together many different stakeholders and agendas requires substantial time and effort, however, these efforts will pay off in the end.

Charters have a more tenuous existence than traditional district schools and it is imperative that charter schools have a constituency willing to fight for them. An involved and supportive community will:

- ★ Help sway a sponsor to approve your proposal
- ★ Help provide full enrollment
- ★ Enhance the school's viability in the eyes of potential funders
- ★ Minimize opposition and negative press coverage
- ★ Offer support during difficult times
- ★ Link the school to a network of resources (e.g., after-school programs and internships)

Note, though, that universal community support is neither necessary, nor likely. Make the best case possible for everyone's support, but as long as you have a solid base of supporters, don't be distracted by the nay-sayers.

WORKING WITH AN ESTABLISHED COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

Some charter schools are started as an initiative of an established community-based organization (CBO). If this is the case with your core design team, you already have a leg up on the process of engaging the community since your organization has visibility and reputation in the neighborhood. Even so, don't ignore the advice in this section. Operating a school is a new venture for your group, and you may learn things you didn't realize about what the community thinks and needs from a new school.

If your design team does not originate from an established CBO, you still may want to work with one as a supporter of the school you're envisioning. Having a CBO as a supporter provides instant credibility and recognition. This will help when the development team needs to build a board, seek allies and resources and gather political and community influence.

COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS

Parents Each school will have a community of parents with distinctive economic, demographic, and cultural characteristics. Within that community, diverse school experiences and personalities of parents will affect their attitudes toward your school. Be careful about making assumptions about parents. For example, it may be ineffective to communicate through email or websites with parents in a low-income community, but don't assume that population does not have access.

Learning from and about the parents in the community will reduce the risk of inappropriate planning for parent involvement. Explore existing community information using sources such as the school district, census data and talking with local residents. As parents become involved in initial planning activities, gather more detailed information. Methods for gathering information can be traditional (i.e., surveys, focus groups, telephone surveys) or more informal and innovative (i.e., social media, activities like icebreakers integrated into networking and social activities). *Remember, parents are the ones who will ultimately decide to send their children to your school. Given their central role in the success of your school, you should learn as much as you can about their needs and interests.*

Community Leaders Community outreach is more than just engaging local residents. Develop a map of the leaders and education stakeholders in your community (see sample template on [page 66](#)). Think of all the parties a charter school may affect and who might have an interest in its successful, or unsuccessful, development. Many charters, for example, have benefited tremendously from the support of local religious leaders who can turn out additional supporters and provide links to valuable resources. Local leaders can be key supporters and can provide or connect you to resources for the development process and beyond.

3D. ENGAGING WITH THE COMMUNITY

At a minimum, it's politically smart to give these individuals a courtesy call to introduce yourself and your ideas and solicit their input, especially if you plan to locate your school nearby or within the areas they serve. Be careful when soliciting leaders' input not to make promises you can't keep.

As you use the community map below, think broadly as you consider whom to include. Are there individuals who don't fit neatly into the listed categories who might be vital to charter school development, a local real estate company, for example? Are there individuals or groups who might oppose the charter school? It's important to identify the terrain in order to develop the best strategies for engagement.

COMMUNITY MAPPING

Community Mapping—Community Leadership and Potential Supporters				
Categories	Names of Community Leaders and Education Stakeholders	Relevant Background Info and Relationships	Views on Education Including Charter Schools. Note any Relevant Voting	Strategy and Tactics to Engage
Education Leaders				
<i>Official</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual school board members • District and school admin • Teachers union • School-based parent/teacher groups • Elected gov. officials 				
<i>Unofficial</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents and families • Individual teachers/educators • Community-based organizations • Neighborhood groups • Religious leaders • Donors/funders • Business and civic leaders 				
Other Community Leaders				

STRATEGY FOR COMMUNITY OUTREACH

It's important to prioritize your community engagement goals and targets—that is, who you want to reach—and to consider strategically both how and when you will engage with the community. You may decide to meet with some individuals or groups earlier than others. You may want to demonstrate the support of one group when you approach another. It may make sense to have some of your supporters broach the general subject of charters with district leaders in order to familiarize them with the concept before talking about plans for your charter in particular. To get beyond the initial obvious meetings, ask the people you've contacted for names of others with whom you should talk. Revise your map to conform to the terrain you actually encounter.

Once you have determined the community leaders, potential supporters and potential opponents, develop a strategy for engaging them and gaining their support. A basic community organizing strategy does not have to be a large undertaking. However, it should at least indicate the following:

- ★ Theme and contents of a consistent message—Messages will show the benefits of the school to the person or organization. You can emphasize different aspects of your message, depending on your audience, but be consistent on the basics.
- ★ Organizational capacities—Know your available budget, time and resources. Prioritize to be sure the most important work gets done, including ranking the people and organizations on which you will focus.
- ★ Measurable objectives—Think about the different targets you have and how you can measure and communicate your success. For example, “500 parents will sign letters of intent to enroll their children in the charter school,” or “Three prominent business leaders will support the charter school through contribution of funds and urging sponsors of DESE to support the application.”



TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

Media Matters

Working with the press is another way to get the word out about your plans for a new school. The content and timing of your outreach to reporters depends on your work's current stage, your relationship with the school district and local media options. You don't want influential people polarized by an unexpected public revelation.

If you think that having your story in the paper or on the news is appropriate, remember to be clear on what message you want to convey and have your facts straight. It's okay to not know yet where your facility will be, for example, but you don't want to say that you have something lined up when it's not finalized. Establish your talking points before any interview, and do not let a reporter's questions lead you into a conversation you're not ready to have publicly. Be careful with your words, and pivot any unwanted questions to a previously identified talking point about your school. Remember that all media is focused on "sound bites," so you have very limited time in a completed TV or print story to convey your message. Focus on the essential info about your school development and why it's good news for the community.

Once your plans to open a school are "out," write and share press releases about the development of your school. Run advertisements for community meetings and later for enrollment in the school. Develop relationships early and maintain contact with the local media because it may lead to editorial endorsements down the road, and additional news stories during enrollment, etc.

RESOURCES

Missouri Public Charter School Association's Telling Your Charter School Story Guide will be helpful as you think through your school's distinct message, and make plans for how to communicate it effectively. mocharterschools.org/pdf/HowToTellYourCharterSchoolStory.pdf

TACTICS

A variety of tactics can be used to solicit community input for your charter school. Your strategy should dictate which tactics you use, in what order and to what extent. You might decide, for example, that public distribution of leaflets or petitioning is not a good use of time and energy before taking other steps to engage high-priority individuals. Basic recommended tactics include:

- ★ Host community meetings and/or conferences—You may want to consider some meetings open to the public and others that are targeted at specific groups, such as parents in the local schools, a local religious congregation or members of the Chamber of Commerce. Local libraries are neutral and free locations to host meetings.
- ★ Attend community gatherings—Visit places community members frequent (e.g., barber shops and community centers) and mention your charter school plan. Ask for input and feedback.
- ★ Conduct a survey—(by going door-to-door or online) of community members' attitudes about local schools, educational needs and responses to your school idea.
- ★ Schedule appointments with targeted individuals—One-on-one meetings or meetings among a few members of the core design group and specific individuals will allow you to go into greater depth.
- ★ Piggyback at other meetings—If you can get your presentation on the agenda at community meetings and relevant public forums, it saves you the time and effort to organize an event. On the other hand, your presentation time likely will be more limited.
- ★ Have a key supporter convene other potential allies—If the key champion is well-known or well-connected, this can be an excellent way to build support for your charter school.

WHAT TO INCLUDE IN COMMUNITY INTERACTION

As you prepare for a community meeting, think carefully about what you would like to get out of it. Community meetings take time and effort to plan, and can be an opportunity for big strides forward for the plan of the school. They can also fall into chaos or move your school planning off-track. Going to a meeting only “to hear what people have to say” is unwise. Consider the following as you plan your meeting:

- ★ First and foremost, remember that the school cannot be all things to all people. Be careful not to promise more than you can deliver to community members.
- ★ Be clear within your team about how much you are willing to change your school plans based on community input. Distinguish between essentials or principles of your plan and details of implementation. Identify the non-negotiable items in your plan and use that knowledge to help shape the meeting agenda you create.
- ★ Do not pursue or consider details of the school in initial meetings. First gather input as to general preferences. What do they think would make a school attractive to students and parents? Is there much support or enthusiasm for a smaller high school, for example? Would the community members prefer an environmental school, an arts infusion school or a different subject focus? Community members may not understand the benefits of some of these options, however, without some information about how they work and their successes in other locations. You shouldn't open up the discussion to a broad array of school themes if your team is very focused on, say, an environmental school.
- ★ Here again, we strongly encourage you to ask for parents and other community members' assessments of student and community needs. While your founding team may be excited about a specific school idea, the school cannot be successful unless there is community interest and recognition of need.

- ★ It will be important to identify who might oppose a charter school in your community and develop strategies that, while they may not gain their support, will at least neutralize their opposition. Take time early in your planning process to think carefully about any parties who may view your school or its program as threatening to their interests. If new opponents develop in a meeting, don't be discouraged. Knowing who may work against your proposal—and why—is important information and recognizing it is a benefit of having held the meeting.

INFORMATIONAL MATERIALS

Whenever you meet with someone, leave information about your new charter school. At the early stages, it might be just a sheet with information about the core design group's aims, what a charter school is, and your contact information. If you already have a mission and vision statement, include that as well. Once you've made more decisions, create a one-page concept paper or leaflet that includes:

- ★ Your school's mission
- ★ A summary of your educational approach
- ★ Other relevant characteristics of your school
- ★ A description of your team and its capacity to achieve your vision
- ★ Contact information so that supporters can reach you later

Be sure to emphasize the messages your team has deemed the most important and convincing about why your new school will be an asset to the community and a great new educational resource for local families.

Additionally, the earlier you create a professional website and social media channels for your school development efforts, the easier it will be to share information and gain a wider circle of influence.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Another reason to work with the community is to attract support to your school above and beyond good public opinion. Ask for targeted help when meeting with someone who is enthusiastic about the school and/or is capable of offering resources, such as:

- ★ Monetary donations, grant funding, and in-kind contributions of equipment and supplies
- ★ Professional guidance and technical assistance in areas like publicity, fundraising or computer systems
- ★ Assistance in locating a facility or a willingness to share space
- ★ Volunteer involvement on boards and planning teams
- ★ Collaborative programming by other educational providers
- ★ After-school and extra-curricular activities
- ★ Personal and social services to students and/or parents



TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

Citizens of the World Kansas City

During the planning years for Citizens of the World Kansas City (CWCKC), the core design team, and later the Executive Director, met with more than 50 community-based organizations, community members, potential parents, teachers, district staff, religious leaders and elected officials. Not only did CWCKC receive many letters of support for their proposal, groups and individuals they met with before the school opened eventually became important partners in the school's operations, providing resources, program partnerships, and eliciting student applicants from their various constituencies.

ONGOING SUPPORT

Your work isn't done after the community meeting is over. Be prepared to build community support after the meeting.

- ★ Collect contact information when you hold meetings or meet individuals.
- ★ Maintain an organized database of contacts so you can contact your supporters again.
- ★ Use a petition or polling sheet to make records of new contacts and people who say they will support your efforts.
- ★ Keep key targets and committed supporters and partners personally informed of your process and progress.
- ★ Keep stakeholders involved as you keep them informed; remember that if you have a way for supporters to give input and feedback, they're more likely to feel part of the process.

See [Section 4!](#) “Family and Community Partnerships,” for more information on sustaining relationships with parents and the community once the school has opened.

4A. OUTCOMES, MISSION, AND VISION

The outcomes you seek for students will inform all subsequent decisions in the charter school design process. Charter school founders often start with little more than good will and the determination to create a “good school.” The best charter schools, however, are far more intentional. They start by clearly articulating the outcomes they seek for students and then write a mission and vision derived from those outcomes.



STUDENT OUTCOMES

What will students graduating from your school know, be able to do and value? By clearly and specifically answering these questions early, you are setting yourself up to make all decisions based on what’s best for the students your school will serve. When articulating student outcomes, consider the following:

- ★ What will students know leaving your school?
- ★ Where will they be academically?
- ★ Where will they be in terms of social emotional skills, interpersonal skills, conflict management and self-perception?
- ★ How will they advocate for their needs?
- ★ How will they solve problems both inside and outside the classroom?
- ★ What will students be able to do?

4A. OUTCOMES, MISSION, AND VISION

- ★ How will they work with others?
- ★ What tools and resources will they be able to access?
- ★ How will they express themselves?
- ★ What will students value?
- ★ How will students engage with their community both locally and globally?
- ★ How will they respond to situations they perceive as unfair or unjust?
- ★ How will they face adversity?
- ★ Where will students be one year, five years, 10 years after graduating from your school?

MISSION

The school's mission is a clear, concise articulation of the school's central purpose. In essence, it should state the school's reason for existence and the difference it will strive to make in the community. The mission will become a guide for all other aspects of the charter school, serving as an anchor and a beacon for the energies of all who will contribute to your school.

Creating a Mission

A good mission statement answers the question "why?": why you exist. It is clear, substantive, focused and concise. It should demonstrate the collective deliberation and reflection that have conceived the school and will direct the school community over the long term. Potential students and their parents should be able to look at your mission statement and understand how your proposed school differs from the school down the street. A mission statement will answer:

- ★ Why do you exist?
- ★ Who will be served by the school?
- ★ What end result is sought?
- ★ What methods will be used to achieve those ends?

An inspiring mission statement will attract support and students, and provide the faculty, administration and board of directors with guidance that is useful when making decisions about the school. The extent to which your school has clearly achieved its mission will be a major factor in charter renewal.

VISION

The charter school's vision is the common idea of what the school strives to be. It defines the unique character of the school and can help you share your ideas with others and inspire them to believe in your school and join your efforts.

Creating a Vision

The vision and mission work together. The vision typically is the bedrock underlying principles on which all other decisions about the school are built. The following questions may help you to get to the heart of important issues and assumptions to create a vision for your school.

- ★ What will success look like?
- ★ What does it mean to be an “educated person” in the 21st century? This question will help you articulate the end goals for students in your school: What do they need to learn and master at your school in order to be successful after they leave?
- ★ How does learning best occur? Using ideas, experience and theories, consider what type of instructional practices, curriculum and instructional settings are most likely to enable the students achieve the school's standards and outcome goals.
- ★ What do you want your school to achieve? In the course of your charter, what do you expect your school to have accomplished? Will you prioritize establishing a strong faculty, a community institution and/or a lab for new educational thinking in the community?

Caution! As you develop your mission and vision statements, be careful to avoid buzzwords or jargon. These statements should be clear and understandable by everyone in the community, both educators and non-educators (parents, community members, etc).

4A. OUTCOMES, MISSION, AND VISION

A charter school's mission and vision together fulfill the following purposes:

- ★ Inform the public of your school's purpose and aims
- ★ Serve as the common motivator and focus for all staff and the entire school community
- ★ Drive every school program and decision
- ★ Help build the school's accountability plan and let others know how well your school is succeeding
- ★ Provide meaningful guidance to the future leaders of your school in making important decisions and resolving conflict
- ★ Provide clarity of purpose that will guide and sustain the school over the long term

Mission and vision should be tied directly to student and community needs and assets. No matter how dynamic or innovative a charter school idea is, if it doesn't address the needs and interests of the population it is designed to serve, it is unlikely that it will be approved or attract students once it opens.

Over time and through transitions, new people will be in charge of management and governance of the school and new challenges and opportunities will arise. A clear mission and vision that have been used to build the school's institutions, governance and culture will help ensure that teachers, administrators, parents and students all understand the fundamental purpose of the school and help it continue to strive to meet these goals.

EXAMPLES OF MISSION AND VISION STATEMENTS

Below are examples of mission and/or vision statements from a number of charter schools in Missouri. As you can see, there is no one correct way to create these tools.

Eagle College Prep Endeavor Charter School

Mission: The mission of EAGLE College Prep Endeavor is to develop serving leaders by providing a rigorous college prep learning community where we work together toward the pursuit of academic excellence and character development in a safe, supportive, and loving learning environment.

Vision: EAGLE College Prep Endeavor is dedicated to developing a public charter school that provides an education with a Loving Emphasis that is genuinely transformational for our students. We are tireless in our commitment to establish a distinctive identity as one of America’s finest public college-preparatory institutions, developing students who are academic standouts and active community servants.

Hawthorn Leadership School for Girls Charter School

Mission: The Hawthorn Leadership School for Girls provides a safe, nurturing and stimulating environment that enables young women from diverse backgrounds to achieve academic success in a college preparatory program and to become leaders in their communities and professions.

The Biome Charter High School

Mission: We engage children in an individualized and challenging educational environment, enriching minds and cultivating confident and creative builders of the future.

Vernare Charter School

Mission: To produce “scholar citizens”—students demonstrating strong academic achievement, environmental stewardship and advancement of community.

Vision: To be the nexus of community sustainability—by developing healthy kids, creating healthy environments and building healthy neighborhoods.

Crossroads Charter Schools

Mission: Crossroads Charter Schools prepare and inspire students to build a better tomorrow by providing an academically rigorous K-12 education in a creative, collaborative, community-focused environment.

Vision: Crossroads Charter Schools will be the premier school system in Kansas City and a destination for other educators seeking inspiration and best practices. Graduates of Crossroads Charter Schools will be scholarly, culturally literate and service-oriented individuals who will pursue their dreams relentlessly and have a positive impact on their family, their community and the world.

SOLICITING COMMUNITY INPUT INTO MISSION AND VISION

There is no one way to create the school's mission and vision. Some charter school developers begin with a specific idea and invite others to join them in pursuing that vision. Others start with a relatively blank slate and use input from a variety of individuals and groups to develop a vision collaboratively. In still other cases, charter developers know they want to meet a student or community need, and work with others to find a model that addresses that need.

Involving individuals and groups to develop the vision and mission for the school can lead to greater buy-in for the charter school you create. However, you will need to balance the goal of gaining buy-in against the practical concerns of keeping the process moving, managing expectations for how input will be used (or not used), and ensuring that your vision and mission do not become overly diffuse as a result of too many different interests. Outside input can come from sustained, structured discussions among people in the community, and from “kitchen table” conversations with community representatives, educational leaders, district officials, etc. See [Section 3D](#), “Engaging with the Community.”

CLARIFYING UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS WITHIN THE CORE DESIGN TEAM

Because the mission and vision guide all other aspects of the school, it is important that once a direction is set, a strong consensus exists around the charter school's vision and mission amongst core design team members—and ultimately among staff and school leadership. Drafting the mission and vision for a charter school is a good time to have critical discussions about underlying assumptions held by different team members about the school and what it will become.

For example, the core design team might all agree that the school should have rigorous academics, but what does that phrase mean to different members? If the school is dedicated to providing an education to a diverse community of learners, does that mean being prepared to accept a wide range of learners and actively recruiting different types of students? How much of the school's resources would be dedicated to acquiring technology if a mission says that the school provides an education that prepares students for today's workplace demands?

Take the time you need up front to think carefully and reflectively about the nature of your school and how its philosophy will play out in practice. People can agree easily with broad principles. However, when you move to the next stage and begin to map out how a school will operate on a daily basis, different expectations can divide the group and, in some extreme cases, even end the process of creating a new school. Discussing and clarifying fundamental assumptions regarding what a school is about now can save a lot of time and trouble later. Creating common understanding of a school's vision and mission is an evolving process. See [Section 3A](#), "The Core Design Team" for more on building your design team.

RESOURCES

Mission and Vision Creation Worksheet:

topnonprofits.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Mission-Vision-Worksheet.pdf

4B. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

Given the autonomous nature of charter schools and the fact that charter schools can choose their own management structure, charter schools embrace an array of school management/leadership models. What's most important is that the choice is aligned to the school's vision, mission, goals and values (i.e., its identity). A charter school with a clear management structure and plan of execution will operate at a higher level once it opens.

Most charter schools have a single leader at the helm—a version of the traditional school management model in which the person at the top makes all the final decisions. In these schools, the leader is clearly identified to all stakeholders. Most often, this leader is called “Principal,” “Director,” or “School Head.” This person is primarily responsible for the overall success of the school. In some schools, this person is supported by a leadership team which includes other administrators—such as assistant principal, dean of students, business manager, etc.—all of whom report to the primary school leader, but take full responsibility for key areas of the school's operations.

In other schools, an executive director or CEO serves as the leader of the school, with other administrators (sometimes including a “Principal,” “Director,” or “School Head”) who report directly to him or her. This person is often responsible for external relations, while the “Principal,” “Director,” or “School Head” is responsible for the instructional program of the school. In these structures, additional administrators may also support as described in the structure above.

Some schools operate on a “co-leader” model in which two or more leaders share responsibility to lead the school. Even in a “co-leader” model, the leaders tend to specialize and take responsibility for distinct aspects of the school's operations.

Still other models choose to contract out some management responsibilities, such as bookkeeping or fundraising. It is possible to contract with consultants, vendors or possibly a charter management organization (CMO) to fulfill certain management obligations. If you choose this model, it is imperative that the design team makes certain that the external organization is clearly accountable to the school and capable of carrying out its responsibilities.

Whichever model you use, the school must identify key players who are primarily responsible for all functions and operations of the school including, but not limited to, the educational program, professional development, financial management, facilities planning and management, parent and community involvement, board relations, fundraising and external relations.

The design team has a lot of freedom to build an administration that works with the school's identity because charter schools are free to create their own organizational structures. Creating an unambiguous organizational chart that explains who is responsible for what, and with clear lines of reporting and accountability, will be key to the success of the school.



THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CHARTER SCHOOL LEADER

The charter movement in Missouri and across the country recognizes the need for exceptional leaders in charter public schools. The charter school leader, whether titled “Principal,” “Director,” or “School Head” and in any model above, will have full oversight of the day-to-day operations of the school and will be the public face of the school once the charter is approved. Selecting the leader will be the design group’s most important personnel decision and arguably the key to the ultimate success of the charter school.

