INDIANA
CHARTER SCHOOL
STARTUP GUIDE

March 2020
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This guide has been a labor of love since the time that ICSN was founded. It would not have been possible without the help of numerous organizations and individuals, who we would like to thank from the outset.

The Illinois Charter School Network (INCS) allowed ICSN to purchase the text of their long-established charter start-up guide. We are grateful for their partnership and the enormous head start their outstanding guide afforded us.

The Indiana Department of Education helped to fund the creation of this guide through generous funding from the federal Charter School Program grant. The charter school team, especially Amreen Vora, also provided invaluable guidance and a critical eye on the guide as it developed.

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Azure Angelov, PhD wrote the special education section of this guide. As an expert in both special education and charter schools, and as a suburb writer, she was the perfect person to draft this very important section. Indiana’s charter schools are lucky to have her as a local resource.

Nick LeRoy, President of Bright Minds Marketing, drafted the guide’s section on student recruitment, school marketing, and maximizing Enroll Indy. Nick has carved out a unique niche as an expert in marketing your school to achieve the greatest possible enrollment. His strategies have been utilized by numerous charter schools in Indiana and across the country, and now you can use them as well.

Brian Anderson and Kim Ballin, of the Center for Innovative Education Solutions (CIES), drafted the expansive section regarding charter school operations and finance. Their considerable expertise has contributed mightily to the overall value of this guide, and their partnership has added a great deal of value to schools who work with ICSN.

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Jen Wagner and her design team of Jacob Vinson and Michael Davey at EdChoice, who took a motley document drafted by numerous parties, and crafted it into this beautiful final version, and did so without charge, are to be thanked profusely. Their extensive experience publishing national research and offering their design and publishing services free of charge is a gift we can hardly repay.

The staff of the Institute for Quality Education (IQE), of which the Indiana Charter School Network is part, has offered guidance and support in numerous ways throughout the process of creating this guide. CEO Betsy Wliey and Vice President of Policy and Government Affairs Caitlin Bell in particular have supported this work endlessly.

All valuable portions of the guide are attributable to those mentioned above, and all shortcomings are those of Marcie Brown Carter.

We intended this guide be used in chunks as you work through the process of starting your school. It is doubtful that anyone will find it useful to read the guide from start to finish like a book. We hope the checklists, charts, , links, and bullet lists throughout will be useful on their own to you and your design team. As this is the first edition of this work, we plan to review and update it annually as necessitated by changes in the law and policy environment, as well as other new developments in funding, best practices and otherwise. We humbly request the input of all who use this guide in terms of which portions helped you in what ways, as well as which portions were too vague, or not sufficient in your opinion. We will endeavor to improve upon this edition in subsequent years, and the input of users will be key to making the guide better over time. All input in welcome via marcie@indianacharterschoolnetork.org.

Best of luck to all who embark on the awesome journey of starting a charter school in Indiana!
INTRODUCTION

Charter schools are a product of state, not federal, law. Currently, 42 states and D.C. all allow charter schools to exist, though charter laws among states vary widely in how effectively they encourage charters to grow and thrive. Due to years of effort on the part of Indiana lawmakers, Indiana’s charter school law has been ranked the nation’s strongest charter school law by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools for five years running. Well over 3 million students attend charter schools across the U.S. in around 7000 charter schools. In Indiana, over 44,000 students attend just over 100 charter schools. Indiana boasts two of the nation’s top “charter cities” based on the percent of the student population attending charter schools. Gary charter schools served 49% of students in Gary, and Indianapolis charter schools served 36% of students residing in the

Indiana Public Schools boundaries, as of 2017-18. That makes Indianapolis Public Schools the 11th largest in terms of charter enrollment share, and Gary #2 nationally in charter school enrollment share.