Due to the autonomy charter schools have, charter school leaders are faced with the daunting task of being exceptional instructional leaders and school managers along with undertaking many of the duties typically handled at the district level. As such, the skill set of the charter school leader must be diverse, including leadership in vision, people, instruction, business and community.

Visionary Leadership

The charter school leader must be able to create and articulate a clear vision, mission, goals and values for the school in line with the changing 21st century world that schools are preparing children to enter. The charter school leader must also ensure that the school’s identity (vision, mission, goals and values) actually drives decisions and informs the culture of the school. Over time, the school leader must be able to initiate and affect changes to the identity of the school based on data to improve performance, school culture and school success.

People Leadership

The charter school leader must create a culture of collaboration and mutual support in which he/she is able to identify and leverage individuals’ strengths effectively and close gaps in performance in ways that ultimately align the team’s knowledge, skillset and mindsets to the school’s identity.

Additionally, the charter school leader must create a culture of accountability that engages the team to analyze results and create action plans to drive and increase the school’s performance. He/she must play an active role by providing effective performance feedback and, in doing so, the charter school leader must be prepared to make personnel decisions accordingly.

Instructional Leadership

The charter school leader must create a positive learning environment that is conducive to learning and that operates with a high level of urgency around preparing students to be college and career ready. In this environment, student behavior must be consistently reflective of an effective learning environment and a rigorous academic focus.

Overall, the charter school leader is responsible to ensure that data is incorporated into the daily life of the school and that all team members are consistently tracking and analyzing a variety of metrics continuously improve and strengthen the culture and academic success of the school.

Business Leadership and Community Leadership

The school leader must be able to effectively engage and invest multiple stakeholders into the school experience. Stakeholders include—but are not limited to—families, community based organizations, political leaders, community neighbors, district leaders, sponsor, etc. He/she must be able to influence and motivate these stakeholders to get involved with the school, be supportive of the school and advocate for the school in order to push the school's identity forward.

RECRUITING A LEADER

Although it is not a requirement to identify your school leader prior to submitting an application to a potential sponsor, it is considered best practice and can be of great value. In the case that the school leader has not been identified, it behooves the design team to provide a sound process for recruitment of a leader. Having an identified, qualified leader undoubtedly strengthens the application.

Finding the right school leader for the charter school-in-design can be extremely challenging, as a good fit with the school's identity is non-negotiable. Because the charter school leader's role is extremely dynamic and requires many abilities and skillsets, design teams should anticipate that the process of finding the right match for your school will take some time, particularly because the school's future success depends on it.

In order to find the right candidate, the design team should spend considerable time developing a job description that clearly articulates the role, the responsibilities and the tasks the charter school leader is expected to carry out, while ensuring that the job description has some flexibility to adapt as the school launches and scales up. The job description should be circulated through formal venues such as colleges, universities, education non-profits and other schools and/or school networks.

Additionally, it is imperative that the design team create a robust interview process that is rigorous and meant to appeal to candidates who would be a good and natural fit for the school's identity. This can include, but is not limited to, multiple interviews with multiple stakeholders, as well as several opportunities to create project or strategic plans that bring to fruition the goals of the charter school. Be prepared to speak and meet with several candidates before making a final decision on a candidate.

Many charter operators report that the best way to find an excellent school leader is through networking and word of mouth. For this reason, the design team is strongly encouraged to tap into regional or national networks that may have skilled candidates capable of taking the helm of a high-quality charter school.

The following are education-specific job search sites that can help you find strong candidates:

- ★ [topschoolsjobs.org](https://www.topschoolsjobs.org)
- ★ [incshools.org](https://www.incshools.org)
- ★ [essentialschools.org](https://www.essentialschools.org)
- ★ [teachforamerica.org](https://www.teachforamerica.org)
- ★ [idealist.org](https://www.idealists.org)
- ★ [newleaders.org](https://www.newleaders.org)

Overall, keep in mind that the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (dese.mo.gov/educator-quality/educator-development/interstate-school-leaders-licensure-consortium) has articulated standards for school leaders that address how the “Principal,” “Director,” or “School Head” can help promote learning for all students, as well as promote overall effective management of the school. Standards such as these can help charter design teams frame their search for an effective school leader, evaluate candidates and can support the school in evaluating school leaders throughout the course of the school’s operations. Many districts, schools of education, and other organizations have adopted and/or adapted these standards for school leaders.



TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

Citizens of the World - Kansas City

When Citizens of the World - Kansas City started a new elementary school in Fall 2016, they used the following job description to recruit and hire their founding school leader.



Job description | Principal, Citizens of the World Kansas City

About Us

The mission of Citizens of the World Charter Schools Kansas City (CWC KC) is to provide an excellent public education focused on developing and demonstrating understanding while building connections within a diverse community. We are opening two elementary schools in the Midtown Kansas City area in fall 2016, in which we will serve 288 students in Kindergarten and first grade.

Our partners

We work with our partners at Citizens of the World Charter Schools (CWC Schools), whose mission is to provide socioeconomically, culturally, and racially diverse communities with schools that:

- Prepare students to become citizens of the world in an ever-changing future.
- Promote academic rigor and experiential learning to support and develop children's natural intellectual curiosity.
- Embrace a constructivist, project-based learning approach.
- Develop each child's potential to live as a learner, both in school and out.
- Reflect, welcome and celebrate the community's diversity.
- Strengthen the bonds among members of the school community and beyond.

Overview

The Principal of Citizens of the World Kansas City is a visionary instructional leader who will create an engaging, joyful, academically rigorous school built on our fundamentals of academic excellence, community, and diversity. S/he will have a sophisticated understanding of and experience with a constructivist approach, balanced-literacy, multiple intelligence theory, backward design, the creation of project-based curriculum, and building and/or working in diverse communities.

The Principal will create and maintain a school culture that challenges and motivates our diverse students, teachers, and families to achieve academic excellence, develop as people, and positively impact the communities in which they live. S/he will have a commitment to the educational philosophy of our school that includes a constructivist approach, project-based learning, and the overall culture of our organization.

Responsibilities

Academics and Instruction

Guides instructional staff to improve teaching and learning by providing teacher support and designing professional development. Ensures that all students are learning and we continually address any and all gaps in achievement between subgroups.

- Provides instructional leadership, coaching, and support to teachers who are working with a diverse student body.
- Identifies and incorporates helpful curricular materials and supports that are aligned to our approach.
- Ensures the use of a wide array of assessments that, together, reflect the educational philosophy of CWC Schools that also prepare students to excel on standardized measures.
- Uses multiple sources of data to develop a plan for the ongoing improvement of student achievement.

Culture

Defines, models, and builds a transformative school culture consistent with CWC NY's principles; manages student discipline; and promotes a social emotional learning and assessment as part of the school's culture.

Staff

Recruits, hires, manages, and develops the school's leadership, instructional team, operational, and support staff.

- Builds a culture of self-improvement and adaptive leadership among the entire school.
- Recruits and hires mission aligned, qualified instructional and operational staff.
- Manages the staff performance review and compensation review processes.
- Addresses staff concerns promptly, effectively, and with mission-aligned, student-focused responses.
- Ensures on-going design and implementation of staff professional development.

Community

Establishes and maintains strong relationships with teachers, students, parents, community members, and the staff of the CWC Schools.

- Ensures that all members of the school community have avenues through which to engage and recognize that they are valued.
- Communicates the school's vision and goals in ways that ensure understanding and commitment from a racially, culturally, and socioeconomically diverse community of parents, students, faculty, staff, and board members.
- Oversees the development and implementation of varied forms of communication with families.
- Maintains positive relationships with the CWC KC Board of Directors, the Missouri Charter Public School Commission, Kansas City Public Schools, the Missouri State Board of Education, and charter organizations, serving as an active leader in the charter community—learning from others and sharing CWC School's best practices.

4B. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Operations, Finances, and Compliance

Ensures compliant, effective, and efficient school-based operations that support an academically highperforming school environment.

- Manages and supports school operations staff.
- Reports on activities, organizational development progress, and student achievement to the Executive Director and the CWC KC Board of Directors, as well as any compliance monitoring organizations.
- Works with the Executive Director to draft and monitor the school's budget and ensure daily financial and business activities are compliant with the school's fiscal policies.
- Ensures school alignment and/or progress toward alignment with organizational goals for diversity.

Staff and Reporting Relationships

The Principal shall formally report to the Executive Director. S/he will work closely with other stakeholders, including the school's Board of Directors and CWC Schools.

Qualifications

Candidates must have:

- A clear record of effective leadership in a diverse school setting for a minimum of two years, including evidence of the utilization of academic achievement data to assess and improve instruction.
- Master's degree or PhD in education
- At least 5 years of relevant teaching experience, with demonstrated student results
- A Missouri Administrator Certificate

Skills/Traits

The Principal must:

- Be aligned with the education philosophy and the school's mission.
- Possess strong leadership and team management skills.
- Possess strong interpersonal and communication skills.
- Have an entrepreneurial spirit and be capable of managing many complex tasks with competing priorities.
- Be organized and self-managed, be able to handle many responsibilities simultaneously.
- Have excellent problem-solving skills.
- Be committed to building a community of collaboration with a diverse group of stakeholders.
- A self-aware leader who knows how to treat all members of the school's community with respect, appraises accurately his or her strengths and weaknesses, and is perceptive about how he or she is regarded.
- Be dependable and have excellent follow-through.
- A strong personal commitment to ongoing learning and growth.
- An effective and persuasive communicator, orally and in writing.

CWC KC offers competitive salaries commensurate with experience, and a comprehensive benefits package. We are an Equal Opportunity Employer and, as a school serving a diverse group of students, we work to reflect this diversity in our staff as well.

Interested applicants should submit a current resume and cover letter to careers@cwckansascity.org.

No phone calls please.



Founding Executive Director, Kristin Droege, adds this piece of advice for new charter school developers:

"I think that one of the great opportunities afforded charter schools is to adjust the administrative structure which allowed us to focus on creating a liaison between the school and community, the Director of Curriculum Integration and Educational Partnerships, who is highly aware of our curriculum and instructional model. This has given us a chance to set up a strong set of partnerships and connections across the community, support teachers extensively in their lesson and unit planning, and enrich the experiences of students and families."

4B. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Job Description | Director of Curriculum Integration and Educational Partnerships, Citizens of the World Kansas City

About Us

The mission of Citizens of the World Charter Schools Kansas City (CWC KC) is to provide an excellent public education focused on developing and demonstrating understanding while building connections within a diverse community. We are opening two elementary schools in the Midtown Kansas City area in fall 2016, in which we will serve 288 students in Kindergarten and first grade.

Our partners

We work with our partners at Citizens of the World Charter Schools (CWC Schools), whose mission is to provide socioeconomically, culturally, and racially diverse communities with schools that:

- Prepare students to become citizens of the world in an ever-changing future.
- Promote academic rigor and experiential learning to support and develop children's natural intellectual curiosity.
- Embrace a constructivist, project-based learning approach.
- Develop each child's potential to live as a learner, both in school and out.
- Reflect, welcome and celebrate the community's diversity.
- Strengthen the bonds among members of the school community and beyond.

Overview

The Director of Curriculum Integration and Educational Partnerships for Citizens of the World Kansas City is a visionary instructional leader who will contribute to the creation of an engaging, joyful, academically rigorous school built on our fundamentals of academic excellence, community, and diversity. S/he will have a sophisticated understanding of and experience with a constructivist approach to curriculum and instruction, the creation of project-based curriculum, supporting teacher professional development, creating community partnerships, and building and/or working in diverse communities.

The Director of Curriculum Integration and Educational Partnerships will support the development and implementation of a vertically and horizontally articulated project-based curriculum that supports diverse students in core academics, areas of enrichment and service learning. S/he will have a commitment to the educational philosophy of our school that includes a constructivist approach, project-based learning, and the overall culture of our organization. S/he will participate in extensive outreach with the Kansas City community to secure beneficial partnerships that enhance curriculum, instruction, professional development, family and student services, and parent education opportunities for the school community.

Responsibilities

Academics and Instruction

Guides instructional staff in the creation and implementation of integrated, project-based learning experiences.

- Provides instructional leadership, coaching, and support to teachers who are working with a diverse student body specific to the areas of science, social studies, enrichment classes, social emotional learning, and the creation of project-based activities.
- Identifies and incorporates helpful curricular materials and supports that are aligned to our approach.
- Ensures the use of a wide array of formal and informal assessments that, together, reflect the educational philosophy of CWC Schools that also prepare students to excel on standardized measures.

Culture

Supports and collaborates with the Principal to define, model, and build a transformative school culture consistent with CWC KC's principles; and promotes social emotional learning and student assessment as part of the school's culture.

Staff

Supports and collaborates with the Principal to recruit, hire, manage, and develop the school's leadership, instructional team, operational, and support staff.

- Contributes to a culture of self-improvement and adaptive leadership among the entire school.
- Manages the staff performance review process for Associate Teachers, Enrichment Teachers and After School staff.
- Addresses staff concerns promptly, effectively, and with mission-aligned, student-focused responses.
- Ensures on-going design and implementation of staff professional development with specific focus on curriculum integration, project-based learning, science and social studies curriculum and instruction.

Community

Establishes and maintains strong relationships with the Principal, teachers, students, parents, community members, and the staff of the CWC Schools.

- Supports the Principal in ensuring that all members of the school community have avenues through which to engage and recognize that they are valued.
- Supports the Principal in communicating the school's vision and goals in ways that ensure understanding and commitment from a racially, culturally, and socioeconomically diverse community of parents, students, faculty, staff, and board members.
- Oversees the communication with the community about project-based learning, service learning, and community partnership opportunities.
- Creates, nurtures, and grows relationships with community members and organizations who bring educational programming, enhancement, and opportunity to the school in the form of curricular materials, afterschool programs, field trips, professional development for faculty, parent education programs, family services, enrichment activities, or fundraising opportunities.

Operations, Finances, and Compliance

Ensures compliant, effective, and efficient school-based operations that support an academically high-performing school environment.

- Collaborates with the Principal to manage and support school operations staff.
- Reports on curriculum development, faculty professional development, and community partnership opportunities to the Executive Director and the CWC KC Board of Directors, as well as any compliance monitoring organizations.
- Works with the Principal and Executive Director to develop community outreach plans in the area of partnerships, fundraising, and professional development opportunities.

4B. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Staff and Reporting Relationships

The Director of Curriculum Integration and Educational Partnerships shall formally report to the Executive Director. S/he will work closely with the Principal, the faculty, community partners and other stakeholders, including the school's Board of Directors and CWC Schools.

Qualifications

Candidates must have:

- A clear record of effective teaching and leadership in a diverse school setting for a minimum of two years, including evidence of curriculum development, experience creating and delivering project-based learning, and experience with development of professional learning experiences for teachers.
- Master's degree or Ph.D. in education
- At least 3 years of relevant teaching experience with demonstrated student results
- A Missouri Teacher or Administrator Certificate

Skills/Traits

The Director must:

- Be aligned with the school's educational philosophy and mission.
- Possess strong leadership and team-building skills.
- Possess strong interpersonal and communication skills.
- Be organized and self-managed, be able to handle many responsibilities simultaneously.
- Have excellent problem-solving skills.
- Be committed to working with a diverse faculty and staff to create and implement an outstanding project-based curriculum.
- Be a self-aware educator who knows how to treat all members of the school's community with respect, accurately appraises his or her strengths and weaknesses, and is perceptive about how he or she is regarded.
- Be dependable and have excellent follow-through.
- Have strong personal commitment to ongoing learning and growth.
- Be effective and persuasive communicator – orally and in writing.

Interested applicants may apply by submitting a cover letter, resume and responses to the following questions to: careers@cwckansascity.org (subject line: Director of Curriculum Integration)

Essay Questions: Please respond briefly to the following questions (maximum one page for each question):

- a. Describe an example of a creative unit or activity in which there was meaningful integration across at least three areas of core academic instruction (English language arts; mathematics; science; social studies). What were the goals of the project? How was understanding measured?
- b. Discuss your philosophy of service learning in the primary and elementary grades? What are the goals? How is success measured? How is service learning most effective in supporting the needs of a socioeconomically and ethnically diverse community of students?
- c. How can a group of diverse faculty be supported in working together on curriculum development and instructional expertise? What approach would you take to insuring meaningful contributions to and exceptional implementation of a project-based curriculum?

CWC Kansas City offers competitive teacher salaries commensurate with experience, and a comprehensive benefits package. We are an Equal Opportunity Employer and, as a school serving a diverse group of students, we work to reflect this diversity in our staff as well.

No phone calls, please.

RESOURCES

Council of Chief State School Officers Offers professional standards for educational leaders. ccsso.org, ccsso.org/Resources/Programs/Developing_and_Supporting_School-Ready_Leaders.html

Charter School Center, Newsletter on Principal Evaluation A great place to learn more about principal evaluation. charterschoolcenter.org/newsletter/february-2013-principal-evaluation-comes-tighter-focus

4C. THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

The educational program is a key area of a charter school's autonomy and ability to innovate, and the primary way the school's central purpose, to educate students, is lived out. Whether developers employ proven curricula and instructional methods, create their own, or a bit of both, the educational program is where the rubber meets the road. It should be tightly aligned with, and be an expression of, the school's mission. Charter applicants should innovate to develop a program that provides a top-notch education and meets specific needs of students, including those with disabilities, English language learners and other specialized populations. In addition, the educational program should align with the Missouri Learning Standards.

Depending on your design, the learning process could range from students at desks with the teacher in front of the class; to individualized or self-paced learning; to project-based learning. A robust assessment strategy must be part of your educational methodology. Professional development for staff should also be a key part of the program. The best applications and most successful schools clearly connect the curriculum to the assessments, which then drives professional development.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

You have many choices to make when developing the educational program.

- ★ Will you rely exclusively on the Missouri State Learning Standards or supplement them with additional standards?
- ★ How will the educational opportunities offered by the charter school differ from those of other schools in your local school district?
- ★ Will your team develop the educational program from scratch? Will you purchase or use existing curricula or will you do some combination?
- ★ Will you contract with an educational service provider to deliver your educational program?

- ★ What instructional methods will you use?
- ★ How will you assess student progress?
- ★ How will you ensure that you are meeting the needs of all students, including students with disabilities and English language learners?
- ★ How will you support teachers to effectively use the school's curriculum and instructional methods?
- ★ How will you ensure that teachers receive the ongoing support needed to continue improving their instruction?

BEST PRACTICES

Education literature is rife with best practices about what works in schools, and you should become familiar with what some of the highest performing charter schools are doing. The Education Innovation Laboratory at Harvard found the following five best practices in the New York City charter schools with the highest tests scores:

- ★ an extended school day and year
- ★ the use of data to drive instruction
- ★ devotion to high-quality human capital
- ★ a culture of high expectations
- ★ small group tutoring

This is not to say that your charter school needs to adopt all of these practices; however, sponsors are demanding more and more that charter applications include research-based practices and curricula. However, this is in contrast to the founding belief of charter schools which was that they would become laboratories of innovation to influence change in the broader school system. Innovation is still necessary, but should be balanced with proven models. A robust knowledge of your proposed population will help you develop a program that will be defensible to the sponsor, and, more importantly, work for your students.

ENSURING YOU HAVE THE RIGHT PEOPLE ON THE BUS

Because educational methodology is central to your school, your design team must include an experienced educator or educators. Ideally, educators are an integral part of the team from the concept stage through implementation. If exceptional educators are not already involved, it is critical that you bring them onto your team or, if that isn't possible, contract with a curriculum expert. Even with skilled educators on your design team, it is likely that you will need to tap into additional expertise in order to undertake some of the complex steps of educational program design. Consider the following options:

- ★ Educators active or retired
- ★ Local organizations and educational nonprofits, such as museums, libraries, or research centers, interested in partnering with new school developers
- ★ Colleges and universities: professors and/or graduate students in education schools as well as business/management, social policy, psychology, sociology and other related fields
- ★ Curriculum development and other education-focused organizations

REVIEW THE MISSOURI CHARTER SCHOOL LAW FOR SPECIFIC LEARNING PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

Even if you have never read a law before, you should take a look at the Missouri Charter School Law. The statute outlines exactly what needs to be in a charter application.

No matter where you are applying, your design team should become thoroughly familiar with state requirements, especially as they relate to content, performance standards and assessment. For example, Missouri requires that all charter schools align their programs with the Missouri Learning Standards. Presenting a clearly articulated alignment between the proposed educational program and State Standards is a must. Charter school design teams also should include in their assessment plans the administration of state-mandated assessments. State and federal law both demand you plan for the provision of special education services.

EDUCATIONAL GOALS AND METRICS

The school's educational goals are the key things the school seeks to accomplish in a given amount of time (such as by the time a student graduates). There are three main types of goals:

- ★ Academic
- ★ Non-academic
- ★ Mission specific

Return to your school's vision and mission, as well as the student needs assessment, to develop your school's educational goals. The goals should drive your choices of curriculum, assessments, instructional strategies and professional development. Some of the goals might be internal: for example, your sponsor might not really pay attention to your goal to have all of your students defend their writing portfolios in front of an external audience in 8th grade. Your sponsor

will hold you accountable to academic goals. It's a good idea to have a clear sense of the metrics that the district uses to hold their schools accountable and use those as a starting point for your school's academic goals.

We recommend that you develop your school's goals at the inception of your educational program design—even if this means that you adjust or revise them later. Carefully thinking through what you hope to achieve from the beginning will help you tightly align your instructional approaches, curriculum and assessment decisions. This process is sometimes referred to as “backward planning.” First define where you are going, then determine how to get there. Your school's goals will ultimately feed into your school's accountability plan.

NON-ACADEMIC GOALS

Academic standards specify the content and the level of mastery students are required to achieve by subject as well as by grade level. Standards state what students should know or be able to do at particular stages of their schooling and include specific, measurable student outcomes with clearly defined evaluative criteria. If students achieve the standards each year, they should be on target to accomplish your school's educational goals in the time frames you have determined.

You will need to establish goals for all areas of student and the Missouri Learning Standards. You might also supplement the MLS. For example, a school with a specialized focus or theme, such as leadership or health, should have standards related to that theme that may not be in the MLS. Some charter school developers also create or adopt an additional set of standards—one that is more rigorous than the MLS, for example, unique graduation standards or “exit outcomes” related to your school's goals.

As you develop the rest of your educational program, ensure that curriculum, instructional approaches and assessments all align with your school's standards. We recommend that you create a document articulating that alignment and include it in your charter application.

The MAP (Missouri Assessment Program) assessment will be the state test upon which your students will be evaluated. You should set numerical goals (for example, 90% of students will show mastery of the standards on the MAP). You will also want to include a growth goal—how much are your students gaining year-over-year. Most schools, and MCPSA would recommend all schools, have an additional academic assessment that is given more regularly than the once-a-year MAP so educators can regularly assess where students are on mastery of standards. You might create your own assessments aligned to the standards and the curriculum, or you may use one of the assessment providers discussed in the assessment section below.

NON-ACADEMIC GOALS

There are some typical non-academic goals that charter schools might outline in their charter, including:

- ★ High school graduation rate (always for high schools but increasingly for elementary and middle schools)
- ★ College matriculation and graduation
- ★ Student attendance
- ★ Parent involvement
- ★ Parent/teacher/student satisfaction
- ★ Clear financial audits
- ★ Teacher retention
- ★ Board effectiveness

There is a lot of talk currently about socio-emotional growth and support of students. Several charter management organizations have committed themselves to building their students' grit, perseverance and self-advocacy skills. Measuring these characteristics remains difficult, but the increase in research and attention to such character development is note-worthy.

MISSION-SPECIFIC GOALS

Schools that are committed to certain outcomes for their students will want to build some quantitative goals around what they value. For example, a school focused on citizenship might want to have a measure of how often their students provide service to their community. A school focused on health might have a measure of student health. See [Section 4A](#), "Outcomes, Mission, and Vision."

WRITING YOUR GOALS

In “Developing Sound Performance Goals and Measures: Guidance for Charter Schools,” Margaret Lin (a nationally-regarded charter school expert) recommends developing ten to twelve broad “SMART” goals for the entire school. The goals should include educational program, governance, financial management and operations, with most of these goals focused on the educational program. SMART goals, according to Lin, are “clear, measurable statement[s] of what the school will accomplish with its students after a specific length of time attending the school.” They meet the following criteria:

- ★ Specific (and for educational goals, tied to learning standards)
- ★ Measurable
- ★ Ambitious and attainable
- ★ Reflective of your mission
- ★ Time-specific with target date

An example Lin gives of a SMART goal related to the educational program is: “All students at the ABC Charter School will become proficient readers of English within three years of enrolling at the school.”

Lin provides the following questions to help you define educational (and other) school goals:

- ★ How will you know if your school is succeeding (or not)?
- ★ What will be important characteristics of “educated students” at your school?
- ★ What will students learn, know and be able to do after a certain period of time, before promotion to the next grade level, or before graduation from your school?
- ★ What should your graduates permanently possess as a result of their time at your school?

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION 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 necessary 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.

Across the country, charter schools have adopted a wide range of teaching and learning programs. Programs have been shaped by constructivist principles, the prescriptions of core knowledge, the regimentation of direct instruction, and blended learning approaches. Some schools feature a student-centered, project-based approach, while others adhere to a textbook and teacher-directed scheme. Your decision about what kind of curriculum the school will choose should be based on a thorough understanding of your options and what best matches your school's mission, vision, and educational goals and standards. In addition, you will need to provide evidence that your curriculum and instructional approaches are research-based and will achieve the stated learning goals with your target population.

In many cases, charter schools are founded by educators or community members committed to a particular educational approach, and if that is the case for you, then many decisions have already been made. If that is not the case, then you have some important thinking and research to do.

Below are a few examples of curriculum approaches. 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 play-based 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 Constructivism 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 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 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. 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. While there are over 60 Big Picture schools in the world, the two in Chicago were closed.

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 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.

Small School If your school will be smaller than a traditional school, you may consider looking at the research and literature on small schools as you develop your educational program. Leaders in the small schools movement caution that small schools should not try to offer every course and opportunity provided by a large school, nor can they afford to match every course found in a larger school. They can and should focus on providing courses and opportunities needed to fulfill their missions and goals and educate students to meet and exceed learning standards.

As you think about your school's curriculum, remember that your approach to the classroom may or may not be aligned with those of the schools from which your students may come or to which they may go, so students may need help with the transition.

A note on level of detail: There are successful applications that articulate the textbooks that the school will purchase and use but that is not necessary. You should demonstrate that the curriculum is research-based, aligned with learning standards, and consistent with your mission. It is also important to note if your team is planning to create some or all of the curricula and how you will align it to Missouri Learning Standards.

CREATE A CURRICULUM OR FIND AN ESTABLISHED ONE

Developing a unique curriculum may be a long and costly process. Existing curriculum resources may fit your educational mission while still being innovative and allowing your school to offer an approach unique to the school district. If your concept already exists, consider negotiating to replicate parts, or all, of the model. Be sure you understand the options and pricing for professional development that supports teachers in learning and implementing the new curriculum.

When reviewing established curricula, develop clear criteria for what you are seeking. Consider, for example, whether the curriculum provides the following:

- ★ Higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills at each grade level or in each course
- ★ Alignment to Missouri Learning Standards and related assessments
- ★ In-depth study of significant concepts
- ★ Connections within and across the disciplines (for instance, students studying the Renaissance in their regular classroom are also learning about Renaissance paintings and music in their arts classes)
- ★ A balance of skill development and knowledge development
- ★ Experiences and applications of information for real-life connections
- ★ A variety of formative and summative assessments to guide future curricular adjustments
- ★ Appropriate age and developmental instructional levels and techniques
- ★ Vertical alignment between the grades and horizontal alignment across topics
- ★ Technology requirement and online resources

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- ★ Support for the learning needs of all students while maintaining high achievement expectations
- ★ Support for lesson development that utilizes multiple teaching methods to address individual learning styles

Designing a curriculum unique to your charter school can provide great rewards, including greater buy-in by the staff involved in developing the curriculum, and the opportunity to innovate and to develop something perfectly suited to the needs of your students. However, it is also time-consuming and demands considerable skill and knowledge on the part of developers. Keep in mind that talented teachers are not always talented curriculum developers. Consider when you will be able to hire staff and involve them in curriculum design—you may not have time to develop a completely original curriculum. Another option is to adopt an existing curriculum at first and then develop home-grown curricula in years to come.

If extensive design and development of a curriculum is needed, work with appropriate advisors to prepare a budget for writing, design and publication costs. You may get valuable guidance from a school that developed its own program and materials and/or a network of new or experimenting schools that hew to a particular educational philosophy that echoes your own. Schools that do not ally themselves with such known sources of educational legitimacy have a greater burden to bear both in proving themselves and in making promises to parents about what they propose to teach their children.

The more you can involve the school's instructional staff early in evaluating, selecting and creating or adapting curriculum, the more committed they will be to its success, and the more refined the day-to-day application will become. Teachers are the professionals who will breathe life into whatever you have put on paper. Also remember that charter schools have autonomy over their curriculum and it is not set in stone. Make sure you understand the terms of your charter and whether or not your authorizer expects you to inform him or her of major curriculum changes.

RESOURCES

Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) is for all kinds of teachers and schools, and it offers links to many resources, covering everything from evaluation to learning theories to subjects like science and the arts. eric.ed.gov

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) is a “community of educators, advocating for sound policies and sharing best practices to achieve the success of each learner.” The website includes resources and information on a wide range of topics in education. Membership provides access to additional resources. ascd.org

“**Starting a Charter School/The Educational Program Design**” section of the Charter School Center website contains links to multiple information sources on a range of educational program topics from curriculum to assessment and professional development. charterschoolcenter.org

What Works Clearinghouse is a database of scientific, research-based information and instructional approaches created by the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) in response to specific areas of education (i.e., high school drop-outs, elementary reading, middle school math, etc.). Note, however, that many educators find the DOE’s definition of “scientific” to be too narrow. Many successful curriculum models are not included. ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc

Sample Education Plans:

- c.ymcdn.com/sites/coloradoleague.org/resource/collection/E9F22B40-1CD5-451B-8459-522447EF1644/Veritas_Education_Plan_Section.pdf
<http://pcs.k12.nj.us/PCSCCharternode6.cfm>
- c.ymcdn.com/sites/coloradoleague.org/resource/collection/E9F22B40-1CD5-451B-8459-522447EF1644/Montessori_del_Mundo-Charter_Application_Ed_Section.pdf

ASSESSMENT METHODS

Assessment is the process of measuring how a school has improved the quality of student performance. Charter schools will be judged primarily on their ability to quantify progress toward the student outcomes specified in their charters. Beyond accountability, assessments can also help shape the classroom curriculum to meet students' needs, provide feedback to teachers on the effectiveness of their instruction, publicize the school to the community, and, of course, be used to see how well individual students are learning.

Designing an effective assessment plan requires absolute clarity in the purpose of the educational program and its component parts. A high-quality assessment plan will:

- ★ Inform leadership and staff of the school's progress towards the school's mission and goals;
- ★ Provide timely, accurate, and specific information to teachers and administrators;
- ★ Allow the school to fulfill its internal and external accountability requirements. The school will need measures that show student progress against state and national norms;
- ★ Compare results to students' prior learning levels—in order to demonstrate the school's value-added effects.

Assessment tools come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Below is a sampling:

- ★ Curriculum-based testing
- ★ Pre-test, post-test
- ★ Essays, written assignments
- ★ Student notebooks
- ★ Demonstrations of projects/exhibitions
- ★ Oral presentations

- ★ Daily work, homework assignments
- ★ Teacher observation
- ★ Oral response, class participation
- ★ Personal growth, self-evaluation
- ★ Ability to work independently and cooperatively as appropriate to circumstances
- ★ Attitude, general behavior, cooperation, citizenship
- ★ Social and emotional development
- ★ Parent, teacher, student surveys

STATE ASSESSMENTS

As public schools, charter schools will administer the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) test, which is mandated by the Missouri State Board of Education. Typically charter schools will have two other types of assessments: school-based and mission based. The school-based assessment will be interim assessments quarterly or every six weeks which will be aligned to the MAP and inform staff of how students are mastering Missouri Learning Standards. These assessments are discussed in more detail below. A mission-based assessment may or may not be administered more than once a year and will measure a specific goal or standard for the school in addition to MAP goals.

Not every assessment method used in every classroom has to be detailed in your charter application. However, you may want to emphasize certain kinds of assessments that you feel best exemplify the school's educational philosophy and curriculum, to show the school sponsor how your charter school will function. Schools should also consider what type of student assessment system best supports their vision, mission and student learning. Schools should articulate a clear and coherent system for student assessment.

RESOURCES

As you consider supplemental assessments, the following providers may prove helpful:

- **NWEA** is a formative testing system that responds dynamically to the child, and gives educators detailed insight into kids' learning. It is administered quarterly (or more often) online. NWEA provides professional development and student level results for every assessment. nwea.org
- **STAR Assessments** offer interim and formative assessments aligned with Missouri Learning Standards. renaissance.com/products/assessment/star-360
- **Catapult Learning's Evaluate** is aligned with Missouri Learning Standards. catapultlearning.com/assessment
- **Textbook assessments** can be included as additional accountability measures for your school.
- **Paul Bambrick and Uncommon Schools** Bambrick is a pioneer of data-driven instruction and wrote a book, *Driven by Data*, that is widely referred to as the best book on the subject. uncommonschoools.org/our-approach/thought-leadership/driven-by-data-book-paul-bambrick-santoyo

THE DATA CYCLE: USING ASSESSMENT DATA

Use of data to identify individual student needs, guide instruction, and support faculty evaluation of the curriculum is key to making assessment a meaningful educational tool, rather than just an external reporting obligation. Exemplary charter schools establish a baseline for each student cohort in each core subject to measure annual progress. Some schools administer baseline assessments during summer student orientation.

Many schools administer an annual pre- and post-assessment in each subject with periodic testing to measure/assess interim progress. The latter assessments are often conducted every six weeks; although some assessments are done quarterly. The resulting data is examined closely by teachers and administrators with an eye toward making instructional adjustments for the class or individual students. The data is also used by administrators to identify professional development and coaching needs.

The creation and holding sacred of staff planning time for analyzing and planning from assessment results is key to making a data cycle work. Many schools provide their teachers training in data analysis, as it is typically not part of a teacher's repertoire.

In developing your assessment system and building a calendar around it, consider the following key questions:

- ★ What standards or outcomes need to be assessed regularly, every six weeks and which might be fine to assess quarterly?
- ★ How will you report and record student progress toward outcomes externally?
- ★ How will teachers receive assessment results (will they correct the tests themselves, will they be online?) and what is the protocol for analysis and planning?

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- ★ What are the consequences for students who do not perform at a given standard? Will promotion be dependent on the standards?
- ★ How will the results of the assessment affect the teaching staff? Will teachers whose students consistently fail to meet the standards receive appropriate professional development and additional support? Will teachers whose students surpass the standards be given awards or incentives?

SPECIAL EDUCATION IN THE WHOLE SCHOOL CONTEXT

Experts in the field universally advise that special education not be viewed as a separate program, but be integrated into the overall school design in which the individual needs of all children are evaluated and addressed through a robust curriculum and multiple instructional strategies.

Teachers must differentiate instruction to help individual students with specific, appropriate learning opportunities. When teachers meet the needs of individuals within the group context, it maximizes learning for all children. Those students who are struggling more than others or who have mental or physical disabilities may need specialized support, but it's provided to the extent possible within the general education classroom. Adaptations to the curriculum and modifications to teaching strategies such as providing more time to complete a test or project can provide students with disabilities access to the same high-quality learning environment as everyone else in the school.

A strong special education staff not only helps with accommodations and adaptations, but also trains and guides the faculty in how to meet the needs of diverse learners. This approach to inclusive education provides the best support for students who have special needs. It builds their confidence, reduces unnecessary dependence, and demonstrates a process of respect and acceptance from which other students can learn.

The unique challenges and demands of providing services to students with disabilities will require a trusting and collaborative relationship between charter schools and other education agencies. Building these relationships requires ongoing commitment and hard work. The following are important legal points of which all charter developers must be aware:

- ★ Charters schools must enroll students with disabilities using the same open-enrollment policies that apply to all other students (e.g., students with disabilities who apply for enrollment must be admitted, and if the school is over-subscribed, they must be included in the same public lottery with all other students). Charters cannot exclude or discriminate against students in need of special education services.

- ★ The charter school holds the legal responsibility to ensure that all students with disabilities in the charter school receive appropriate special education services. School fulfill this responsibility by (a) providing funding and/or services to the students with disabilities in the charter school and (b) ensuring that special education requirements are met in the charter school.
- ★ Special education teachers in a charter school must meet the requirements of Missouri State statute and the IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act).

LAWS GOVERNING SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

Like other public schools, charter schools must comply with the federal laws that include many specific rules for how students with special education needs should be treated. The three most important laws are the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). In addition, schools must meet state requirements regarding the provision of special education.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Originally passed in 1975, the federal special education law was revised and reauthorized in 2004 and is known now as “IDEA 2004.” The intent of IDEA is to assure that all individuals who qualify for special education services, regardless of their specific cognitive, physical or emotional disabilities, will be provided with free, appropriate educational services in the least restrictive environment.

IDEA provides federal financial assistance to state education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) to underwrite special education and related services to eligible children with disabilities. Every state receives these funds and must follow all of IDEA’s specific procedures, including those requiring an evaluation to determine whether students are eligible for special education and the additional requirements for subsequent services and re-evaluation.

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The basic requirements of IDEA, often discussed using a set of acronyms, are:

Evaluation School districts must identify all children suspected of having disabilities who attend school in their district and, with parental consent, conduct evaluations of those children. This includes participation in their state's "Child Find" system to assure that early identification of eligible children takes place. Schools and districts must also respond to requests for evaluation of students by either conducting an evaluation or advising parents of the school's or district's refusal to evaluate the student. (Parents may appeal such refusals.)

IEP Any student determined eligible for special education through evaluation is entitled to an individualized education program (IEP) that is developed by a team of professionals and the student's parents, based on the evaluation data. This team decides on the individualized special education and related services for the child, and prepares specific content that must be reviewed at least annually. An IEP includes measurable annual goals and short-term objectives or benchmarks, how the child will be included in state and district assessments, and how the child will access the general education curriculum in order to meet state standards.

FAPE Students with disabilities are entitled to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) provided at no charge to parents. The FAPE standard provides the minimal level of services that an eligible student is entitled to receive. If the parents believe the district has failed to provide FAPE, they may request a due process hearing to challenge the school district's program or proposed program.

LRE The least restrictive environment (LRE) refers to placement in a setting as close to the regular classroom as possible. Students with disabilities must have available to them a continuum of placements that range from full-time in a regular classroom with support to full-time in a special setting. They are entitled to be placed in the setting that will meet their individual needs while removing them as little as possible from the regular classroom. The right to services in the LRE is balanced with the right to an appropriate education. Note that finding this balance is often a source of tension between parents and educators.

Amendments to IDEA have specifically articulated that students who attend charter schools are covered under this law and that the district or LEA retains the legal responsibility to uphold the law.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act)

Section 504 prohibits discrimination against persons with a disability by any institution receiving federal financial assistance. ADA prohibits discrimination by any local or state governmental entity, including the public schools, and by any private school unless it is religiously controlled. Both acts define disability more broadly than IDEA does, including any individual who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits life activities, even if that disability does not require special education. For example, a student with asthma may require medication, nursing assistance and accommodations in relation to physical education without requiring special education services. Section 504 requires institutions (including schools) to provide educational and related aids and services designed to meet the individual educational needs of the child. Section 504, does not, however, provide funding for these aids and services.

Both Section 504 and ADA require programmatic accessibility for individuals with disabilities. ADA also has extensive requirements related to the accessibility of the physical facilities. Charter school developers must take care to adhere to these regulations. Section 4E, “Facilities,” gives information about how a school should prepare to be in compliance with ADA.

State Law and Regulations

Charter schools in Missouri must comply with Part B of the Missouri State Plan for Special Education and with the same special education regulations as other public schools. Members of the charter school design team should become well-versed in the law and regulations which together contain the state requirements for special education.

RESOURCES

IDEA idea.ed.gov

Section 504 ed.gov/policy/speced/reg/narrative.html

ADA ada.gov

Missouri Part B dese.mo.gov/governmental-affairs/dese-administrative-rules/incorporated-reference-materials/IDEAPartB-2014

DEVELOPING THE SPECIAL EDUCATION PLAN

The charter school—in line with its goals to educate its students—has the responsibility to develop sound plans for providing special education services to its students and to arrange for appropriate funding, resources or staffing as part of that plan.

Below is a list of components that should be in a comprehensive special education program to serve the needs of all students in your school, rather than just simply operating as a compliance mechanism. Because you are developing a new school, you have a unique opportunity to implement cutting-edge practices. We encourage you to explore your options with the help of an expert in special education.

The following components should be included in a special education program:

- ★ **Personnel** Hire qualified, certified teachers and teaching assistants and establish who among the staff is responsible for case management (oversight and coordination of a special education program).
- ★ **Student Identification** Incorporate systematic procedures to identify students at risk for disabilities, including Child Find, followed by a systematic referral system to evaluate students' more specific needs for special education services. Note that both parents and staff have a right to refer students for evaluation; however, students may not be evaluated without written consent from the parents.
- ★ **Free Appropriate Public Education and Least Restrictive Environment** Plan to provide a continuum of services that delivers free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Note also that new IDEA requirements require that special education programs be based on peer-reviewed research, to the extent practicable.
- ★ **Parental Involvement** Include parental education, notification and involvement in the special education process. Note that schools have very specific obligations related to informing parents of students with disabilities, or those suspected of having disabilities, of their rights.

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Schools must ensure parental participation in the special education evaluation, planning and review processes.

- ★ **Individual Education Program** Plan for creation of an Individual Education Program (IEP) for each student eligible for special education services, along with ongoing implementation of required services and resources. Each IEP must be developed by an eligibility team. The IEP development, review and evaluation process should include timelines for tri-annual re-evaluations and yearly review or development of IEPs, and required parental notice and consent forms.
- ★ **Assessments** As part of the IEP process, enumerate the accommodations students need for the statewide assessments each student will take (MAP, etc).
- ★ **Discipline** Schools must follow specific, more stringent rules for disciplining students with disabilities. It is critical that administration and staff be familiar with these special rules in accordance with applicable law, including the IDEA, and its amendments, Section 504 of Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 162.670-.995, RSMo., and Missouri's State Plan for Part B.
- ★ **Transportation** Consider offering special transportation for students with disabilities, if needed.
- ★ **Compliance Plan** Create a compliance process to ensure the school is in fact providing free appropriate public education, IEPs, Assessments, Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), procedural safeguards, confidentiality, parent involvement and full educational opportunity to all students.
- ★ **Public Awareness** Design a public awareness plan to educate the community about special education and related services in all necessary languages (address dissemination and implementation strategies).

In your charter application, the more plans you can include for the above elements, the stronger the application will be, since it will show that you have anticipated these core needs. Relevant specifics are also important whenever you have them.

RESOURCES

As you research special education, you will learn about early intervention services and “Response to Intervention” (RTI). These are pre-special education interventions designed to support struggling students that can also be used to provide data to determine whether a child requires special education.