Indiana is home to an impressive mix of charters in urban, rural, small and medium-sized towns, and even a few suburban areas. We have a unique variety of types of charter schools as well. They include traditional, brick-and-mortar charters, charters aimed at adult high school dropouts, charters serving primarily special populations such as significant needs special education and drug-addiction recovery, alternative school models, virtual and hybrid charter schools, and innovation network charter schools that partner with a traditional public school district. In a state that embraces many forms of school choice, charter schools are a long-standing and proud part of that mix, offering families options in their children’s education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2020 STATE CHARTER LAW RANKINGS</th>
<th>States</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Indiana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Colorado</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Washington</td>
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<td>Minnesota</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Alabama</td>
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<td>Mississippi</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Florida</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Louisiana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Maine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>D.C.</td>
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<tr>
<th>INDIANA K–12 ENROLLMENT, 2019–20 SCHOOL YEAR</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>936,693 (82.5%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>47,535 (4.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44,771 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36,248 (3.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69,475 (6.1%)</td>
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<tr>
<th>TOTAL CHARTER STUDENTS 2019-20</th>
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<tr>
<td>B&amp;M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- Traditional Public School Students (excluding Public to Public transfer)
- Public to Public Transfer Students
- Public Charter School Students
- Accredited Non-Public School Students (excluding Choice students)
- Choice Scholarship Students
CHARTER SCHOOLS IN INDIANA

Indiana first enacted public charter school legislation in 2001, after years fighting to put a law in place. A handful of charters opened their doors for the first time in 2002, and in the fall of 2019, 103 charter schools are welcoming students every day, in communities across the state. In 2019-20, charter schools serve 44,771 students, or 3.9% of the state’s student population. Charter schools serve a higher proportion of black students, Latino students, and students receiving free- and reduced price lunches than traditional public schools.

Demographics show that on the whole, charters are serving a more complex set of students than traditional public schools. Charter schools serve a 71% free and reduced-price lunch population, whereas traditional public schools serve 47% free and reduced-price lunch students. English language learners constitute 7.9% of charter school students, while 6.3% of traditional public students fit that definition. Special education is nearly identical at 15.9% of traditional public schools versus 15% of charters. And charter schools serve 65.7% minority students, while traditional public schools serve 32% minority students.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>CHARTER SCHOOL DEMOGRAPHICS 2019-20</th>
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<tr>
<td>FRL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42.44%</td>
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<tr>
<td>15.86%</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.38%</td>
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<tr>
<th>SPECIAL POPULATIONS ENROLLMENT 2019-20</th>
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<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.90%</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.30%</td>
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Performance-wise, 68.8% of charter schools received a state grade of A, B, or C for 2017-18 (which scores will carry over for 2019-20 and 2020-21 due to the state’s “hold harmless” legislation). Five charter schools received an F for the same year, but two of them are alternative model high schools, and the other three were closed by their authorizers. Schools not receiving a grade are not included in this calculation.

The Indiana charter school law creates a set of parameters that will affect your charter school application as well as aspects of how your school operates and its relationship with the authorizer. You will benefit from reading and becoming familiar with the law in its entirety as you progress through the charter school development process. The summary below does not capture every nuance of the law, and the law can change. Be sure to educate yourself on updates during and after each legislative session. ICSN will always be a good source of information as state laws, regulations, and other policies evolve each year in ways that may affect your school and how you carry out your job.

Unlike some other states, Indiana has no limit on the number of charter schools allowed to exist. Anyone interested in opening a charter school in Indiana has an opportunity. Indiana charter organizers must be organized as nonprofit entities and are subject to all federal and state laws from which they are not specifically exempted, including those governing health and safety, nondiscrimination, special education, and academic standards and assessments. Approved schools may receive initial charters for three to seven years.

For more detailed information about all the requirements for operating a charter school under the state law, go to the section, “Understanding the Law and Authorization Process.”

Charter School Basics

Let’s begin with some of the most important basics about charter schools in Indiana.

One of the purposes of charter schools set out in state law is to allow “freedom and flexibility in exchange for exceptional levels of accountability.” Other purposes include serving different student learning styles, offering innovative choices, providing varied opportunities for educators, and offering expanded involvement opportunities for families and communities in public education.

Enrollment in charter schools is open to all students living in Indiana. If there are more eligible applicants for a particular charter school than there are spaces available, the school must hold a lottery as a random drawing in a public meeting, with each timely applicant limited to one entry in the drawing. Enrollment preference may be given to students who:
• Enrolled during the previous year,
• Enrolled in the previous year in another charter school held by the same organizer
• Attended a level 3 or 4 Paths to Quality preschool program co-located in a charter school may enroll in that charter school's Kindergarten
• Have siblings who are currently enrolled,
• Qualify for free and reduced-price lunch,
• Are co-located with a different charter school
• Siblings of charter school alumnus
• Are a child of a founding board member, teacher, or staff as long as it is less than 10% of the student population

If the school will be located in Indianapolis, you must take time to learn about Enroll Indy, a common enrollment system that Indianapolis Public Schools and some Marion County charter school take part in. If you participate in this system, it will control your enrollment process. There are several enrollment windows your school would participate in, and traditional lotteries are not part of the Enroll Indy system. Enroll Indy runs a series of lotteries through an algorithm system in order to comply with IN state lottery law. Visit the Enroll Indy website and contact their staff to learn more.