National Charter School Resource Center: Special Education This is a great starting place for charter developers looking to develop strong practices for serving students with special needs. Click the second link for an especially valuable resource on Getting Special Education Enrollment Right from the Start charterschoolcenter.org/priority-area/special-education-0, charterschoolcenter.org/newsletter/june-2013-getting-special-education-enrollment-right-start

Special Education Services at the Missouri State Board of Education

The website includes a range of helpful resources on special education including data, information webinars, and other guidance. dese.mo.gov/special-education

Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) at the U.S. DOE

This website includes links to the IDEA statute and related resources. ed.gov/osers

The website for the **National Association of State Directors of Special Education** includes links to a broad range of special education information, tools and resources. nasdse.org

Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) is dedicated to improving educational outcomes for individuals with exceptionalities, students with disabilities, and the gifted. CEC advocates for appropriate government policies, sets professional standards, provides continual professional development, advocates for newly and historically underserved individuals and helps professionals obtain resources. cec.sped.org

National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities serves as a central source of information on disabilities, IDEA, No Child Left Behind (as it relates to children with disabilities) and research-based information on effective educational practices. nichcy.org

Center for Law and Education’s website includes useful briefs on issues related to implementation and enforcement of the rights of students with disabilities. Issue briefs on other issues, such as NCLB, may be useful for charter school developers as well. cleweb.org

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

One in four children in American schools is Latino. While initially charter schools served more African-American students, the Latino population in charter schools is increasing. Many other English language learners, from varying countries around the world, are also present in charter schools. Strengthening teaching and learning for English language learners is central to closing the proficiency gap. Just as with students with special needs, your charter application needs to demonstrate how you will improve and support the academic achievement of English language learners in your school.

The law does not mandate a specific instructional method (e.g., sheltered language instruction, bilingual education, structured immersion, dual immersion, English as a Second Language (ESL)). What you must ensure is that students learn English in a timely manner and have authentic access to the instructional program. We would recommend that you choose a program or strategy that has a research base and fits with all of your curricular choices.

According to the National Alliance, charter schools need to address the specific needs of English Language Learners in the following ways:

- ★ **School opening/recruitment** Similar to the recruitment of special education students, you need to have a strategy (i.e.: go door-to-door, recruit through a non-profit that serves migrant families) to recruit ELLs. Your recruitment materials should be bilingual and you should be prepared to have the capacity to translate parent inquiries if necessary.
- ★ **Admissions** All registration documents should be translated. You need to have a strategy to communicate to parents of ELL students.
- ★ **Identification/assessment** You must determine which students qualify for ELL services as soon as the school year begins. Home Language Survey (HLS) completed by the parents usually informs this designation. Parents must be notified in a timely matter of the child's identification.
- ★ **Program requirements** There is no prescribed program for ELLs. Different schools may use different strategies. A school may also employ different models for different students. The key is to demonstrate how you implement

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the strategies, determine whether they are working and reevaluate programs that are not serving ELLs well.

- ★ **Teacher qualifications** A teacher of ELL students needs to meet the definition of “highly qualified” under Missouri law.
- ★ **Exiting students from the program** The school needs to have an objective assessment that it uses to test students before they can exit the ELL program. The school must follow the student’s progress upon leaving to ensure his or her progress is satisfactory in the regular school program.
- ★ **Program monitoring** Like all of your education programs, you should consistently monitor the program and make adjustments and changes as needed. You could include a calendar in your application that shows how and when you will reevaluate.
- ★ **Parental communication** You need to outline a plan to communicate with parents that includes several modes of communication, all in the home language.

RESOURCES

The National Alliance of Public Charter Schools The National Alliance of Public Charter Schools provides the nuts and bolts of serving English Language Learners in your school. publiccharters.org/publications/serving-english-language-learners-toolkit-public-charter-schools/

The Center for English Language Learners (ELLs) at American Institutes for Research. air.org/center/center-english-language-learners-ells-air

National Charter School Center This site has constantly updated links of ELL resources for charter starters. charterschoolcenter.org/priority-area/english-language-learners

The National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition This website includes resources on grants, data, professional development and best practices for teaching English Language Learners. ncela.us

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development is no longer a workshop here or there or an outside speaker brought in to teach about cooperative learning. Professional development needs to have a laser-like focus on the standards your school is teaching and be guided by the results of your assessments. Your education program and professional development practices must be aligned for either to be effective.

Because of their autonomy, charters can create a professional development calendar that makes sense for their school.



TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

Ewing Marion Kauffman School

One example is the Ewing Marion Kauffman School in Kansas City. The Kauffman School is committed to teacher development to ensure their teachers have the skills, mindsets, and practice necessary to reach their mission of creating college graduates. Summer professional development focuses on building a strong content vision in June which then allows July and August PD to be focused on the practice of routines, systems, and procedures needed to execute the instructional vision for each grade and content team. Using data collected during observations, instructional team leaders lead staff in 3 hours of weekly professional development focusing on skills aligned to the school wide priorities. Professional development goals are progress monitored by coaches and peers through weekly observations and one on one meetings that target individual development goals. In addition, The Kauffman School values consistent feedback to ensure teacher progress is being monitored and affirmed at all times.



TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

Crossroads Charter Schools

At Crossroads Charter Schools, students are released early every other Wednesday in order to permit regular professional development time for the staff.

Some schools are committed to more time for instruction and pay teachers to stay later for PD and planning or hire extra staff so teachers can plan during the school day.

All schools work best with a thorough professional development strategy that is well integrated into the school year. Teachers need time to learn, plan, coordinate, and reflect on their work and traditional school schedules leave precious little time for this. Make professional development a part of the plan from the start.

BEST PRACTICES IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Consider a range of professional development methods. See the list of professional development models below:

- ★ **Involve teachers in professional development planning.** Faculty members are much more likely to buy in and the work is more likely to be relevant if representatives are involved in the planning. While a framework is important in the initial planning stage, it is equally important to have teachers contribute to it as soon as they become part of the school. It's also critical that the entire school community should understand the plan.
- ★ **Allow time and resources for orientation for new teachers.** For example, an extra week at the start of a teacher's first year at the school can provide time to help a teacher get up to speed on curriculum, pedagogy, culture, assessment, etc.
- ★ **Support job-embedded professional development.** Professional development is most effective when work takes place in the school, is aligned to the school's curriculum and instructional approach, and is focused on carefully analyzed teacher needs. One-shot workshops are designed to impart information to teachers all at once, whereas ongoing job-embedded training creates a support system that allows teachers to learn, refine their skills, implement new techniques and reflect on the results collaboratively and over time. Examples include in-school study groups for teachers, peer coaching, teacher-to-teacher collaboration and partnerships between schools and universities. External workshops may still be valuable in imparting new knowledge and skills to teachers. However, they should supplement a job-embedded program, rather than substituting for it.

4C. THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

- ★ **Coaching and mentoring** Pairing a young teacher with an experienced member of the faculty can help to increase his skill. However, many schools also use instructional coaches to support their entire faculty. Effective coaching is grounded in inquiry, involves teachers in the collaborative exchange and construction of knowledge, is ongoing and is connected to teachers' classroom practices.
- ★ **Professional development laboratory** In this model, a seasoned teacher or resident teacher accepts a number of visiting teachers into his or her classroom for three weeks of observation and practice.
- ★ **Observation/modeling** Classroom observations can greatly enhance teachers' understanding of teaching and learning within specific content. A collaborative approach to classroom observation—where the host teacher and observers are active in not only evaluating the work, but also in helping to design the evaluation methods—enhances the skills of all involved.
- ★ **Training for serving specific communities** If your school will be working with student populations with specific needs or characteristics, preparation may include training aimed at these groups. For example, the Council of Great City Schools and Urban Deans program recommends that training for faculty working in at-risk communities focus on issues of child development and multiculturalism specific to children living in poverty.
- ★ **Reflection** A peer critique methodology, Critical Friends, has colleagues gathering on a monthly basis to discuss and examine one another's teaching practices. The program helps keep teachers motivated, engaged and continually learning, which, in turn, builds skills and increases job satisfaction. While this approach makes reflection a focus, most professional development practices will involve reflection. The National School Reform Faculty has some helpful guidelines on critical friends groups. nsrfharmony.org/faq.html

RESOURCES

Leaning Forward (formerly The National Staff Development Council) is committed to improving student learning through professional development. Their website includes a library of resources on topics in professional development. Educators and school leaders may also join to access additional resources and opportunities. learningforward.org

The Annenberg Institute for School Reform has published a range of useful reports on cutting-edge professional development approaches, including this publication on building learning communities and instructional coaching. annenberginstitute.org/publication/professional-development-strategies-professional-learning-communitiesinstructional-coach

Online Professional Development Resources In the last ten years, there has been a proliferation of online professional development for teachers. Below are a couple of the many options:

- ★ From PBS pbs.org/teacherline
- ★ Read Write Think readwritethink.org/professional-development/online-pd
- ★ PD 360 schoolimprovement.com/products/pd360
- ★ True North Logic truenorthlogic.com/educator-effectiveness

INSTRUCTIONAL CALENDAR AND DAILY SCHEDULE

Once you have defined the goals and primary components of your school's educational program, design your instructional calendar and daily schedule to support your program. In Missouri, many charters have taken advantage of their flexibility to provide additional time-on-task for students through longer school days and/or more instructional days in the school calendar. Options available include a school day that lasts longer than other schools in the district, full- or part-time days on Saturdays, and a school year that starts in early August or lasts well into June. Charters are also not mandated to include the same holidays and teacher institute days as the district (although many do to help families that have one or more children at both charter and district schools).

Some charters have implemented year-round schedules to eliminate the loss of learning that can occur during summer break. Others offer or require summer programs, including programs to orient new students to the academic or cultural aspects of the school. As you plan, be sure to find out what other charters are doing and how well their approaches are working. Consider these factors when making choices:

- ★ Applicable state statutes that may impact your school calendar
- ★ The alignment of the calendar/schedule with the school's instructional goals and practices
- ★ Parent and student needs and preferences
- ★ Staffing availability and constraints
- ★ Professional development opportunities and needs
- ★ Funding implications (the calendar should be designed to maximize average daily attendance)
- ★ Advantages and disadvantages of coordinating with local district schools' calendars

4C. THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

- ★ Any constraints you might have on your facility, such as if your school is in a church school, when does the church need the classrooms
- ★ Longer Day, Longer Year

Because of their autonomy, most charter schools have longer school days and years than traditional public schools.

Here are some examples of how and why charter schools pack more time in the calendar:

- ★ Some charter schools require that students have an extended school day, attend one Saturday school session per month and attend class for three weeks in the summer. More time enables them to acquire superior academic skills as well as broaden their horizons with extra-curricular experiences.
- ★ Another school has a school day that is nearly two hours longer than the traditional public school day, allowing many students to have two reading classes and an extended math class every day, with tutoring available during and after school, an average of one to two hours of homework per night, and an intensive independent reading program so that students READ, READ, READ both at home and at school.
- ★ With longer class periods, a longer school day, and a longer school year, a third school provides students with substantially more instructional time than the traditional public high school. This extra time, combined with a disciplined, consistent school culture, high expectations and a team of dedicated teachers, results in dramatically improved academic performance.

4D. TEACHERS AND STAFF

The people interacting with students, day in and day out, will determine the success of your school. The best charter schools strategically plan to recruit, select, develop and retain strong teachers and staff.

In this chapter, we'll focus on recruitment, selection and retention of qualified staff. Professional development is inextricably linked to the education program and therefore more information and resources about professional development can be found in [Section 4C](#), "The Educational Program."

STAFF RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

Before you plan your staffing strategy, ensure you have a mission, vision and culture that will make the best people want to work at your school. People take a job for many reasons including pay, role, mission alignment and working environment. A specific and compelling mission and vision will energize potential staff members and make them want to apply to work at your school. Similarly, you should create a culture that promotes respect of teachers, values teacher autonomy and voice, and ensures that teachers are treated fairly. See [Section 4A](#), "Outcomes, Mission, and Vision," and [Section 4E](#), "School Culture" for more information on planning these pieces.

When recruiting and selecting the staff of a new school, experts recommend that you first select a highly-qualified person or people to fill the school's key administrative/management position(s). The school's leadership should then be allowed to lead the search for other staff. Consider the following as you empower the school leadership to execute staff recruitment and selection:

- ★ Develop a staffing plan that includes the anticipated number of staff members, their positions, the pupil-teacher ratio, a timeline for recruitment and selection and how the staff will be assigned.
- ★ Plan staff resource allocations that will contribute to the achievement of the school's mission and vision. Personnel costs will make up

approximately 70% of your budget, so judge carefully the number, responsibilities and compensation levels of administrators, teachers and other staff you hire to begin the school.

- ★ Begin an active search at least eight to nine months before the start of the school year. Schools opening around the beginning of September should have the full staff hired no later than the beginning of June to ensure time for intensive staff development, team building, and curriculum refinement. Allocate funding for recruitment costs such as advertising, candidate travel, and search consulting services.
- ★ Approach selection in a predetermined, organized way that aligns to your mission and vision. Review applications based on clearly documented and agreed-upon criteria. Develop interview protocols and questions and a rubric to score and evaluate candidates' responses. Complete criminal background checks as required by law, and carefully check candidate references and qualifications. Use offer letters, contracts and related personnel policies that have been vetted as legally appropriate.

Keep in mind that the earlier you look for teachers, the better pool of applicants you will have. Highly-qualified, committed teachers are a valued and too often scarce commodity. Some tips for finding faculty:

- ★ Identify organizations and individuals that can connect you to top talent. These organizations may be universities, teacher preparation programs, education-focused organizations and community groups. Build relationships with these organizations and ask them to help you find top talent by referring names, posting advertisements about openings at your school on job boards, in newsletters, and on social media and talking about your school to colleagues.
- ★ Identify top recruits, whether they are looking for a job or not, and develop an individualized approach to bringing them to your school.
- ★ Provide basic information about charter schools and about your school in particular. Many prospective teachers are unfamiliar with charter schools, or hold misconceptions that can be a barrier to interest in your school.

- ★ Expand advertising to newspapers across the country and attend job fairs.
- ★ If possible, offer enticing incentives and alternative training programs (e.g., signing bonuses, performance-based teacher bonus).
- ★ Emphasize your school's special features including mission and vision, location and student population.

TEACHER CERTIFICATION AND QUALIFICATIONS

The Missouri Charter School Law allows charter schools substantial flexibility in hiring personnel (with notable exceptions, which we discuss below).

Missouri Charter School Law says 20% of the instructional personnel can be noncertified as long as they are supervised by certificated instructional personnel. 80% of the instructional personnel must be certificated.

These requirements allow charter operators to hire individuals who, while they may not hold traditional teaching credentials, bring relevant and interesting experiences to their classrooms. For instance, charters may hire practicing artists to teach art class, or a biologist to teach biology.

In a Foreign Language Immersion school the 80-20 requirement is waived and any teacher whose duties include instruction given in a foreign language have current valid credentials in the country in which such teacher received his or her training.

PERSONNEL POLICIES

One way to create a culture that promotes respect of teachers, values teacher autonomy and voice, and ensures that teachers are treated fairly is to create personnel policies that promote this culture. Staff contracts, personnel policies and staff manuals should be developed prior to recruiting and interviewing potential staff so that all candidates understand the school's expectations and working conditions. Because this area of law and policy is constantly changing, you should consult with an attorney experienced in both public and private employment law. Also, there is no need to reinvent the wheel—this is a time to ask your network of existing charter school leaders for sample policies and manuals and modify them to fit your needs.

At the heart of staff management is a concise outline of performance expectations and how those expectations will be measured. A job description and performance review process is integral to effective staff management and development. The complexity of the job description will vary according to positions, but standard features include:

- ★ Position
- ★ Authority
- ★ Responsibility
- ★ Requirements
- ★ General Duties
- ★ Evaluation
- ★ Qualifications
- ★ Person to whom the individual reports

In order to attract high-quality teachers, charter schools must compete with other schools. In developing a compensation package, give some thought to offering both competitive salaries and benefits and other non-monetary incentives, such as a supportive, collaborative working environment or a

management structure that leaves room for teacher voice. Also, consider developing your own pay scale that accounts for teachers' past experience or for performance in your school. It may cost more to hire experienced lead teachers with master's degrees, but you should carefully weigh what skills and background teachers will need to make your school's educational program succeed. Some charters begin with many new teachers. Others intentionally start with a base of experienced teachers who can build the school's program and support new teachers who come on later. Still others begin with a mix of new and experienced faculty.

RESOURCES

The Long Term Impact of Teachers, Teacher Value-Added and Student Outcomes in Adulthood This research shows the importance of a high quality teacher, and catalyzed new interest in the importance of teacher quality. nber.org/papers/w17699

National Commission on Teaching and America's Future NCTAF highlights teacher retention as a critical strategy for increasing teacher quality and points to the development of learning communities as a means to retain teachers. The website links to reports related to these issues. nctaf.org

National Best Practices: Teacher Recruitment and Pipelines "This paper from the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools and the Illinois Network of Charter Schools highlights seven core practices that are foundational to building a high-quality teacher pipeline and the tactics behind them in an effort to help charter schools, and the organizations that support them, recruit and retain the best talent." charterschoolcenter.ed.gov/publication/national-best-practices-teacher-recruitment-and-pipelines

Center for Teaching Quality This website serves as the hub of a virtual community of teacher leaders from across the country. In addition, it has many valuable resources for school planners and leaders on topics such as coaching and mentoring, professional communities and teacher performance pay. teachingquality.org

Kansas City Teacher Residency kcteach.org

4E. SCHOOL CULTURE

Schools are comprised of individuals from many different groups—administration, faculty, students, parents, alumni, community members, board members, local supporters and more. This section explores how cultivating a strong, supportive school community will help your school prosper. A positive, focused school culture will shape your charter school and provide a foundation upon which learning can occur. Involving parents, families and community partners will bring resources to the school and help your faculty serve the students' needs. Student enrollment policies not only attract students to the school, they also present and explain your school to potential students and begin to instill the school culture from the first connections a child and family have with your charter public school.

Charter developers should consider the school community as part of their planning. The core design team should take into account what the school will “feel like” when it opens and how you will involve various groups. Will you hire a parent coordinator in the first year? Should the school offer parents and community groups meeting space? Plans for all members of the school community can also serve as evidence in the application that your group has fully considered school design and provides further evidence that the school will be an asset to the community.

WHAT IS SCHOOL CULTURE?

Perhaps the simplest way to define school culture is to say that it is the way your school feels to students, families, and staff. Your school culture is the underlying set of norms and values, rituals and traditions, ceremonies and stories that make up a school's character. It's a strong web of social expectations and beliefs that help shape how those connected with it think, feel and act.

Your school culture should be a concrete manifestation of the charter school's mission and vision. If not planned intentionally, the school culture may grow to be positive, but it also can become negative and toxic. The good news is that it is far easier to create a positive culture in a new school than to fix poor culture in an existing school.

Your school will be a new institution and will have the flexibility to design many of the factors that define school culture. As such, the core design team can

have a bigger impact on school culture than most school administrators who step into an already established culture—if you take the time to define what the culture should be and plan how to create it.

Though it may not be mandated by your school sponsor’s particular application requirements, your design team should consider developing student behavior policies and a description of student supports—from advisors to guidance counselors—as part of the proposal. Charter schools have the opportunity to create systems that can better support student learning and promote alternatives to traditional discipline systems.

WHY SCHOOL CULTURE IS IMPORTANT

Culture is not a separate aspect of the school that only encompasses or impacts social relations. It’s tightly linked with the school’s educational program. Research suggests that in all levels of schooling, but especially at the high school level where it is often lacking, it is important for students to feel that they belong. A caring, supportive and respectful culture that encourages academic achievement and hard work can help students learn. Students who are having difficulty feel safer asking for help. And teachers know more clearly who is struggling and who is making new strides. Conversely, a negative school culture—where students do not feel respected, where they fear for their safety, where students who achieve are viewed as “nerds,” for example—can become a roadblock to learning.

When students, teachers and parents have a strong sense of community and commitment to the school, they are more likely to work collectively toward the mission of the school and are more likely to be motivated and energized. Research confirms that high levels of trust among the various adults in a school correlate strongly with higher student achievement. At any workplace, in any field, it is more enjoyable and productive to be part of a true team in a positive and dedicated atmosphere. A supportive team approach can be doubly important as elementary school students form attitudes about education, and older students fight against societal attitudes about enthusiasm for academics and simple adolescent boredom.

The bottom line is that charter school designers who plan for and create a culture aligned to the school’s mission and vision are much more likely to achieve the outcomes they seek for students.

CREATING A SCHOOL CULTURE

During the design process, you probably will be visiting similar schools to learn about everything from curriculum to operations. While there, be sure to observe and ask about their cultures. Incorporate good ideas into your school. As you're thinking about what you'd like your school culture to feel like and how to develop it, consider some overarching ideas that will contribute to a positive culture:

- ★ A sense of belonging and ownership for students
- ★ A professional culture of openness to improvements and mutual support for teachers
- ★ A sense of voice and ownership for all stakeholders
- ★ Social relationships that are respectful and supportive

Consider these ideas as ways to promote the school culture that the core design team thinks will make your school an enjoyable, effective place to learn. Many of these suggestions come from *Shaping School Culture: The Heart of Leadership* (for more information, see Resources below):

- ★ Start with your vision and mission. How do you envision learning occurring at your school? How would you like students to act and interact in the hallways and classrooms? Is this a school where students work quietly at their desks or a school in which classrooms are filled with the “organized chaos” of group work? Will your school serve a population that arrives with specific needs or expectations?
- ★ Think about what it takes to accomplish your mission. If your high school is aiming to produce graduates who will succeed in college, ask what that will take. How will students need to act in that atmosphere? What will they need intellectually and socially to do well in post-secondary education? What will inspire them to reach for this?

4E. SCHOOL CULTURE

- ★ Identify core norms, values and beliefs that will undergird the school. This includes identifying norms of behavior and decision-making, establishing values concerning education and its purposes and setting forth belief statements that can be guideposts for the school. Be clear about how teachers, administrators, students and parents should treat each other. Specify what mix of respect, caring, expectations, discipline, concern and support will be a trademark of the school. Relationships among adults will be mirrored among the students.
- ★ Plan for extensive, regular communication among all the adults. Teachers should be sharing both successes and struggles. Schedule time to build supportive relationships among various groupings of teachers in the school. Make sure they are closely involved in decision-making. When these strategies are in place, teachers usually promote them among students as well.
- ★ Attend to the symbols, artifacts, history and logos of the school. These outward manifestations of the school's culture and vision communicate what the school stands for, both overtly and subconsciously through their level of professionalism and "style." Encourage new faculty and school leaders, as they are hired, to keep early artifacts of the new charter school that can make a difference in the future.
- ★ Consider physical ways to express school culture. Maybe your school creed or mission statement is painted on a prominent wall in the school building. Perhaps students recite the school creed each morning as part of the opening of the day. Creating daily reminders of your school culture serves to center both faculty and students around the school mission.
- ★ Generate rituals, traditions and ceremonies. Bringing the community together—and how you do so—transmits the culture. Ceremonies at the beginning and end of the year can forge community bonds. Commemorate important events and transitions and host award and recognition events to honor people who are making a difference and exemplify what your school is about.

4E. SCHOOL CULTURE

- ★ Celebrate early successes, both large and small. Without the visible celebration of efforts and achievements, motivation can be lost.
- ★ Weave culture into other decisions. Not every aspect of your school culture will be advanced by events and codes of conduct. In fact, much of the school's culture becomes embodied in everything from how the schedule is created to the type of facility that houses your school. Advisory periods, relationships with parents and the outside community, school discipline, whether to hire a school social worker or student support staff—all these and more are aspects of the school culture. There are many factors at play in making choices about how your school will operate—try to keep the impact on school culture in mind as well.
- ★ Ensure staff members understand the vision behind the culture. If you don't have the adults on board, the school culture will be vulnerable to the inevitable challenges that arise in an organization. Have systems in place, both in writing and verbally, to promote and explain the culture and how it is manifested. Consider making school culture part of the professional development. If staff members don't understand the procedures or agree with the culture, then it may jeopardize the school's success.
- ★ Be prepared to sustain the culture. A living school culture can unravel or go in directions you don't anticipate. School leaders must remind people in a thoughtful, respectful and energizing way throughout the year: This is what we're about; this is how we handle this. Back up rhetoric with actions: If a student comes in without a uniform, follow through with the stated consequence.

SCHOOL CULTURE PLAN

Use the following diagram to start planning for strong school culture. From student outcomes, you will craft your school's mission, vision and values. From there, you will draft culture goals which might include goals around staff retention, student attendance and others you see fit. Next, create a culture statement that describes the school culture you seek and, finally, brainstorm discreet activities and actions you will take to build the culture you want.

Student Outcomes

Mission/Vision and Values	
Mission	Values

Culture Goals

Culture Statement	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ What your school must feel like to students, families, and staff in order to achieve your school's mission. ★ Promotes positive environment with high behavioral and academic expectations to foster students' intellectual, social, emotional development. 	

4E. SCHOOL CULTURE

Structure	Culture Activity / Ongoing Action
Physical Space (office, hallway, classroom, etc.)	
Student Transitions (arrival, departure, passing periods, etc.)	
Student Expectations (discipline, policies, etc.)	
Student Traditions (ceremonies, awards, meetings, etc.)	
Staff Expectations (employee handbook, meeting norms, interpersonal conflict, etc.)	
Staff Traditions (holiday parties, awards, staff meetings, etc.)	

RESOURCES

There are many good books available that delve more deeply into how to foster a positive organizational culture. Some of these books are about schools in general; some are about any type of organization:

- ★ **Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice and Leadership,** by Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal
- ★ **Shaping School Culture: The Heart of Leadership,** by Terrence E. Deal, Kent D. Peterson
- ★ **Revisiting “The Culture of the School and the Problem of Change,”** by Seymour Bernard Sarason
- ★ **Organizational Culture and Leadership,** by Edgar H. Schein
- ★ **Building Community in Schools,** by Thomas J. Sergiovanni
- ★ **The Power of Their Ideas,** by Deborah Meier.

4F. GOVERNANCE

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

Establishing effective school governance is a critical responsibility that many charter school planners tend to overlook or underestimate. Charter schools have many more opportunities and responsibilities than a typical public school. Good governance helps ensure the school is moving in the right direction.

Governance has proven to be one of the greatest challenges faced by charter schools. Along with facilities and financial hurdles, confusion or disputes about governance have seriously threatened the survival and stability of numerous charter schools around the country and have caused many to close. But, with foresight and planning, governance can be a source of strength for your school, instead of a problem.

In Missouri, all charter schools must be operated by a nonprofit organization. See [Section 2D](#), “Understanding the Law and Authorization Process,” for more information about the implications and requirements of operating a nonprofit.

BYLAWS AND OPEN MEETINGS

It is critical to plan your Articles of Incorporation and bylaws carefully—they serve as the legally binding framework for your school’s governance and decision-making processes. Bylaws can help prevent or resolve conflicts and disagreements and can protect the organization from potential problems by clearly outlining rules around procedures, rights and powers. When drafting your Articles and bylaws, take the school’s mission and educational philosophy into account, and review examples from other charter schools. Write the Articles of Incorporation and bylaws with the assistance of an attorney with knowledge of Missouri education law and nonprofit corporation governance. Remember that both may be revised, but must be filed with appropriate agencies to be effective.

Missouri charter schools are subject to the Missouri Sunshine Law, which requires that all meetings, records, votes, actions and deliberations of the board of directors be open to public, unless provided by law. Closed meetings are permitted (but not required) for discussions involving matters such as employment issues and student disciplinary cases. All other board discussions and actions must be conducted at a meeting open to the public, and closed meetings must be properly convened and recorded. Among other requirements, an “open meeting” requires that your school give the public at least 24 hours posted notice of the meeting.

THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

A nonprofit organization is governed by a board of directors, which will bear the ultimate responsibility for the success of your charter school. The key duties of an effective charter school board are to:

- ★ **Provide oversight.** Just like the board of directors of a corporation, a charter school’s board makes the school’s management accountable to a diverse group of people who have the general interest of the school at heart and are not directly involved in the operations of the school.
- ★ **Oversee the finances.** Boards establish fiscal policy and boundaries, approve the budget, exercise financial control and review and approve major commitments of funds.
- ★ **Promote the charter school’s mission.** Board members advocate for their school by promoting its mission and goals within the community and in the wider education reform arena.
- ★ **Hire and supervise the charter school administrator.** One of the most important roles of the board is to recruit and support an administrator who can provide vision and leadership to the charter school. The administrator is designated to act on behalf of the board to implement its decisions. See more on this relationship below.

- ★ **Set important policies.** The board makes major financial and operational decisions for the school, setting policies that impact how or whether the school makes progress toward meeting its student achievement goals. The board also engages in long-range planning.
- ★ **Raise funds.** The ability to raise funds is an important measure of a board's effectiveness in serving a charter school. Building a group of regular financial donors will make it easier for the charter school to fulfill its mission and achieve its goals.

RESOURCES

Charter Board Partners is a national nonprofit that works to ensure that the boards governing public charter schools are focused on quality, equity, and accountability, so that every public charter school is providing its students an excellent education. charterboards.org

Bylaw Resource “The Massachusetts Charter Schools Trustees Guide,” by Marci Cornell- Feist, provides guidance on developing bylaws and resources related to other areas of board governance. pioneerinstitute.org/pdf/trustees_guide.pdf

A guide to the Missouri Sunshine Law can be received by contacting the Office of the Missouri Attorney General – PO Box 899, Jefferson City, MO 65102 or ordering on line at ago.mo.gov

The Ultimate Board Members Book: A 1-Hour Guide to Understanding and Fulfilling Your Role and Responsibilities This book is a basic and jargon-free description of how boards work, what the job entails, serving on committees and task forces, and much more.

BoardSource This site includes resources and tips on effective board development and governance. boardsource.org

GOVERNANCE VS. MANAGEMENT

There is a difference between governance and management. Governance focuses on “big picture” decisions, long-term planning, policy development and enhancing the future of the school. Management addresses decisions about daily operations and the staff. To put it another way, governance is about strategic decisions, while management is about tactical decisions. Typically, the board of directors focuses on governance issues, while the school leaders focus on day-to-day management issues.

The board must understand that its role is governance. However, the board’s level of involvement in day-to-day management can vary from school to school. Governance and management aren’t polar opposites, but are part of a continuum, which is why the roles of board and staff must be clearly defined and understood from the outset to avoid conflict. Good communication between the board and the school administrator is especially important in the first year, as both parties learn where their roles overlap and diverge.

School organizers should clarify the role and limits of the board in writing by developing and implementing a formal set of policies, which can be revisited when questions arise. Make sure clear procedures are articulated about how the board will evaluate the school’s leadership.

The following chart, adapted from *The Trustee Handbook: A Guide to Effective Governance for Independent School Boards* by Mary Hundley DeKuyper, provides an illustration of the types of decisions boards and school leaders typically address. Your school may have a different breakdown of responsibilities, but be sure everyone is clear on who makes the final decisions.

Board of Directors	Shared between Board and School Leader	School Leader
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Mission ★ Sustainability ★ Leadership ★ Strategy Decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Finance Policies ★ Employment Terms ★ Enrollment ★ Student Expulsion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Staffing ★ Academic Program ★ Student Disciplinary Policies ★ School Operational Systems

RESOURCES

Many resources are available to help you run an effective board of directors. Focus on those written specifically for charter schools, since not all advice for nonprofit boards in general is relevant.

The High Bar This site includes best practices and resources about charter school boards. thehighbar.com/resources

US Charter Schools' excellent guide to operating a charter school board, "Governing Boards," includes extensive detail. uscharterschools.org > Search for "Governing Boards"

"Charter Schools: Creating Effective Governing Boards" is a part of a series of resources for charter operators that covers everything from identifying board members to developing effective board self-assessment. A PDF of the short version is at uscharterschools.org/gb/governance. The full version is available, with each chapter a Word document, atuscharterschools.org/governance/contents.htm

BUILDING A STRONG BOARD FROM SCHOOL DESIGN TEAM TO LONG-TERM BOARD

The transition of governance from a core design team to a sustainable governing board of directors is a critical part of any charter school's evolution. Usually, the school's board of directors is a mix of some or all of the core design team and some new members. Regardless of who sits on the board of directors, however, you should plan ahead for how your new board will take over responsibility for the school. See [Section 3A](#), "The Core Design Team."

The leadership and management skills needed during start-up are different from those needed to govern and guide the school over the long term. Discuss the desire, time and abilities needed to serve on the board of directors with members of the design group and be sure everyone feels comfortable to bow out if necessary. Board membership is likely to require eight to twelve hours on average per month, with more time needed in the school's first years. When adding new board members, make sure everyone is on the same page with regard to the end goals of the school, the proposed school culture and educational plan, etc.

It is helpful to have a written procedure for adding new board members. This may require service on a board committee before full membership; an interview with the board chair, school founder or school leader and one other board member; and a nomination by a board member. Following a written policy ensures that new board members are not added without proper consideration by the whole board. Being a board member for a start-up charter school takes dedication and commitment. Be sure everyone understands that before signing on.

Once the charter is granted, plan to begin to operate as a board as soon as possible. Formalize the governing board, hold the first official governing board meeting, adopt the bylaws, and elect officers. It is much easier to practice running effective meetings and to learn how to work together as a board before the school is open.

It's typical that in the pre-opening phase, before you have full staff in place, the board may be pitching in and doing more management-related tasks. Once you hire staff, the board can then shift attention to higher-level governance issues. Be prepared to hand over the day-to-day and on-site responsibilities as the transition unfolds.

The right mix of skills, knowledge and points of view on a board of directors can make a big difference in how well your school operates. Make informed choices when deciding who will be invited to be a board member, with a vision of a balanced, effective board in mind as you compile the membership. For example, not everyone necessarily has to be willing and able to raise money for the school, but at least some members should, and the same goes for educational expertise, community connections and the other roles a board serves. Remember you need “do-ers” and you need “heavy-hitters.”

TOP 10 CHARACTERISTICS OF A HIGHLY-EFFECTIVE CHARTER SCHOOL GOVERNING BOARD

1. Passionate, unwavering belief in the charter school's mission and core values
2. Clarity of collective vision—where the school is and where it wants to be in the future
3. A firm understanding of the charter's promises and a clear, consistent way to measure them
4. Clarity of roles and responsibilities for the full board, individual trustees, committees and the school's chief administrator(s)
5. Demonstration of a clear understanding of the difference between governance and management
6. Focused on results
7. The right structure in terms of board size, composition, committee structure and officers
8. Board meetings focused on strategic questions, not just reporting
9. A school leader who has the time to assist in the creation of effective governance
10. A strong partnership between the board and the school leader, built on mutual trust and respect

BOARD MUST-HAVES

A strong charter school board represents a diversity of gender, age, race and occupation. Additionally, the board as a whole should have expertise or experience in:

- ★ Accounting/Finance
- ★ Fundraising/Development
- ★ Construction/Real Estate
- ★ Legal
- ★ Technology
- ★ Human Resources
- ★ PR/Communications
- ★ Education
- ★ Medical
- ★ Community/Volunteer
- ★ Board Experience

Use the chart on the following page to determine if your board is diverse and has the necessary expertise and experiences. If you are weak in any of these areas, consider recruiting additional board member(s) as appropriate.

In addition to diverse perspectives and key skills, The Northwest Regional Education Laboratory recommends building a board of members who have at least three of these traits and characteristics, in any combination.

- ★ Industry—willingness to commit the time and energy to the work that needs to be done
- ★ Intellect—intelligent people who understand education, including the “big picture”
- ★ Expertise—individuals with experience in real estate, law or other useful areas
- ★ Affluence—individuals or corporations can contribute funds as well as in-kind donations
- ★ Influence—political, social, economic
- ★ Leadership—proven skills in more than one setting
- ★ Time—available time and willingness to commit time to the board

Additionally, though the Missouri Charter School Law doesn't require board members to be from your area, we suggest keeping the board local, both for logistical reasons and because local members are more likely to be invested in the success of the school.

Finally, some school boards have one or more seats reserved for parents of students in the school and/or community members. Others create a special parent advisory council that provides advice and input to the board and acts as a conduit between the board and the parent body. If you have parents or community members on the board, ensure that they bring the skills and commitment that any board member should possess.

Parental and community involvement does not have to start or end at the board of directors. The charter school developer may wish to invite some individuals to be on specific committees without being on the board of directors. Other volunteers may fall into a more general category of “advisors” whom the school solicits for advice and help on an as-needed basis. For instance, a lawyer with whom a school has developed a relationship may be interested in providing pro bono legal services without making the additional commitment of serving on the school’s board. Note that the school should be thoughtful about creating additional structures that require management and could blur decision-making.

Finally, take into account any conflict of interest when considering a new board member. Integrity and public accountability are musts in a nonprofit organization and public enterprise. Board members should not have any direct or indirect financial interest in the school or profit financially from its operations. If situations arise where this cannot be avoided, board members must abstain from voting on issues in which they may have an economic interest. If staff members are on the board, it is imperative to avoid potential conflicts through written policy as well as actual practice. As a simple example, staff members who serve on the governing boards of their school should not vote on issues relating to their own compensation. Likewise, the board of directors must have the authority to remove the school director or principal for cause, regardless of whether that person also sits on the board. You should be aware that some funders make grants only to schools that have no staff or close relatives of staff as voting members. Many boards include the school director as a non-voting member to avoid this concern.

BOARD DIVERSITY

Expertise/Experience	Board Experience																			
	Community/Volunteer																			
	Medical																			
	Education																			
	PR/HR/Communications																			
	Technology																			
	Legal																			
	Construction/Real Estate																			
	Fundraising/Development																			
	Accounting/Finance																			
Race or Ethnicity	Occupation																			
	Other																			
	African-American																			
	Latino/a																			
	Asian																			
Age	White																			
	51-Over																			
	36-50																			
Gender	21-35																			
	Female																			
Board Members	Male																			

4G. FINANCE AND OPERATIONS

Many charter school leaders have a background in education, not in business. As a charter school leader, you are operating an organization as well as a school, and that organization needs to have well-functioning business processes in order for you to successfully execute your school's mission. Poor fiscal management is one of the most common reasons for charter school closure. This section defines the kinds of finance and operations functions necessary for your charter school, and provides tips for staffing and operating to successfully fulfill those functions.

FINANCE

Your charter school, as its own non-profit organization, will need to have well-functioning financial operations, including:

- 1. Developing budgets and financial plans**
- 2. Recording all activities in an accounting system**
- 3. Producing monthly and annual financial statements**
- 4. Executing loans and soliciting other external funding**
- 5. Tracking grant income and expenses, and producing related reports**
- 6. Procurement**
- 7. Paying vendors**
- 8. Managing payroll and related federal, state, and local tax and retirement contributions**
- 9. Reconciling bank accounts**
- 10. Executing and maintaining insurance coverage**
- 11. Managing revenue collections**

FINANCE STAFF & GOVERNANCE

Think through how your school will staff or contract financial operations in your start-up period as well as over the entire term of the charter. Your school might grow to support a small team conducting financial operations, but not necessarily in year one. Therefore, it is important to articulate how the planning year and year one of operation will be staffed or serviced for financial operations and how this may evolve as the school grows.

Consider bringing someone onto your design team, and ultimately onto your staff, who has relevant experience with non-profit and/or education finance. If you cannot find someone with this experience to serve on your design team, consider hiring an expert or finding one to serve pro bono to help you develop the budget, business plan, and financial systems and controls. The work of financial operations will begin during your planning year, so consider staffing or contracting for financial operations as soon as your planning year's operations begin.

Establishing a business office can take many different forms. Most schools set up their financial system management following one of three models:

- ★ Hire a full-time business manager to run the business office, staffed by personnel that handle all the responsibilities of the office.
- ★ Hire a full-time business manager to run the business office, and outsource some or most of the office's routine activities, such as bookkeeping, human resources and/or payroll.
- ★ Contract with a private business services provider and hire a staff member to carry out certain day-to-day functions at the school.

Regardless of their specific roles, plan to hire qualified personnel to handle the financial management of the school. The school's leader, in many cases, will not have financial expertise nor will the school leader have the capacity to conduct day-to-day work related to the school's finances. Therefore, the school leader needs to be able to staff and oversee qualified, dedicated personnel for the finances. Having an effective team to provide non-academic services will also allow the school leader to remain focused on student achievement but still cognizant of the school's finances and budgets. In addition to general finance, accounting and operations expertise, key skill sets to look for in these positions include the ability to juggle an enormous number of tasks and projects concurrently, being highly detail-oriented and having superior customer service skills with all constituents, including coworkers, students, families and board members.

As you are recruiting board members, you should seek at least one to two board members with considerable financial expertise. You will need a board treasurer and a functioning finance committee of the board. In order for your board to effectively oversee the financial management of your school, board members will need to fully understand your financial plan and compliance requirements. The board of directors should have an explicit and clear role in oversight of the school's finances, especially for approval of expenditures over certain amounts or that vary from the approved budget. The board's treasurer and chair should be involved in reviewing financial statements, hiring the auditor and approving the school's annual budget. See [Section 4F](#), "Governance".

FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES

A comprehensive financial management system must address all aspects of fiscal management. At a minimum, such a system will include the following elements:

- ★ A comprehensive set of fiscal management policies and procedures, clarifying who has authority over the school's fiscal affairs, internal controls, accounting practices, purchasing and personnel practices. As your finance staff commences its work, it will be important for them to establish systems of checks and balances with the school leader, to limit any financial pitfalls from bounced checks to embezzlement. For example, different people should be responsible for writing the checks and reviewing the bank statements, and checks should require two signatures.
- ★ A budget development calendar and budget monitoring system.
- ★ An accounting system, usually consisting of a computer-based accounting package with a chart of accounts customized to the school's needs and state reporting requirements.
- ★ A system of conducting timely and accurate payroll and ensuring that appropriate tax and retirement funds are withheld and forwarded to the appropriate agency.
- ★ Establishment of external review of reports by qualified personnel including board members, CPA and auditors.

It's essential that you use practices consistent with the Missouri financial accounting manual, provide for an annual audit by a certified public accountant, and publish audit reports and annual financial reports. Consult Missouri charter school law for more details of what's required for a charter school. .

You will need to be proactive in working with your sponsor to understand all compliance and reporting requirements during startup and ongoing operations, and incorporate those requirements into the duties of the finance team.

BUDGETING & FINANCIAL PLANNING

By starting with a well thought out budget and a comprehensive financial plan, charter school developers can lay the groundwork for a fiscally sound organization and avoid problems down the road. If created carefully early in the application process (and revised often as new circumstances arise), a budget serves as an iterative roadmap for the school's future and shows the sponsor and funders that the group proposing to operate the charter school is well-organized and takes fiscal responsibilities seriously. To begin planning for your charter school, start with understanding the core elements of a financial plan: enrollment, revenues and expenses.

Enrollment The main driver of charter school funding is the number and type/demographic of students that are projected to be enrolled at the school. Estimate each grade to be served, along with the challenges associated with recruitment. Budget for marketing and recruitment efforts in the financial plan, so that you can ensure that you achieve targeted enrollment. Ideally your charter school will maintain a student waiting list in order to have more predictable finances and instructional planning.

Revenues Each charter school will have a varied combination of revenue sources depending on location, student demographics and other factors. Charter schools receive funds from the State for each student who is enrolled, referred to as "per-pupil funding." These per-pupil disbursements are the main source of income revenue for most charter schools. Revenues introduce the need for fund-based accounting within charter schools. Each revenue source is treated as a separate fund and each fund will have various reporting and compliance requirements associated with it. It is important to understand the requirements of each funding source in order to properly receive and retain the revenues.

Categorical/Supplemental Funds A charter school may apply for and receive any grant that is administered by the State Education Agency (SEA) that is available for school districts. While administered by the State and often

provided to the District, these funds are often sourced from the federal government. Categorical funds are directed for specific uses only and are supplemental to the general operations of the school. Some of these funds are directed at helping low-income students and might be restricted to special literacy programs, small group-learning environments and support services. Categorical funds include (but are not limited to):

- ★ Supplemental General State Aid
- ★ No Child Left Behind Title I
- ★ English Language Learner (ELL)
- ★ Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and state SPED funding

Charter schools qualify for SGSA and Title I funds based on the proportion of students who are eligible to receive free or reduced price meals and, in the case of Title I funds, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Likewise, a charter qualifies for ELL funding based on the percentage of English Language Learner students enrolled in the school. Charter developers should consult with the sponsor to learn about the funding formulas they use to disburse categorical funds to schools.