Requirements as a Legal Entity

Charter schools are public and non-sectarian, cannot charge tuition, and must be organized and operated as non-profit corporations authorized under the laws of the State of Indiana.

Charter schools are prohibited from discriminating on the basis of disability, race, gender, national origin, religion, or ancestry. However, according to IC 20-24-5-4, a charter school may operate as a single gender school if approved to do so by the authorizer. A single gender charter school must be open to any student of the gender the school serves who resides in Indiana.

A charter school is administered and governed by its board of directors or other governing body approved within the charter agreement, and it is subject to the Freedom of Information Act and the Open Meetings Act (see IC 5-14-1.5 Indiana Open Door Law).

Employees

At least 90% of individuals who teach full time in a charter school, must 1) hold a license or permit to teach in a public school in Indiana, or 2) be in the process of obtaining a license in the transition to teaching program (must be within 3 years of beginning to teach in the charter school). However, a charter school may obtain a waiver from the State Board of Education if it desires a higher percentage of its teachers to be non-certified. Additionally, any charter school teacher who holds a Bachelor’s degree with a minimum GPA of a 3.0 in the content area they want to teach, or if they hold a Bachelor’s degree and pass the licensure exam in the area they want to teach may obtain a “charter school permit” and is therefore legally licensed by the IDOE and counts as part of the 90% requirement. Find more information about this on the IDOE’s website.

Charter school employees may unionize and bargain collectively. Additionally, according to IC 20-24-6-8, the decision by an authorizer whether to grant a charter is not subject to restraint by a collective bargaining agreement.

Charter schools may choose whether to participate in the state public employee retirement system or a private employee pension or retirement fund.

OVERVIEW OF THE DESIGN PROCESS

Before you begin reading about the tasks of school design and charter application, it is 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 its own work plan and schedule, based on the time and skill of its members. However, we estimate that it takes 9–18 months to develop a strong charter school proposal, with another 8–12 months needed as a “planning year” after the charter is approved but before the school is opened. Charter schools have been established in shorter timeframes, but teams should allow at least 20 months and, ideally, 30 months between the decision to create a school and school opening.
For the bulk of this book, 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 accomplished each step of the way.


1. EXPLORATION PROCESS

Investigate state laws, policies and available funding
Review state authorizing process
Visit charter schools and read charter documents
Conduct research on charter schools, school models and design, and related areas
Begin community engagement
Assess community assets and needs

2. INITIAL DESIGN PROCESS (3–6 MONTHS)

Engage with the community
- Identify community members (including planning group members, community leaders, and parents/families) who are interested in education in the community
- Solicit input from community members
- Hold community meetings
- Work with community members to collaboratively develop vision for school

Form a core design team
- Assess skills, access experts
- Ensure that design team is diverse in skills and experience
- Articulate initial vision for the charter school

Apply for nonprofit and tax-exempt status

Develop clear vision and mission statements

Create a plan that maps out how the design team will prepare the major design areas below

Conduct research and reach out to experts in each major school design area, as needed
- Educational program design
- Governance
- Budget/Finances
- Facilities
- Other

Create a basic written description of your ideas for a new charter school, including major design areas
- Share prospectus with community members, school board leaders, potential funders and others to engage them and solicit further input for your school design

Develop a strategy for gaining district support if you are interest in the Innovation Network model

Identify possible facilities for the school

Identify and apply for available local and national charter school start-up funding; begin to raise additional funds, if needed

3. MAJOR DESIGN AREAS (6–12 MONTHS)

School culture and climate
- Articulate vision for school culture and climate, and a strategy for developing them for both students and teachers