For budgeting purposes, keep in mind that these categorical funds can be hard to quantify since you don't know how many low-income students will attend your school, and the accounting rules can be complex. Some authorizers, in the district role of disbursing categorical funds, assume all charters will get Title I funds for 40% of their students in the first year, for example. In subsequent years, actual counts are conducted. ELL funds sunset for each student after three years of eligibility, under the assumption that in that period the student has achieved a level of language proficiency to no longer need the special services. Be sure to understand the procedures for disbursing each of these categorical funds and make conservative assumptions about how much categorical funding is available each year.

Charter Start-Up Grants The Federal Government through its Charter School Program Grants provide start-up grants. Start-up grants are highly competitive and are typically available only after your school has been sponsored. Refer to the Missouri Charter Public School Association for information regarding the current status of Charter School Program Grants.

Fees Charter schools can by law charge minimal fees for uniforms, field trips, and programs prior to and after school. While charter schools should not look to parents as a major source of revenue, student fees can assist the school to run certain projects or programs. Several charters use fees to help run after-school programs. Most charter schools charge fees on a sliding scale, depending on families' financial situations. For budgeting purposes, be sure to discount your projected amount receivable due to under-collection of fees.

Loans Debt can be a necessary and beneficial tool for growth. Many schools take out a loan to buy or renovate their facility. It is usually not advisable to take out a loan for operating expenses, although lines of credit are sometimes needed to fund a gap in timing of receipt of revenues and payment of expenses, and it can be provided by the bank that is holding the school's accounts. Remember that if you borrow money, you will have to include debt service in your operating expenses—all the money you borrow has to be paid back with interest. A line of credit allows a borrower to obtain access to a pre-approved loan amount without re-applying each time as long as the total of borrowed funds does not exceed the credit limit. At times, credit is drawn down to make up a shortfall in cash flow and it is paid back in a month or two without incurring high borrowing costs.

Fundraising Fundraising from foundations, corporations, government grants and individuals is a key revenue source for charters. Monetary contributions to charter schools with 501(c)3 status are tax-deductible, which provides donation incentive for local individuals and companies. For both foundation support and contributed income, don't forget that the process takes time and typically incurs costs as well (mailings, writing proposals, events, etc.). Each school will have its own mix of funds. Consider these sources during the budgeting process:

Foundations Some foundations have made an explicit commitment to support charter schools or school choice, while others are interested in supporting types of education or local institutions. Research to find out which philanthropic organizations might support your school.

In-kind donations In-kind donations are non-monetary contributions of supplies or labor. Like monetary donations, in-kind gifts are tax-deductible, with certain restrictions. Many charter schools have been able to secure full classrooms of used furniture from consolidating or closing district schools, computers from local businesses, volunteer hours from parents or other supporters, and pro bono professional services such as legal or architectural. Be cautious not to take everything that is offered to your school, since receiving unneeded contributions can be more of a hindrance than a help. Schools should create a list of in-kind needs as a communication tool for potential contributors.

For more information on fundraising and sources of funding see [Section 4J](#), “Funding Sources and Fundraising.”

Expenses In order to ensure that you can sustain your organization, you will want to keep your annual expenses to an amount that does not exceed your expected revenues. Along the way, you should consider including some kind of contingency in your expense estimates for matters that you cannot predict at the outset of the year, and create a cash reserve.

The expenses your charter school will incur will vary with enrollment, grade configuration, mission, instructional strategy and location. While you may have to modify your ambitions down the line, there is no need to start cutting corners just yet. Estimate your expenses in the planning process by distinguishing between desired programs vs. essential programs and make sure you will have at least enough to support the essentials critical to your design. The majority of the operating expense in your budget will likely be personnel. Setting salary levels, annual pay increases, bonuses, and negotiating employee health, dental and other insurance benefits are your major budgetary decisions. While you want to provide a competitive

compensation package to your teachers, paying higher salaries and benefits to your employees will impact many aspects of what your school can offer, from the creative programs provided during the school day to the student/teacher ratio in the classroom.

Estimating & Projecting Expenses When creating the required five-year financial plan for the charter application, all expenses should be thoroughly explained in the narrative section and allow for growth of the school. The expenses are typically summarized into the following categories:

- ★ Staff (Administrative Staff, Instructional Staff, Employee Benefits)
- ★ Purchased Services
- ★ Food Services
- ★ Transportation (required in charter application)
- ★ SPED Services
- ★ Annual Audit
- ★ Other Services (including rent)
- ★ Materials and Supplies
- ★ Capital Outlay / Non-Capitalized Equipment
- ★ Sponsor Fee of 1.5%, which is withheld from state aid

Staff The most significant expense is your staff. Start budgeting your staff expenses by listing every position that you will require for each year of your school. You will need to tie your position requirements to your estimated enrollment by grade to ensure that you have accounted for enough of the right instructional personnel. You will also need to identify the positions you will need to run and manage the school, instructionally, financially and operationally. Assign anticipated salaries or hourly wages to each position, adding 7.65% for payroll taxes, 9% (KC) or 15.75% (St Louis) for retirement contribution, and monthly allocation for health benefits, and calculate staff salary and wages from there. In addition to the salary and wages, your charter will pay for employee benefits, which include health care premiums, social security, Medicare, retirement plan contributions, unemployment insurance and workers compensation insurance.

Purchased Services, Materials & Supplies, Capital Outlay, Equipment & Fees For non-staff related expenses, vendor quotes or internet research from other similarly-sized charter schools should give your team enough information to estimate your expenses. Facility costs can be some of the most costly non-staff related expenses in your school, including rent or mortgage, capital outlay (construction and renovation), custodial services, landscaping, general repair and maintenance, security services and waste removal. Basic school expenses, such as classroom consumables, furniture and transportation, can be determined via catalogues and estimates from vendors. Non-salary and wage costs related to staff should be considered, such as the cost of recruiting and professional development.

When it comes time to figure out any financial trade-offs you may need to make while trying to balance your budgeted expenses with your expected revenues, it is helpful to have options. Here are some steps to get you started:

- ★ Review currently operating charter schools comparable to the one you are planning to see how they have allocated resources.
- ★ Try to establish a cost range—for example, state-of-the-art computers as compared to basic machines.

- ★ Understand how expenses grow over time. For example, do you expect a line item to increase as the number of students increases (e.g. textbooks) or by a percentage rate (e.g. salaries or insurance costs)?
- ★ Know which estimates are “fixed” and which can be manipulated to fit your circumstances. Do you really need an after-school program, individualized tutoring and a state-of-the-art computer lab, or can you get by without an after-school program until year two?

Financial Reporting As you read this section about financial reporting, keep in mind the documents that will be required from you as a charter school applicant. Charter schools in Missouri are independent non-profit organizations and the Missouri Charter School Law **requires** that charter school applications include the following components:

- ★ *A financial plan for the first three years of operation of the charter school including provisions for annual audits;*
- ★ *Procedures, consistent with the Missouri financial accounting manual, for monitoring the financial accountability of the charter, which shall meet the requirements of subdivision (4) of subsection 4 of this section;*
- ★ *Preopening requirements for applications that require that charter schools meet all health, safety, and other legal requirements prior to opening;*
- ★ *A description of the charter school’s policies on student discipline and student admission, which shall include a statement, where applicable, of the validity of attendance of students who do not reside in the district but who may be eligible to attend under the terms of judicial settlements and procedures that ensure admission of students with disabilities in a nondiscriminatory manner;*
- ★ *A description of the charter school’s grievance procedure for parents or guardians;*

- ★ *A description of the agreement between the charter school and the sponsor as to when a sponsor shall intervene in a charter school, when a sponsor shall revoke a charter for failure to comply with subsection 8 of this section, and when a sponsor will not renew a charter under subsection 9 of this section;*
- ★ *Procedures to be implemented if the charter school should close, as provided in subdivision (6) of subsection 16 of section 160.400 including:*
 - ★ *(a) Orderly transition of student records to new schools and archival of student records;*
 - ★ *(b) Archival of business operation and transfer or repository of personnel records;*
 - ★ *(c) Submission of final financial reports;*
 - ★ *(d) Resolution of any remaining financial obligations; and*
 - ★ *(e) Disposition of the charter school's assets upon closure,*

In addition to the required reports to be submitted in the charter school application, the following financial reports are **strongly recommended** during the planning and operation of your charter school:

- ★ *Monthly Financial Statements*

In order to keep these reports accurate and relevant, the accounting records and processes should be kept up to date. Monthly financial statements, including the profit and loss and balance sheets, depend on accurate information. These documents will be reviewed by parents, board members, authorizers and auditors so the importance of the data and processes can't be overstated.

- ★ *Cash Flow Projections*

A school can have a surplus at the end of the year, but be short on cash on hand during the year due to the timing of funds' receipt and when costs are incurred. In the cash flow projection, total cash disbursements for each budget interval are subtracted from total cash receipts in the period.

- *Start-up period* Donations and potential startup funding should be clearly planned in order to have enough resources to setup the leadership and structure of the school. Cash flow, prior to July 1 of your first fiscal year, is important to articulate and track so that the 1st year opening begins as smoothly as possible. The start-up cash flow should list expected sources of revenue used to cover these expenses, such as loans and charter school start-up grants, as well as justification of these expectations and evidence of grants that have been committed, received or processed.
- *1st year monthly* A cash flow projection should be created for the 1st year of operations that ties directly to the 1st year line item budget. The budget should be broken down on a monthly basis in order to make sure that the timing of revenues and expenses is considered and planned. A significant portion of the budget can be reimbursable funding sources meaning your school will need cash on hand in order to expend the funds and then seek reimbursement. Cash flow in year one is important to ensure proper payment of payroll and vendors and to remain compliant with reporting standards.

★ *Detailed 1st year line item operating budget*

A budget requires the core design team to figure out how much money your school will have as revenue, where that money comes from, how much you'll spend and on what. Developing the school budget should be a team effort. You will require the input and feedback from multiple team members to make sure that you have developed a sound, realistic and thorough budget. Clearly defined assumptions with back-up documentation will ensure that you are creating a realistic budget that you can defend to the charter school authorizer. Create a dynamic financial model when developing your budget that will give you the ability to link figures to a number of key variables. You can then easily view the effects of different assumptions on the entire budget. The budget is going to be updated and revised multiple times each year so having your team embrace an iterative process early on will help when the factors change that determined your initial budget.

- ★ *Statement of philanthropic need and fundraising plan*
Fundraising will be part of your first year and five-year financial plans, however, an additional document fully explaining your school's philanthropic need is recommended. This can be used to source potential donors as well as work with your district and/or authorizer to show gaps where grants could help. Keep in mind that a fundraising need is not a fundraising plan, so this document should define what is needed as well as a path to achieve that target.

RESOURCES

The U.S. Department of Education Charter Schools Program Grants provides startup grants for “Planning, Program Design and Implementation” of new schools, among other grant programs. We recommend that charter design teams apply for startup funding in the first grant cycle following their sponsorship. Typically these federal funds are disseminated through the state department of education. 2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oij/csp/about-cs-competitions.html

OPERATIONS

Operations are the non-instructional functions that support the day-to-day operations at the school. Operational duties might seem unimportant, especially in the rush and complexity of a new school launch, however, school lunches, custodial services, security, transportation and technology impact students' ability to learn, and insurance and student records directly affect whether your school can remain open over the long-term. As a charter operator, you will essentially be running a small business, responsible for facets of the school experience that are handled by the central office in a traditional public school. Displaying to the sponsor in your application that you're prepared for non-instructional operations is a sign that your design team has a strong capacity to make the school work.

OPERATIONS STAFF

Often, school personnel wear many hats. For example, charter schools often staff a Director of Finance & Operations, responsible for both facets of non-instructional activities in the school. Some schools have an operations leader and others split these duties among several staffers who have administrative duties. The size of your school and funding levels will impact whether you can hire additional operational staff. Clear roles and responsibilities will protect the school leader and the academic staff's time and allow them to remain focused on teaching, learning and achievement.

The operations leaders should recognize the impact of financial and operational decisions on the academic program, and school leaders should take the time to understand the scope of work and responsibilities for non-academic staff members. Staff the back office appropriately to prevent burnout of the non-academic team. Have an operational policies and procedures manual that clearly explains how all functions are handled. Written guidelines are especially useful when a key staff person leaves the job and transition to a new person is required.

OUTSOURCING

At times, charter schools will choose to save safe time by outsourcing non-academic functions. This allows the charter to leverage an external resource without having to recreate the function on its own.

As you are looking to outsource a specific service, research the going rates for various services and ask for references from satisfied clients. Develop formal operating agreements with the firm for any services they will provide, including the terms under which they will provide them, when they will be accomplished and consequences if the work is not done properly or on a timely basis.

MAJOR OPERATIONAL TASKS

Transportation In the application, a charter school must state whether the school intends to provide transportation for students. If so, they must describe the transportation plan and explain budget revenue and expenditure assumptions including those related to anticipate state aid pursuant to section 163.161 of Missouri charter school law. If the school intends to contract with the local district or any other third party for transportation services, discuss the status of those plans and provide evidence of the third party's readiness and terms for providing those services.

Insurance A charter school, at its own expense, must procure and maintain insurance covering all of its operations that are beyond any coverages provided by the sponsor. The following insurance coverage is the required minimum. Check to see whether your sponsor imposes particular requirements.

In the application, a charter school must provide evidence of ability and preparation to obtain liability insurance coverage (minimum ABEST rating) in the following areas: • Directors' and Officers' Liability • Commercial General

Comprehensive Liability that also expressly covers corporal punishment and athletic participation • Educators' Legal Liability • Employment Practices Liability • Sexual Abuse Liability (separate policy or a separate part of general comprehensive insurance with independent limits) • Automobile Liability • Excess Liability or Umbrella (i.e. bundled commercial general liability, directors' and officers' liability, automobile liability, and sexual abuse liability) • Workers Compensation Liability • Surety bond for the school's chief financial officer in an amount to be determined based on the cash flow of the school or evidence that school's liability insurance covers employee theft insurance • Include evidence to support the budget expense assumptions related to insuring the schools such as copies of broker or agency estimates.

Food Service Providing meals to students is an important part of the school day, but it also can be difficult due to logistics, nutritional and safety requirements and free or reduced-price meal paperwork. There are a number of routes charter schools can take to provide food services to their students. Your decision may depend in part on your facility's kitchen or cafeteria.

- ★ *Develop a food service program in-house* Your school must become a Food Service Authority (SFA) in order to manage its own food service. The school will also need to hire staff, ensure that they have appropriate facilities for preparing food that meet local health standards, develop menus that meet nutrition standards, and, if the school serves low-income students, apply for participation in federal and state child nutrition programs. Although managing a food service program is demanding, some schools prefer this option—either initially or once their charter is well-established—because it provides them freedom to develop a food service program aligned to their mission and goals.
- ★ *Contract with a vendor* Charter schools may contract with a food service vendor. To contract with an outside vendor, charters may still need to become a Food Service Authority or be added to the non-district's Food Service Authority.

Regardless of which route you choose, all schools need to carefully track student eligibility for free or reduced-price meals. Free or reduced-price meal rates are used not only in the provision of meals, but to determine low-income rates of schools and eligibility for other funding, such as federal Title I funds under the No Child Left Behind Act. At the beginning of each year, your school will need to distribute “Household Income Eligibility Applications” to all households.

Maintenance, Custodial & Security Costs and operational responsibilities for the cleanliness and maintenance of the charter school facility can require a combination of staffing and contracting. Often times it is easier for a small charter school to contract these services but the contract itself should be very clear on the standards to be maintained. This will allow for an already busy school employee to manage the vendor in accordance to the contract and hold them responsible. Maintenance costs will vary depending on the age of the building and the ability of the charter school to set aside funds for these costs (typically excluding capital expenditures). Since maintenance and custodial staff typically perform most duties after school hours, a security guard could be necessary to monitor the facility access.

Procurement Your team will need to find appropriate vendors and develop a process for procuring materials and supplies for the school, including office and classroom supplies, copy machines and other office equipment, furniture, library books, and educational materials and textbooks. Include in the process an inventory and monitoring system as well as guidelines for how often orders will be placed, noting that items’ lifespan will differ by supply or material (e.g., furniture should last years, while certain classroom materials must be replaced annually, and office supplies will need more frequent replenishment). Given that furniture can be a significant expense, think about whether to buy, rent or obtain donated items.

Information Technology The use of technology in charter schools is important and connects to the idea that charters are innovative schools. Each school should have a technology plan in place and someone to implement that plan and keep your IT system running and up-to-date. In addition to having

sufficient computers and connectivity to allow students to access the Internet, consider the many educational software programs, as well as technological teaching tools such as overhead projectors and student response systems.

- ★ *E-Rate* Most charter schools have used the E-Rate program, a federal grant with the goal of eliminating the “digital divide”. E-Rate funds provide discounts to assist most schools and libraries in the United States in obtaining affordable telecommunications and internet access.

Professional Services Your school should also have plans for the other professional services that an operational institution like a charter school needs. The following are examples of major areas of services that can be contracted (in addition to business services outlined above) and will provide your school with additional and necessary support:

- ★ *Human Resources* The laws surrounding employment are constantly being updated and require consistent attention and understanding. Personnel expense is the largest budget area for a charter school and HR services can provide recruiting, hiring/firing, payroll, compliance, benefits administration and employee evaluations.
- ★ *Marketing and Public Relations* Especially in the beginning, charter schools will need to spend considerable time marketing themselves to prospective families and students and to the community in general.
- ★ *Legal Counsel* Charter schools should plan to consult with qualified legal and other appropriate counsel on a regular basis to keep abreast of any relevant changes to the law. Schools should also have a relationship with legal counsel for consultation if legal issues emerge, especially around hiring and employment practices and special education
- ★ *Audit Services* An audit of each charter school’s finances must be conducted annually by an outside, independent contractor retained by the charter school.

Mandatory Procedures and Records State, federal and some local laws require all schools to follow some procedures for student health and safety, and charter schools are not exempt from these responsibilities. Your school should have systems in place to handle these issues:

- ★ *Student Discipline* Missouri charter schools may institute their own student discipline policies, under sections 160.261, 167.161, 167.164, and 167.171 of Missouri Charter Law. This may include adapting or adopting the discipline policies of the district. If you do base your discipline system on existing policies, make sure that they are consistent with the mission and goals of your school.
- ★ *Criminal Background Investigations* The Missouri Charter School Law requires charter schools to comply with Section 168.133 requiring criminal background investigations for teachers and other school personnel. These should be conducted during the hiring process prior to the employee stepping onto the school campus.
- ★ *Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act* All school personnel are mandated reporters of suspected child abuse, according to Section 210.115.
- ★ *Immunization* Charter schools must comply with state requirements regarding student health examinations and immunizations, as indicated in Section 167.181, and on the Missouri Department of Health and Human Services website.
- ★ *Student Attendance* Charter schools should develop plans to describe how they will meet the State's requirements for providing student attendance data. There are a number of vendors who provide online student information systems that include all manner of student information and statistics.

For more legal considerations, see [Section 2D](#), "Understanding the Law and Authorization Process."

RESOURCES

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Nutrition Program website (dese.mo.gov/financial-admin-services/food-nutrition-services) provides information on both state and federal school-based child nutrition programs, which provide low-income students free or reduced-price meals and snacks. The site also has the application for participation in these programs and additional information, resources and training workshops related to school food services. isbe.net/nutrition

The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services website (mo.gov/government/guide-to-missouris-government/department-of-health-and-senior-services) provides a wealth of information regarding student health requirements, immunizations, and resources to design your school's wellness program.

The National Center for Technology Planning NCTP is a national clearinghouse for information about IT in education, including planning aids and samples of school and district technology plans. nctp.com

E-Rate program The E-rate program website provides information, resources and grant money for bringing technology into schools. e-ratecentral.com

4H. FACILITIES

Identifying and securing a facility to house your school is an essential and challenging piece of the charter school development process. Most charter schools do not receive facilities funding, and unlike traditional public schools, charter schools do not have the ability to raise specialized funds for facilities through property taxes. For the most part, charter schools must find their own sites and finance their facilities (purchases, leases and, most often, needed renovations) out of operating revenues or fundraise to cover the costs. We recommend that design teams begin to tackle the facilities challenge as early as possible in the charter school development process and have a realistic timeline of what is required.

The process does require immense planning, perseverance, creative thinking, and the help of skilled individuals to support. Many charter schools have been able to locate in district facilities, former parochial schools or other educational / training facilities (i.e., community or private colleges, training centers, etc.), while others have found a home in converted office, commercial or light industrial space, and temporary trailers. Despite the challenges of the facilities process, every operating charter school has found a facility, and many have secured buildings that foster and nurture an appealing and appropriate setting for learning.

IDENTIFY COMMUNITY NEED

One of the original appeals of the charter school movement is that charter schools provide a unique educational opportunity for a community that has historically been underserved by existing educational institutions and options. It is essential to ensure that not only does your school design complement the existing community it serves, but there is a substantial need to fill seats and meet enrollment goals. A demand study conducted by a research group, similar to the studies done by IFF, a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI), often prove beneficial to ensure that there is a need for high-quality education options, and affirm that the location of a potential facility, temporary or permanent, is indeed located in a community where families and students live. Ultimately, your school program and design that is reflective of the community you are serving should drive the decision on the facility; the facility should not be the driver for your program.

FROM TEMPORARY TO PERMANENT

There are some instances where charter schools must begin operations in buildings that will not be their final and permanent home. There are examples of schools who open with a slow growth model, beginning with only a few grade levels and grow over time, which ultimately changes the needs for space. Many schools don't have sufficient funding at their launch to rent, buy or build an ideal facility that can accommodate the school's full enrolled student body. In many cases, an inability to find the ideal location in a high-need community often hinders a school's ability to secure a site prior to their first year of operation.

If you encounter any of these situations, one option is to consider moving into a temporary space prior to a long-term, permanent site. There may be more small-school facility options available in your community than there are formal school buildings, and starting in a temporary space can give you a chance to build a track record of success, which can allay potential creditor concerns. It also allows a charter school the time to assess how its mission and day-to-day operation translates to spatial needs and use. For instance, a school may conclude that small in-class library spaces are preferable to a large centralized library.