Educational program
- Define educational approach and goals
- Consider whether you will contract with a charter management organization (EMO or CMO)
- Define school academic standards
- Develop or select curriculum and instructional methods
- Develop or identify assessment methods
- Develop special education plan
- Develop professional development plan
- Develop instructional calendar and daily schedule

Develop parent and community engagement strategy
School governance
- Draft board bylaws and policies
- Create an administrative structure
- Identify school leaders and/or recruitment strategy
- Identify board members and/or recruitment strategy

School staffing
- Identify staffing needs and develop recruitment plan
- Develop staff professional development plan
- Develop staff evaluation plan

Budget and finances
- Develop school budget and financial plans

Facilities and operations
- Tentatively secure possible facilities for the school
- Develop operations plans

School accountability plan
- Write an accountability plan that incorporates accountability for academic achievement, sound fiscal management, and governance

Address other application requirements (including plan for liability and insurance coverage, transportation plan, and other areas)

Continue building community and school board support for your charter school proposal

4. APPLYING FOR THE CHARTER

Draft the charter application
- Incorporate all elements required by your authorizer, and Indiana charter school law
- Provide detailed information on each major design area for your school

5. REVIEW, REVIEW, REVIEW
- Ensure that your charter school proposal is comprehensive, addresses all required areas, adequately addresses the concerns identified by the authorizer, and provides a solid framework for a high-quality charter school

- Ask your chosen authorizer if there are partners that previous successful schools have worked with to craft an outstanding proposal, or ensure you have a strong editor on your founding team or board.

Assess whether you have gained sufficient authorizer support

Submit completed charter school proposal to chosen authorizer
- Meet with authorizer staff as requested, and understand and address concerns
- Show respect for opposition
- Assess likelihood of approval
- Prepare for and participate in community hearing for your school, if required
- Prepare for and participate in the meeting set by your authorizer at which your application will be voted on

6. PRE-OPERATIONS/INCUBATION: GETTING READY TO OPEN (8–12 MONTHS)

Finalize charter agreement with the authorizer, including, for innovation network charters, identification of services the district will provide and the terms under which they will be provided

Recruit and hire staff

Recruit any necessary additional board members

Recruit and enroll 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

Formalize or establish relationships with community groups, supporters, local media, ICSN, and other partners

7. OPERATING: OPENING THE DOORS

Formally open the doors and celebrate the commencement of the school

Transition school’s governance structure from initial “start-up” stages to one of ongoing policymaking and oversight

Deepen relationships with community groups, supporters, the authorizer, the media, ICSN, and other partners

Refine your model as you go

THE EXPLORATION PROCESS

Research and Resources to get you Started

The resources recommended 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, entering into discussions with potential authorizers, raising money, and planning a school. Many of these same resources will be useful once you get started.

Learn from Successful Charters

There is no reason to reinvent the wheel. We recommend that you become familiar with existing charter school models and the 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, news articles, websites and books that include descriptions of successful charter school models.

Review charter school applications. Charter school applications are public documents and should be found on authorizer or school websites. Reviewing a completed charter school application will give you a sense of what you are aiming for as you begin the charter school development process. This is one of the most important steps you can take to prepare yourself to enter the authorization process. Reviewing numerous charters will help you understand the level of detail needed in a variety of areas to turn in a successful application. It might also expose you to interesting ideas you may want to borrow. Reading a charter for a school located in another state may also be a “short cut” to visiting that school in person.

Visit charter schools. This 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. Consider visiting charters in other states, as well.

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 leaders’ time. Sometimes, such relationships may even allow you to develop formalized partnerships with established schools for a variety of supports.

Attend charter school conferences. ICSN hosts an annual statewide conference. Additionally, the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS) and the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) both 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.

Join appropriate lists. Once you have researched models that align with your goals as well as charter-support organizations, be sure to join those organizations’ email or newsletter lists, if they exist.

Resources

Many local and national charter school organizations provide information, tools and other resources that can help you throughout the charter school development process. Some sites include links to guidebooks for charter school developers or sections that go into great detail about how to create a new charter school.

**Indiana Charter School Network** ICSN is the statewide association and collective voice of charter schools in Indiana. ICSN works to strengthen charter schools and the communities that they serve through advocacy, education and direct services to schools.

**IDOE Charter School Webpage** Utilize this site to learn more about current authorizer options, charter school funding opportunities, IDOE charter school staff and other resources, and more.