After its first two years of operation, a charter school can exhibit positive and/or improving test scores, a growing and active waiting list, deep community engagement, strong teacher retention and solid audited financial results to potential lenders and funders, and request funding for a more permanent facility.

The process to locate a temporary facility includes many similar steps to finding a permanent site. Determining need and identifying a space to fit your programmatic needs is essential in both processes. As is educating oneself on financing options and finalizing a financially feasible deal. However, be sure to have a long-term and short-term plan working side-by-side if you decide to go with a temporary site. While there are both advantages and disadvantages to a temporary path, it is important to consider the costs that are associated with temporary space that do not reap long-term benefits when making this decision.

"It is strongly advised that you do not purchase a facility in your first year of operation. Just as most people do not buy a house right after graduating from school, most charters should not buy in the first year. Look for a good 'apartment' to start—it may be cramped, but it should give you what you need, and it may be in a good location. When you are really ready, look for your 'starter home.' Work with it and fix it up until you can afford your 'dream home.'" (Source: [The New Schools Handbook](#))

OVERARCHING IDEAS

Basic advice from the U.S. Charter Schools' guide to facilities:

- ★ Start the planning process early and be flexible in the first few years of operation.
- ★ Allow one or two years (depending on the size of your school) to plan, negotiate, finance and complete a charter school facility project.
- ★ Draw on professional assistance from real estate agents, nonprofit developers, architects, building inspectors, general contractors, real estate financiers and lawyers.
- ★ The facility search and real estate process can entail fluctuations in response timeliness- manage your own expectations carefully about board member ability to participate and problem-solve school real estate challenges in real time.
- ★ If possible, hire a project manager with charter school or non-profit design and construction experience to assist with assessing needs and selecting a site. At the very least, make this a dedicated task for a member of your founding team, not an as-needed assignment. This project manager could potentially play a role in your work with the architect and general contractor.
- ★ Start with sufficient enrollment (and a healthy waiting list to account for attrition) to cover rent or debt service.
- ★ Try to secure enough physical space for at least the first two to three years of your programmatic needs.
- ★ Or, alternatively, secure lease expansion or adjacent space options that will secure gradual space increases as your organization grows. Total occupancy costs should be no more than 18-20% of operating revenues, depending on the neighborhood in which you are operating. Within the first 3-5 years the operating costs should, ideally, be less than or equal to 15% of operating revenues.

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- ★ Occupancy costs can often be fixed, irrespective of student count.
- ★ Minimize the non-instructional space (i.e., administration, resource rooms, support, etc.) that do not add revenue. Make your spaces as multifunctional and flexible as possible; for instance, lunchroom and gym can be housed in the same space, small instruction or pull-out rooms can double as conference rooms via the use of changing furniture groupings.
- ★ In growth years, consider shared spaces for non-instructional space-leased gym facilities at a nearby Y or community center, a community college for performing arts space, etc.
- ★ As a rule of thumb, keep the school's classrooms at or above 45% of the school's total square footage. Partner with community agencies for access to spaces such as gym, libraries, outdoors / recreation areas, large assembly spaces, etc.
- ★ Find a stable location for the school that requires as little time and attention to the upkeep of the facility as possible will play a vital role in securing staff's time to focus on the delivery of the curriculum and programs.

Even after you have identified a need in a community in which you would like to serve and think that you have secured your perfect space, have a back-up facility in mind in case the district pulls their facility offer, or the real estate transaction or renovation hits a roadblock.

FACILITY PLANNING

Start the facility process by developing an outline of what you're looking for, how you'll find it and how you'll pay for it. Subsequent parts of this section give advice about how to design the rest of your course of action. Remember, though, to project your plans for the entire process at the start, because once you've begun, you can't wait until one stage is finished before starting the next. A clear plan will allow the design team to look for new sites, evaluate those that have been identified, and consider funding options simultaneously.

While a plan is important, often facility evaluation is not a linear process, but rather a simultaneous assessment of options. Consider the following:

- ★ Begin by determining your facility criteria and space needs. Your school mission and educational programs should drive your space requirements. Your first and second year space needs often differ from those of your school at scale.
- ★ Once your mission and space needs are aligned, the available spaces and their affordability will determine your available options. You should consider your macro and micro needs:

Macro-needs

- location / neighborhood
- access to public transportation
- parking options for staff and parents
- overall safety of travel paths
- drop-off / pick-up areas (depending on whether you bus students or not)
- proximity to support facilities (e.g., shared gym or library)
- access to food (this is most often forgotten)

Macro-needs continued

- proximity to community anchor institutions (community centers, health clinics, early childhood centers)
- proximity to other schools serving students of the same age
- strength of school partnerships nearby selected sites
- political support for your project in that community or area

Micro-needs

- size of classrooms (at 20 sq. ft. per student) and functions within the typical classroom
- number and type of specialized classrooms (i.e., computer labs, STEM, science, art, music)
- ★ Talk to teachers and administrative staff about what they expect their instructional spaces to be—either staff members who have signed on to work at your new school or experienced staff and faculty from similar schools.
- ★ Once you have identified the ideal characteristics of your school facility, prioritize your needs. Certain features are non-negotiable, for instance, a STEM-focused curriculum requires classrooms with technology infrastructure, classrooms with sinks, etc. Other elements of the facility can be developed at a future year. For instance, Student Commons that reflect college environments could wait until you enroll upper grades.
- ★ In any case, be flexible without letting any available facility dictate your school design.

- ★ Every school facility has some core requirements that you cannot overlook, such as:
 1. Applicable federal, state and municipal building codes and ordinances compliance
 2. Environmental clearance
 3. Accessibility to persons with disabilities
 4. Space for secure storage of student records
 5. Designated spaces for students with IEPs
 6. Access to spaces supporting graduation requirements (e.g., PE for high schools)

FINDING A SITE

As mentioned in the section labeled, “Identify Community Need” it is imperative that there has been research done that demonstrate the need for a high-quality school option that your charter will be addressing. Your school’s location and its overall building features will determine or greatly affect the school’s configuration (e.g., number of floors, outdoors space, etc.). Experts recommend you begin searching for space as early as possible.

It is important to consider the array of time-consuming logistics that will be required when a building is acquired—logistics such as, purchase or leasing paperwork, construction permits, construction surprises, inspections and delays (particularly when renovating an older facility), financing paperwork and a host of other issues. We’ll say it again: Start early—give yourself **at least** 18 months to identify and renovate a school building.

FORM A COMMITTEE

As previously mentioned, identifying and securing an appropriate facility will be a time-intensive task. We recommend that the design team forms a facilities committee early comprised of skilled and committed individuals who can dedicate significant time to the job. It's best if the committee is composed of members of the core design team and individuals from fields related to facilities, such as architecture, construction, real estate, and financing. In some cases, it may be beneficial for a qualified and informed member of your governing board be placed on this committee. This committee can report back to and involve the full design team at relevant junctures, offering its informed advice as a resource to the design team.

To help find and evaluate appropriate sites for consideration, the facility search committee should use professional assistance—commercial real estate agents, architects, building inspectors, general contractors, real estate financiers and lawyers. The committee can also work with parents, potential students, staff, and the broader community in the process. Not only will incorporating community input ensure that the school is seen as a positive local contribution, it can also be a useful source of site location ideas. *NOTE: Involving many stakeholders will necessitate a delicate balancing act, so that nobody feels excluded, ignored or disrespected.* Manage expectations carefully- input does not necessarily lead to final outcome, and project timing and execution will always needs to be balanced with stakeholder voice and input. Ideas that seem critical and well-received may not remain in the project due to value engineering, and ideas may be generated in the value engineering process that were not present in the stakeholder engagement and planning phase. The leader of the school or real estate committee should proactively and carefully message these changes and iterations throughout the planning and execution phase of the project, and manage expectations around the board.

Before you start your search, the committee should do its homework. Start by talking to other area charters and associations that serve charters to learn from their lessons and mistakes. Ask your facility committee to research local codes and ordinances in terms of parking, setbacks, height restrictions, etc.

There are many organizations like IFF, LISC and other CDFIs, who can assist charter school developers with this process. Research support organizations so that you don't have to navigate the facility process alone.

LEASE VS. BUY

As you're considering all options, remember that you're not required to buy a building, especially not in the school's early years. Even if you don't want to move to a second facility down the road, you might want to delay purchasing your building. If available, a renewable lease might initially be as good as purchasing or a lease-to-purchase option. Unless you have a benefactor that purchases the building for you up-front, which is very unlikely, your hands will be full with the first year's school activities; you may not want to be a landlord and asset manager too.

Leases require less up-front cash and fewer property management obligations, and may offer a wider variety of choices for space. However, with a lease it is important to remember that the school is not building any equity, have less control over property management and may face lease renewal restrictions. You may also have to spend a lot of money to bring someone else's building up to code and ADA compliance. With help from experts, examine the relative merits of leasing space (from public or private agencies) as opposed to building or purchasing space.

Ideally, a lease should not be longer than the term of the charter. Realistically, lenders and landlords may require leases to extend beyond a charter's terms. Try to negotiate a lease tied to the term of the charter with options to extend commensurate with future renewals – a five year lease with three five year options to extend, for example. Be prepared to approach conversations regarding contingency planning in the event of charter non-renewal as a necessity of the process. It can be tempting to appeal to the mission and inevitability of success of the school, two incredibly important characteristics for dynamic and persistent leaders. However, the language of lease and purchase negotiations and lender discussions is replete with scenario and contingency planning, and risk mitigation. These industry risks should not be construed as an affront to your school or vision, but rather as a matter of prudent and sound decision-making.

SEARCH CREATIVELY AND WIDELY

Use your community and site priority checklist (which you and your facility committee should develop) to identify possible sites. Walk the neighborhoods you're interested in and drive the streets. Build relationships with local residents and businesses, and tap into networks such as the chamber of commerce, neighborhood associations, quality of life plans and other community organizations. Other resources might include the archdiocese, local politicians, religious leaders, and existing charters.

Make sure you check out a potential area during different times of the day to identify rush-hour issues, safety concerns, etc. If you are offering transportation services, make sure that you have adequate drop-off zones that are accessible and safe during pick up and drop off times. An often forgotten and vital detail is the location, safety and accessibility of crosswalks for families to use during rush hour times. If your parking lot is off-site, you may want to consider an escorting officer for your staff at night.

The following is a list of possible charter school facility options:

District buildings There is a growing national trend of district-charter collaboration that is emerging. One benefit to that collaboration may be the access to unused or underutilized district facilities. It may prove beneficial to discuss those options with your local district as your site search begins. This may require additional negotiation, therefore it is important to make sure your facilities committee evaluates a district facility option thoroughly. Investigate schools, former schools and vacant facilities owned by the town or city. A district might simultaneously be closing schools in one area while building new ones elsewhere—pursue those opportunities.

While closed school facilities can be an attractive option, it is important to take into consideration the reasons the school was closed. If the closure decision was because of under-enrollment it may not be the ideal spot for a fully-enrolled school. This is often a sensitive topic for communities and families. If there are conversations about closures, be engaged and informed as early as possible with potential site locations. Relationship development will pay off when and if you locate in a closed facility and are trying to gain community trust and credibility.

School districts have mixed opinions on whether to lease or sell unused buildings to non-profit entities. Districts that see charters as part of their public education system may be willing to provide extra supports, such as facilities, to help charters succeed. Some charters have even negotiated a lease agreement in which the district eliminates the rent over a period of time.

A few things to consider when evaluating a district facility:

- ★ Will you be required to give your LEA status to the district?
- ★ Will you be the sole occupant or share with a district school? The latter has its own host of issues (see further below re: sharing with the district).
- ★ What are your facility financial obligations? Is it a flat fee off your per-pupil or does it involve additional fees for services like food, security, janitorial, pest control, trash snow removal, landscaping services and consumables (e.g., toilet paper, paper towel, soap, etc.)?
- ★ Ask for a list of the capital projects performed in the building in the past ten years
- ★ What is the condition of the building you are offered in terms of:
 - Exterior envelope (roof, tuckpointing, windows, etc.)
 - Infrastructure (mechanical, plumbing, electrical services, emergency generator, elevator, food service equipment, etc.
 - Environmental (asbestos, lead) conditions

Other school buildings

Consider other vacant school buildings, such as former private or parochial school buildings. Colleges, universities or other institutions of higher education may also have available space, although their classroom sizes (typically smaller) may or may not be conducive to your school's educational design.

Find out when these facilities were last used; you may be grandfathered in on certain code compliance work depending on how long the building has been vacant. Be sure to find out what was the last use of the facility, even if it was originally built as a school.

Multi-use facilities In some cases, community-based organizations can house a charter school in its facility, renting at a low rate to the school. This allows the school to keep its own operations relatively simple and share those spaces that your school doesn't need on a full-time basis (e.g., gym, lunchroom, auditorium, playground, etc.) The benefits that can come from partnering with a local community organization is that it may increase access to community services and resources to families and students. Co-location with community organizations has increasingly become a model of best practice across the country as schools seek to serve students and families in an intentionally holistic way.

Non-educational buildings Office / commercial: Some charters operate in commercial or office buildings; however, most will need to be renovated. These renovations may be fairly extensive to create spaces that conform to building codes for schools, in addition to the applicable zoning changes needed.

Retail spaces: Strip malls offer ground level access that typically eliminates a number of ADA accessible path of travel issues. Big box stores may allow for on-grade access but be prepared to spend significant money to punch windows, and install appropriate mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems.

Modular buildings Modular units can be constructed as stand-alone facilities or additions to existing buildings. Several companies offer construction management and financing assistance to nonprofit organizations and have recently begun to work with charter schools.

Consider the following about modular buildings:

- ★ They are typically faster and cheaper (particularly if you purchase used units) to install. The newer units are sustainable and environmentally comfortable, but you are still using a structure that is not meant to last 30 years.
- ★ Modular units do require transportation, permitting and utility connection, with associated fees, construction costs and time involved (e.g., water, sewer, power, gas connections).
- ★ They require planning time and early ordering; during the summer, everybody competes for a spot in the modular factory assembly line.
- ★ Modular units have little or no resale value. Many charter schools have been unsuccessful selling their used modular units.

Sharing a facility with a district school (or school) In many large cities, where large traditional schools are being closed due to dropping student enrollment or poor performance, the district is opening several distinct small schools in one of these large facilities. This type of occupancy arrangement may be an option for your school, but sharing a building comes with distinct advantages (e.g., shared maintenance costs) and disadvantages (e.g., the need to share common spaces, achieve consensus on some decisions and potentially share space with a school with a very different culture from your own school's culture).

Consider the following:

- ★ Will one school's principal be considered the de facto owner of the building?
- ★ How will issues regarding the shared use of the building be resolved? This will require setting a protocol and assuring that both the district and the charter principals adhere to it.
- ★ How will tenant schools use the space?
 - Which spaces will be communal and which will be used by your school alone?
 - How is access to shared spaces such as the gym, lunchroom, and auditorium determined? How are conflicts resolved at busy times (e.g., lunchroom access, graduation ceremony access to auditorium, etc.)?
- ★ Will one principal in a building speak for all tenant schools, or will each school leader speak individually?
- ★ How much money is available to renovate or partition the building? When will funds be available and who will decide how they are spent?
- ★ Who owns the equipment purchased by the charter school, such as IT racks, window A/C units, and security cameras?
- ★ How long will your school be guaranteed the space? Charter schools have found themselves transferred to a new space or without a building unexpectedly.
- ★ Who is responsible for facility maintenance? Who oversees the janitorial teams to assure that both schools are treated equally?

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- ★ Are there union contract issues that will restrict your ability to engage outside maintenance? Who pays for facility upkeep?

NOTE: District engineering and maintenance staff are typically unionized. This means that if you need to keep the building open later or on a weekend, as many charters do, you will, most likely, have to account for overtime costs.

Additional options A list of options that have been used by other charter schools nationwide includes:

- ★ Residential space
- ★ Warehouse space
- ★ Houses of worship
- ★ Community college
- ★ Child care center
- ★ Boys and Girls Club, YMCA or similar organization
- ★ A “school within a school” operating in an existing school site
- ★ New construction (not generally recommended for a brand new school due to the expense and time required)

Another option, if you chose to purchase your facility up-front, but you are not at capacity, is for the charter school to own and operate the building and rent it out to one or more organization. This allows the school to earn additional revenue while growing to scale, either through rental income or through proceeds from other operations. This option does require the school to take on the up-front financing costs and responsibilities of a landlord. There are many benefits to this type of ownership arrangement, this space could be leased to a much-needed high-quality early childhood provider, a health or dental clinic or in some cases even a credit union. Again, this opportunity allows a school to become a community cornerstone that serves the entire family and community.

WORKING WITH AN ARCHITECT

Whether building a new facility or renovating existing space, experts recommend that charter school planning teams work with a professional architect, preferably one who is well-versed in school codes and K-12 charter school educational space requirements. An architect will guide you as you are visiting and considering facilities and will help you visualize a building's opportunities. He or she can help determine the square footage you will need for each type of space and for your school as a whole, as well as budget-friendly material and equipment selections. You should brainstorm and prioritize with your architect how to meet the school's goals.

Find an architect who knows schools, especially charters (whose budgetary constraints are much stricter than those of districts), and local codes and ordinances, particularly if you are contemplating a conversion of an existing building where previous use (and time lapse from last occupancy) impact the extent of renovation work. Remind your architect that they are not a simple service provider, but rather a partner in your journey and he/she will be helping you as the school grows. Further, request the architect recommend a "Project Delivery Method" that structures the architect's and contractor's agreements in a manner that provides cost and time savings to the project over other delivery methods.

Once a facility is secured, the architect will help you tailor the facility to your purposes. The architect can also help you develop a rough estimate of what the design will cost and a rough schedule of how long the development will take, from design and permitting to construction and inspections / Certificate of Occupancy. The architect's experience with charter school design will provide added benefit as you discuss your project's budget as it relates to your enrollment growth plan. Having a contractor at the table sooner than later could save your project time during the design phase, as well as time and costs during construction.

Work with your architect to consider phasing the construction of the project to decrease facility costs and thus control financial risk during the first few years of operations. This will provide you and your team the opportunity to openly discuss balancing financial risk mitigation, capital needs, and staff & board capacity to play an active role in potential future construction phases.

Ask other schools, board members, the local AIA (American Institute of Architects), and the facilities expert at the local district for architect recommendations.

FINAL EVALUATION AND FEASIBILITY

Schools should start the search process with a general idea of how much they can afford to spend on a facility and occupancy – no more than 20 percent of annual revenues. Once you have identified one or more options for your facility, it's time to determine if they are feasible solutions within your time and budget constraints. Research and groundwork may be delegated to a committee, but final decision-making regarding selection, renovations, and related expenditures should remain with the school's board of directors.

It is imperative that your qualified architect and contractor inspect and evaluate the options thoroughly before committing to a lease or purchase. We strongly recommend that you take this step when preparing the charter proposal, to obtain and demonstrate reliable estimates of necessary renovation costs. The architect will identify code, zoning, environmental and other issues and the overall feasibility of the proposed school facility.

We recommend fully considering more than one site. Because you usually can't financially secure a facility until the charter is approved—and possibly much later, once a loan or income is available—a school is vulnerable to losing its preferred facility. Even if you have been promised a district facility, it is wise to have a backup.

A FEW ADDITIONAL THINGS TO CONSIDER

When choosing a non-K-12 facility—or even a school that has been out of commission for some time—it is important to consider carefully the (often very high) costs of bringing a facility up to current technology and environmental compliance standards and federal, state and local building codes, which are very specific for schools. Issues include (but are certainly not limited to) occupancy loads per floor (that determine the number of means of egress - doors and stairwells), access for people with disabilities (ADA), fire alarms and sprinklers, square footage requirements depending on the function (classroom vs. lunchroom sq. ft. per student), permissible construction materials, and specifications for mechanical systems, plumbing fixture counts, walkways, doors, windows, ceiling heights, etc.

Your architect can recommend contractors with relevant education and non-profit facility construction experience to do a cost estimate of how much time and money it will take to bring a building up to code, and making necessary capital improvements to the property to suit the school's curriculum and programs. Be aware that there may be alternative approaches to meeting some regulations, through waivers, phase-in periods or grandfathering. If you have questions about specific requirements for your area, your architect should further inquire at the municipality's Department of Buildings.

When determining if your school can afford a given option, the cost to buy and/or renovate the facility is not the only consideration. Talk with a former tenant, owner, or property manager to help you determine on-going building costs, such as heating and other utilities and maintenance costs, as well as experiences with the particular landlord.

Don't forget the other, often overlooked, ongoing costs, such as miscellaneous services (e.g., pest control, grounds/landscaping, snow removal, trash removal/recycling), cleaning supplies, consumables (toilet paper, paper towel, soap), inspections (major equipment, sprinklers, fire and burglar alarm, fire extinguishers & defibrillators, etc.).

FINANCING

Although working through the financing may be the last piece of the facilities process, the facilities committee can't wait until a site or sites have been identified to begin thinking about how to finance the project. Just like a family can't find the right house until they have a good idea how much mortgage they can afford, a school can't know what facilities are feasible without knowing its annual and multi-year budget as outlined in [Section 4G](#), "Finance and Operations."

Funding Options

Outlined below are several ways a charter school can raise the money to rent or buy and, if necessary, renovate its facility. To finance a large project, charter schools may combine several options (for example, a loan and fundraising) to create the most affordable and appropriate financing package for their facilities' needs. The core design team should always consider both the short- and long-term financial implications of any financing arrangement.

We do not recommend guaranteeing the loan or to float a bond to secure the capital needed to finance your building needs with one of the school's partners or supporters. This option requires the guarantor to assume responsibility for the loan should the charter school default—a difficult position for supporters that could create a conflict of interest, especially when there are financing options available that does not require this kind of guarantee.

Loans from Community Development Financial Institutions Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) are non-profit mission-based lenders specializing in providing nonprofits with access to financing. In Missouri there are several potential CDFI's to consider. A principal CDFI is [IFF](#), a nonprofit financial institution. Through its Missouri Charter Capital Program, IFF has made many loans to charter schools for their facilities, provided credit enhancement and tax credits.