**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.

**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.

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

**National Charter School Resource Center** Created by the U.S. Department of Education and now supported by a nonprofit partner, 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.

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.

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. It might seem to you that you and your school are a good match, but you’ll need many supporters besides yourself before doors can open for the first time—advocates in the community, 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 community’s current educational offerings. 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? Would it locate in a specific neighborhood to serve those families?

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 and community, be sure to consider what kinds of good schools already exist. Ideally, a charter school will fill a gap in a community; it will help to create a stronger educational system overall. Research, and be able to clearly articulate, what the gap is. Be able to demonstrate that your school and model will fill that gap.
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 test results, census bureau data, public surveys, news sources, research studies) and different kinds of data (e.g., cognitive, attitudinal, behavioral and demographic)
- 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 educational options are currently available in the area, including traditional public, private, virtual, religious, innovation, special programs, and any others?
- 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 area? (e.g., an arts program, a science and technology program, a different pedagogical approach, a strong middle school program, specific subgroups of students are being underserved, a college-prep program, or a program designed to serve high school dropouts)
- What needs does the local community have?
- What are the demographic characteristics of the community? (e.g., neighborhood income levels, college attainment results among adults, employment rate)
- What are area district schools 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
- Community partnerships and organizations
- Demand for additional seats
- Demand for specific grades
- Quality of existing schools in the area
- 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.

While the data-based analysis above will give you invaluable information, another step you cannot skip is talking with parents, teachers, students, community members and other stakeholders. What do they see as strengths and
weaknesses of other educational options in the area, and do they see a need for another school? Does the niche you are considering feel like a good fit to other interested parties as well? Do they see the analysis of the data the same way you do? Be strategic about when and how to "go public" with your plans for charter school development; your charter school may not be seen favorably by all, and initially you may need to be guarded about your intentions. 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. You need time to understand the local politics and find key allies who can offer public support if charter opponents voice opposition.

**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, other non-standardized indicators of student achievement, and social and emotional factors.

**INview**: INview is IDOE's newly-released website that allows users to look up school data and even compare schools to each other. It utilizes a map feature that allows users to find the locations of schools they are exploring.

**IDOE Compass**: Compass provides school and district level data for all schools in Indiana. Starting in 2020, the database is no longer being updated.

Authorizer Reports: According to IC 20-24-9-1, authorizers are required to submit an annual report that includes academic outcomes, updated governance information, and the overall status of the authorizer’s portfolio of schools. Additionally, some authorizers’ websites have information about their accountability metrics. If not, you can attempt to contact the authorizer directly to discuss their metrics.

Selected authorizer sites:

- Ball State Charter School Accountability Reports
- Indianapolis Mayor’s Office Charter Applications
- Indiana Charter School Board Starting a School
- Education One (Trine University) Start A School
- Grace College Application Process

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**IS DEVELOPING A CHARTER SCHOOL THE RIGHT PATH FOR YOU?**

Starting a public charter 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 a school. You should carefully consider why you want to create a charter school, and whether your goals are best served by “going charter.”

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 had 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 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:

- Does your interest in starting a school primarily have to do with your wanting 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? 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?

Do you realize that you will have to devote an extraordinary amount of time and energy to the project?

What skill sets do you possess that will ensure your school is 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?

In addition to the education work, the design team and school leaders will need to learn to prepare and stick to a budget, fundraise, manage payroll, buy insurance, work with a landlord, as well as work with numerous other non-pedagogical issues. Does your team possess the skills and experience to take on these tasks?

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?

Even if you have the skillsets, do you have the time and energy, and do your life circumstances allow you to pursue the 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. 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.

Core Design Team

Charter school development cannot be accomplished 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 entails three challenges, operating

- A start-up organization,
- A non-profit corporation, and
- A public school that is strictly accountable to its authorizer, the state and the public at large.

Developing a strong proposal for a charter school requires a team with diverse skills and experience.

Note on Virtual Charter Schools

Starting a virtual charter school presents its own unique set of challenges in addition to those that all charter start-ups face. Virtual charter schools have enormous potential for serving the needs of unique learners, but some have been managed poorly over the years, and thus they face additional scrutiny from policymakers and some of the public. If you are even slightly considering making your school a virtual charter, there are additional issues you need to be aware of. The pool of potential authorizers is smaller. Only statewide authorizers may approve a virtual charter school, and currently only one Indiana authorizer, Ball State University, is overseeing any virtual charter schools. Virtual charters receive only 85% of the basic state per pupil funding, which is every school’s largest revenue line item, and they are also ineligible for some additional grants.