Loans from the IFF for charter schools provide:

- ★ Capital for projects ranging from \$10,000 to \$2 million
- ★ Terms of up to 15 years
- ★ Loans for leased space
- ★ Loans for Equipment and Furniture

Most start-up charter schools will require (and be able to afford) financing in the \$10,000 to \$1 million range. However, IFF has a range of financing tools and can directly lend up to \$2 million. IFF also partners with other CDFIs and banks to provide additional project capital.

IFF loans are often a good option for charter school developers because they are developed specifically to provide schools and other nonprofits with financing they could not obtain from traditional banks. The mission of a CDFI is to offer loans to non-profit groups that may be considered high-risk. For example, in the case of charter schools, IFF will lend to start-up schools without a track record.

During the charter school development process, design teams can contact IFF to discuss charter school lending guidelines. IFF may provide a pre-approval letter stating that the group meets preliminary underwriting criteria. Loan approvals are not granted until after a charter is approved. Generally, charter schools do not begin paying back the loan until the school opens and they receive their first per pupil funding allotment.

Traditional Bank Loans Charter schools, given their start-up nature, limited assets, and the short duration of the initial charter terms (five to ten years), are usually considered a high-risk venture for traditional banks, making it difficult to secure bank loans and especially loans at low rates. This is why most banks look for a guarantee and will require a mortgage or other collateral. To secure any loan, the charter school will need to convince the potential lender that the school has essential management experience, a guaranteed revenue stream, and a solid growth plan. Banks also have requirements for appraisals and collateral that are often difficult for charter schools to meet. This is where it can be very beneficial to have a local community banker on your board.

From a lender's point of view, the first few years are the **most risky**. After a school has a track record, the perceived risk is somewhat lower than for a start-up. If you do wait a few years to get a loan, be prepared to present the lender with a success story. Show growth in enrollment, a positive track record, educational success, and accurate financial statements. Your accountability plan should provide the kind of record you need.

Developers should be wary of “balloon financing,” where debt service payments are initially structured as though the financing period extended beyond the charter period but require one or several large “balloon” payments at the end of the charter period. With both CDFI and traditional bank loans, the charter school needs to determine in advance that the amount and timing of its per pupil revenue stream will allow it to make loan repayments.

Fundraising/Capital Campaign Some charter schools use fundraising to pay for a portion of their facilities development costs. A capital campaign can be used to focus fundraising from foundations and wealthy individuals on facility improvements or to purchase the school's permanent facility.

On the positive side, a capital campaign can strengthen and broaden the school's network of financial supporters and mobilize a volunteer group to support the school.

However, capital campaigns have some drawbacks, especially for new charter schools. A capital campaign requires fundraising expertise, organization, time and often a dedicated staff member. Capital campaigns can also jeopardize charters' ability to raise funds from the same resources for programs and operations. Many foundations and individuals will not donate funds to charter schools for other purposes if they have already donated for capital campaigns. Most capital campaigns take four or five years to reach funding goals, especially for schools without connections and relationships to wealthy individuals or foundations, and start-up charter schools usually don't have that long to acquire a facility. Therefore, schools pursuing capital campaigns usually need to take out bridge loans or other financing to cover the total costs of the project more quickly. These loans are then paid off with capital campaign

proceeds over time. Most lenders are wary of fundraising plans developed by inexperienced organizations and tend to discount projections significantly.

For these reasons, we generally recommend that a capital campaign may be a more realistic strategy for an established charter school that has time to devote to raising significant amounts of money in order to move to a permanent facility or undertake another major facilities project.

Internal Funding from Operating Funds Most charter schools use a portion of their per pupil operating funds to finance facility costs, either to pay for facilities outright or to pay debt service on facilities loans. In considering what percentage of per pupil operating funds should be reserved for facilities, charter school design teams will need to look to their overall budget. While the unique situation of each school—including size of the facility, per pupil numbers at the beginning of the charter and the relationship with a lessor, whether it is a district or private party—national trends suggest that total occupancy costs should be no more than 15% of total expenses and debt service should be achieved with a 1.2 coverage ratio.

REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION

Investors and lenders will want to see standard financial documents including audits, internal financial statements, and a 5-10 year operating projection. Typically a lender will want to see a summary of the school's revenues, costs and expenses and a balance sheet that shows the status of a school's assets and liabilities. For a start-up, you will be expected to be able to produce income and expense projections with very detailed assumptions. A lender will ask for a marketing plan, realistic enrollment projections with milestone achievements and contingency plans if revenue and enrollment targets are not met.



TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

Case Studies

School A hired IFF to assist in identifying a new location for its middle and high school expansion. RES' site search and due diligence efforts identified the former non-profit organization property as the optimum site to target for acquisition and redevelopment. Thanks to a \$1.9M IFF loan, School A was able to purchase and renovate a facility that allowed it to double in size and accommodate future growth.

School B hired IFF to perform a feasibility study and assist in identifying a new location for its growing middle school. RES site search and due diligence efforts identified a vacant parochial property as the optimum site to target for acquisition and redevelopment. Thanks to a \$1.5M IFF loan, School B was able to relocate to a facility that would provide greater visibility while serving a greater number of children.

RESOURCES

IFF In addition to providing below-market loans and bond financing for charters to rent, buy or construct a school facility, IFF provides a set of real estate services at below-market rates that span all stages of a facilities project, including site selection, construction, evaluation, internet, project management and budgeting. iff.org

ADA Standards Take a look at the broad overview of the act published by the U.S. Department of Justice, “ADA Standards for Accessible Design.” ada.gov/2010ADASTandards_index.htm

Capital Impact Partners created “The Answer Key: How To Plan, Develop and Finance Your Charter School Facility” to help charter school planners assess their needs and costs for their schools, including the total square footage. The Answer Key helps school operators succeed by providing step-by-step directions for each phase of the facility development process, including: concept, predevelopment, design and pre-construction, construction, and financing. capitalimpact.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/CapitalImpact_AnswerKey_Build_Expand_Charter_School_Guide.pdf

EPR provides education facility financing and works with many charter schools across the county. eprkc.com/financing-solutions/education_financing

41. FAMILY AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

In [Section 3D](#), “Engaging with the Community,” we described how to engage families and the community in your charter school planning efforts. As you move further into developing your school design, it is important to think about the role that families and community members will have in the school once it is open. You will want to think about these pieces during the school design process as your plans for ongoing family and community engagement will speak volumes about the school you envision.

PARENTS AND FAMILIES

Parent involvement creates community, builds commitment to and enthusiasm for the school and its programs, and provides volunteers with diverse skills to meet the school’s many needs. But most importantly, parent engagement is critical to help students achieve academically. The latest research on family involvement shows that “students whose families are involved in their learning earn better grades, enroll in higher-level programs, have higher graduation rates, and are more likely to enroll in post-secondary education,” according to a summary of ‘A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement,’ from *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships* (see [Resources](#) below).

Effective strategies for involving parents in a charter 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 group may require proactive efforts by school staff and administration to reach out to parents (possibly even by visiting them in their homes), to create a warm and welcoming atmosphere, and to boost parents’ confidence and sense of efficacy.

The possibilities to tap 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 to organize the school's priorities and resources. Below are a number of strategies for offering parents the opportunities, atmosphere, information and training they need to become involved.

- ★ Consider hiring a parent-involvement coordinator or community liaison to conduct outreach efforts, host parent and family events and workshops, coordinate parent volunteers, and serve as a link between parents and staff.
- ★ Create and distribute a parent handbook to all prospective parents that includes basic information, such as a list of parent involvement opportunities, a calendar of school events, the school's discipline policy, an overview of the academic program and suggestions on what parents can do at home to support student learning.
- ★ Foster an atmosphere in which parents' perspectives and input are expected, invited and incorporated in all aspects of decision-making.
- ★ Keep the lines of communication open. The school director should send out a regular parent newsletter that describes important school activities and approaches, and tells families that you value their connection to the school. Schedule parent and teacher orientation sessions and other meetings to keep parents in touch. Some charter schools require a certain amount of parent or guardian involvement in the school. You can determine whether this is appropriate and achievable for your community.
- ★ Many effective schools provide very specific workshops for parents to help them develop specific skills: to help their children study, to promote children's healthy eating habits, to prepare families for students to go to college and in some cases to train parents to become classroom aides or to take other active roles in the school.

RESOURCES

Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships

This practical guide provides resources, tips and examples for forming strong family-school partnerships focused on supporting students and improving their achievement. Available on [Amazon](#).

National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools

The website includes research reviews, strategy briefs and tools focused on effectively connecting schools, families and communities to improve student achievement and support students' success overall. sedl.org/connections

EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS AND ONGOING COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

In [Section 3D](#), “Engaging with the Community,” we laid out some key roles community-based organizations, businesses, universities and other groups can have in a charter’s operations, such as providing donations or partnering on or developing after-school support. Charters and small schools have turned to community-based education to provide specialized electives, as well. Depending on the school’s staffing allocations and needs, it may be more affordable to pay an organization to teach one or two specialized classes—a dance or technology class, for example—than to hire an additional teacher full-time. Think creatively about how to use partnerships.

Partnerships should support your school’s vision and mission and help you to accomplish your school’s goals. To avoid spreading yourself too thin, choose partnerships carefully, and limit the number of partnerships you undertake in the first years. See [Section 3D](#) for resources on creating effective partnerships.

Beyond partnership opportunities, it is important to think about how you will maintain relationships you have built with community institutions during the design process—and continue to build new ones—once the school is open. Community members and leaders can serve as advocates for your charter school, and help you secure ongoing funding and services by providing key contacts and referrals.

Perhaps even more importantly, community support can be essential if your charter school is ever challenged. Charter schools are in a more tenuous position than district public schools and are more susceptible to the changes in the state’s fiscal and political environment. Maintaining a strong and diverse base of support will help protect your charter school from changing circumstances in the state.

STUDENT RECRUITMENT AND ENROLLMENT

Creating a school community includes attracting students and families to attend your new charter school. Unlike most traditional public schools, charters do not have students assigned to attend—families have to choose to be enrolled. Enrollment is especially important to charter schools because most of the school’s budget will be based on the number of students enrolled. Many charters have a waiting list, but before launching, almost every charter school must get the word out that the facility is open and looking for students. Even if your school proves to be wildly popular, student outreach remains important to ensure that potential students and families understand exactly what your school offers to and demands of students.

REVIEW THE MISSOURI CHARTER SCHOOL LAW

The first step in creating student recruitment and enrollment policies and plans is to review the sections of the Missouri Charter School Law that relate to student enrollment. We outline some of the key provisions below, but read and understand the law or seek legal advice in interpreting it if needed.

- ★ In their student admissions policies, charter schools are prohibited from discrimination on the basis of disability, race, creed, color, gender, national origin, religion, ancestry, marital status or need for special education services.
- ★ Charter school enrollment must be open to any student who lives within the school district of the charter school.
- ★ If more students apply to the charter school than there are spaces available, the charter must conduct a public lottery to select students. If capacity is insufficient to enroll all pupils who submit a timely application, the charter school shall have an admissions process that assures all applicants of an equal chance of gaining admission except that:

- A charter school may establish a geographical area around the school whose residents will receive a preference for enrolling in the school, provided that such preferences do not result in the establishment of racially or socioeconomically isolated schools and provided such preferences conform to policies and guidelines established by the state board of education
- A charter school may also give a preference for admission of children whose siblings attend the school or whose parents are employed at the school or in the case of a workplace charter school, a child whose parent is employed in the business district or at the business site of such school
- Charter alternative and special purpose schools may also give a preference for admission to high-risk students, as defined in subdivision (5) of subsection 2 of section 160.405, when the school targets these students through its proposed mission, curriculum, teaching methods, and services

PLAN TO SUCCEED

Successful charter operators use the recruitment process to tell prospective students and families about their school and to sell them on the school's vision and mission. You may need to make special efforts to help students see your school as a real option. The idea of a charter school will be new to most students and families, and they may not be comfortable trying something different. In addition, the message that you are preparing students for college, for example, or that your school will have two hours of homework a night, may be intimidating to students who have not been successful in school in the past. Carefully think about how you will couch your messages and what tactics you will use to engage students.

Develop Your Story It's critical that you develop a compelling story for your school. Why is this school being created? What unique need are you meeting? Why does it matter? Why should a parent be excited about sending their child to your school? Identify your key differentiators – what makes you different than the school down the street – and speak about them succinctly and compellingly.

Materials Develop marketing materials that explain the goals and mission of the school and provide prospective students and families with information about how to enroll their children. Emphasize the basic facts about your school and include what a charter public school is and how it works (don't forget to mention it's a free public school). Be sure to distribute your materials widely. If you plan to serve non- English speakers, be sure to have your recruitment materials translated into other languages.

Outreach Hold open houses to talk about the school and show the facility. If you haven't moved into the building yet, hold a recruitment meeting at a local institution and, if possible, show what your facility will look like. If your charter will be a high school or middle school, recruit students at the local feeder schools. Attend community meetings to introduce your school and answer questions. Use social service agencies, churches and other religious institutions, youth-serving agencies and other community organizations as resources.

Speakers In addition to your core design team, consider enlisting trusted community members—such as local after-school program staff—to discuss the charter school with students or families individually to increase your outreach capacity. Be sure that everyone who represents the school understands your “talking points” and has correct information about admissions policies and other details.

Clarity Have clear, distinct and public due dates for all parts of the admissions procedure. Target marketing to ensure that underrepresented groups have ample opportunity to learn about the school. Be sure that everyone understands the school's mission, clearly telling prospective students and families, for example, that your school is designed to help failing students succeed and go on to college.

Applications and lottery Keep in mind that the application should be minimal and cannot request certain information, such as the student’s need for special education, grades from the student’s prior school or whether the student received free or reduced price lunch. If it’s needed, conduct a well- publicized public lottery. Schools may wish to have public officials present to supervise or attest to the fairness of the lottery, or have an outside firm (such as an accounting or auditing firm) conduct the lottery. Applicants who are not admitted should be placed on a waiting list in the order in which they were selected in the lottery.

Timing Many charter schools create student and parent contracts to clarify school expectations and establish a mechanism for holding students accountable. While you can—and should—inform parents and students about such contracts during the admissions process, wait until after students have been admitted to have them sign. By the same token, wait until after students are admitted to ask for past transcripts and other information that may be viewed as selection criteria if requested before the admissions process is complete.

RESOURCES

How to Tell Your Charter School Story Guide from MCPSA This guide helps charter schools develop a clear understanding of their marketing/recruitment message, and gives tools for how to share that message effectively
mocharterschools.org/pdf/HowToTellYourCharterSchoolStory.pdf

4J. FUNDING SOURCES AND FUNDRAISING

Even at the very first stages of developing a charter school proposal, you will need financial support. It is possible to write a charter school application using volunteer hours, but there will still be expenses, such as printing, phone bills, and office supplies. We recommend that you try to provide financial support for a team coordinator or project manager, because of the heavy demands of the job over the course of creating a charter school application. This section provides strategies for raising funds to support your team through the initial charter school planning and application process, and includes guidance on fundraising for the school's ongoing operations.

Fundraising Most charter school developers and operators raise funds from foundations, businesses and individual donors. You should research foundations and businesses, especially those that are local, as a means of exploring funding opportunities. Develop a strong network and reach out to your supporters. If you lack experience in fundraising, seek advice from fundraising consultants who can provide guidance and coaching.

In-kind Goods and Services Donated goods and services may save you considerable money and time in the charter school development process. Some Missouri charter school developers have worked with community-based organizations or universities that provide significant resources, such as office space, office supplies, and telephone use, as well as the time and skill of their staff members.

State and Federal Start-Up Funding See [Section 4G](#), "Finance and Operations," for more detail about start-up grants.

STRATEGIES FOR FUNDRAISING

The following strategies for fundraising are recommended by experienced fundraisers:

Make contact with veteran charter school development officers. Charter school fundraising is a peculiar beast, and those who have had experience raising money for charters probably have the best advice. The fundraising strategies employed by other nonprofit organizations, such as museums and hospitals, do not necessarily translate to charter schools. And unlike many private schools, charters will not have a strong alumni base from which to draw. However, design teams can benefit from the fundraising strategies utilized by small social service agencies.

Create a large group of supporters from the beginning. Relationships matter when you are looking for support for your school. Tap into individual supporters and board members (or potential board members). Begin cultivating relationships with local funders, including foundations, businesses and other organizations that may be able to offer either funding or in-kind goods and services. Refer back to the Community Mapping Tool introduced in [Section 3D](#), “Engaging with the Community,” to develop leads. Cultivating a large group of supporters will allow you to diversify your funding, which is important to achieve long-term fundraising success.

Use events to raise the profile of your school—but do not expect huge financial returns. Simple events during the school design phase—such as a breakfast featuring a presentation about the school—may help you develop relationships with potential donors while also sharing information about the school. However, be cautious when considering major events, such as an auction or gala. These demand a significant investment of time and money upfront, and tend to yield relatively small net returns (and often lose money in their first year). Keep in mind, too, that major donors will require a personalized approach beyond an invitation to an event.

Consider what role private fundraising will play in the long-term future of the school. Seeking start-up funding is different from seeking funding for ongoing operations. When raising start-up support, look for major donors (high net worth individuals, corporations and foundations) and multi-year commitments. If you will be looking for ongoing contributions, plan to build an annual campaign with a broader base that may yield more, smaller gifts.

Keep fundraising potential in mind as you develop your board of directors. Your school's board of directors will be an important resource for fundraising. As your board matures, your need for certain expertise may diminish, while your need for fundraising escalates. If board members have been involved in fundraising from the beginning, they'll have ownership of the school, gain experience with fundraising, and view the school as an essential part of their role. See [Section 4F, "Governance"](#) for more on establishing a board.

Involve the "face" of the organization in fundraising. During the charter school development phase, and after the school's launch, ensure that school leaders are involved in fundraising, even if others do background research and grant-writing. Foundations, corporations and major donors will want to talk to the person in charge, whether that is the principal, executive director or key leaders in your core design team. That person must be able to speak passionately about the school and convince others of its value.

FUNDRAISING RESOURCES

The **Association of Fundraising Professionals** (AFP) is an international membership organization that serves to further the development of fundraising professionals and the broader fundraising profession. Its stated purpose is to advance philanthropy through advocacy, research, education and certification programs. Both national and local websites contain resources that would be helpful in the pursuit of funding sources.

National AFP afpnet.org

Missouri AFP midamerica.afpnet.org

The Foundation Center provides access to a national database of grant makers for a monthly membership fee and also offers trainings and other resources related to fundraising. foundationcenter.org

The Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University provides well-regarded courses on fundraising, as well as additional services and resources. Scholarships are available for courses. philanthropy.iupui.edu

The National Charter School Resource Center provides information and links to resources about charter school funding and fundraising. For more on budget and finance, see [Section 4D](#), “Financial Management.” charterschoolcenter.org/grants

Local Community Foundations Community foundations often provide grants to local organizations. Conduct an internet search for “community foundations” in your area.

Nonprofit Connect offers training on many functions of effective nonprofits, and can offer opportunities to connect with fundraising professionals and/or potential board members. npconnect.org

5A. DEVELOPING A PROSPECTUS

An extensive amount of work will be done to design your charter school across the major areas of mission, culture, curriculum, grade configuration, finances and operations. The details of this plan are important in order to receive approval from your sponsor and to be prepared to launch your school. However, in order to attract outside interest in your school, you will want to create a document about your school that is more pointed, relevant and compelling for your stakeholders, who may include:

- ★ Funders, grantors and lending institutions
- ★ Parents, family members and prospective students
- ★ Community members, local support organizations and volunteers
- ★ Potential staff members and teachers
- ★ Local, state and federal politicians

A prospectus or annual report style document should be detailed enough to thoroughly explain the school design, yet clear enough to keep the reader's attention (generally 1-3 pages, including graphics or images). You should strive to create a well-written document that reflects the professionalism of the design group and the care that is going into planning a well-run school. Take the time to have multiple people proof-read any and every document that is distributed. A poorly executed document that has misspellings, typos and incorrect punctuation can be devastating, especially as a first impression. Think of this document as a professional resume that you tailor to fit each individual job description for which you are applying. The prospectus can include:

- ★ Mission, vision, school focus/curriculum, and how the school fits the needs of the community
- ★ All necessary contact information and school location or planned location
- ★ Financial reports including budget, actuals and fund usage
- ★ Staff bios for leadership

5A. DEVELOPING A PROSPECTUS

- ★ Board member information
- ★ Important policies and operational procedures

Limited start-up budgets will force smart marketing choices in order to sell your idea to various constituents. Be sure that all staff members in your organization see external documents that are created so that everyone is on the same page and the message is consistent.

Once your school is up and running, this document will evolve from a document that describes a plan or concept, to one that is more of an annual report, describing the successes and attributes of the school you have in operation. The annual report can include the school's success metrics such as improved test scores, student stories and clean audit financial statements. As your school moves from design to development to ongoing operations, find relative information to keep your targeted audience involved and interested.

Keep in mind that these documents range in length and focus. Start with the elevator speech and move up to the audience-focused documents that will share your vision and most importantly attract investment. Above everything else, this document should address at least one specific need for your organization. The need can be enrollment, funding or staffing. However, don't forget to ask for what you need and explain that your organization is deserving and capable.

5B. DRAFTING A HIGH-QUALITY CHARTER SCHOOL APPLICATION

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) offers a robust outline for the required charter school application. We recommend using this resource as you write what will become one of the most important documents in your school's success: the charter school application. In addition, DESE offers examples of other schools' applications, which we encourage you to review.

The Model Charter School Application, and example applications, can be found online at dese.mo.gov/sites/default/files/Model%20Charter%20School%20Application.pdf

THE FOLLOWING SHOULD ALWAYS BE NOTED AS IMPORTANT

- Incorporate all elements required by law
- Address any application requirements noted in the model application evaluation criteria
- Provide detailed information on each major design area for your school
- Review, Review, Review