On the positive side, there are best practices to follow if virtual is the route you choose to follow. An excellent report titled “Meeting the Potential of a Virtual Education” was published in 2019 highlighting a few of the best virtual charter schools in the U.S., and examining their strong practices. The entire guide is well-worth reading, but the four primary recommendations are:

- Be sure to incorporate the same elements that drive student success in brick-and-mortar schools.
- Identify and adjust to what is truly different about online schooling.
- Use the unique opportunities online schooling offers.
- Innovate, don’t just automate.
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 authorization and launching the school that you envision. As they evaluate your charter proposal, authorizers will place considerable weight on your team’s credibility, capacity and track record (academic and operational) to operate an effective school. So 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 authorizer.
• Write the charter application and present the school model in interviews with the authorizer and in hearings for the public during the authorization 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. Some 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. In addition to this non-negotiable requirement, other key attributes to look for include:

• “Worker Bee” orientation: commitment to completing work, and dependability
• Adequate time to commit to the work
• An entrepreneurial spirit
• Creativity and a propensity for innovation
• Leadership and a talent for project-management
• 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 targeted 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, though, 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 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.

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

Since you probably won’t be able to check off every box in the expertise chart for core design team members, 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 some resources and templates for volunteers or good consultants:

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. 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, 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 even imagined.
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 in Table 2 (“Gaps & Areas for Recruitment”). Track potential volunteers (and current volunteers’ contact info) in Table 3. A sample is completed in italics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CORE DESIGN TEAM MEMBERS OR PROSPECTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliation (Employer/Organizer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SKILLS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Leadership</td>
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<tr>
<td>Standards and Assessments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Curriculum Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instructional Practices</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>English Language Learners</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher Recruitment &amp; Induction</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Relations and Communications</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Relations, Community Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media and Communications, Social Media, Design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposal Writing and Editing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent and Family Engagement, Parent Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Organizing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge of School District</td>
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<tr>
<td>Political Knowledge and Skill</td>
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<tr>
<th>Operations and Organizational Leadership</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership and Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizational Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Startup Experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Board Governance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Human Resources, Staff Recruitment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundraising, Grant Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law (preferably knowledge of education or civil rights law)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities, Real Estate, Architecture, Construction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other Areas</th>
</tr>
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</table>

Adapted from the Northwest Regional Education Laboratory’s "Charter Starters" Leadership Training Workbook: Start-Up Logistics.
Use the chart below to prioritize needed skills, identify prospects for recruitment, and track Outreach to prospects.

### GAPS/SKILLS AREAS FOR RECRUITMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority Level</th>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Prospect/Leads</th>
<th>Outreach Lead</th>
<th>Outreach Plan</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Priority</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Medium Priority</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low Priority</td>
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</table>

### VOLUNTEER TRACKER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Contact Info</th>
<th>Primary Skills</th>
<th>Potential Role: Design Team, Board, Advisor, Other</th>
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</thead>
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</table>

Potential Committee Assignment
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 and to ensure the work gets accomplished in a timely manner. Be prepared to answer the following questions, either formally at the start, 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. If you are in Indianapolis, The Mind Trust may have a fellowship opportunity to support the work it takes to start a school. Contact them to learn more about what they are looking for, timelines, etc.

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.

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 later become its paid counsel without an open bidding process. Teachers who found the school should not automatically become employees, and parents should know that their child has no special status. He or she must enter the lottery like any other applicant.

Create a Workplan

To keep on top of all the research and decisions that need to be made, we suggest developing a workplan that includes the major tasks of school design. 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 what process you will use to make adjustments, if needed, once work is underway.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Person(s) Responsible</th>
<th>Beginning Date</th>
<th>End Date</th>
</tr>
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</table>

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.

Tools of the Trade

Various project management tools are available, including many online tools. 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/Workstream
- 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 authorizer 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

Over the years, many local and national groups have been established that offer school management services to charter schools. These groups include for-profit education management organizations (EMOs) and nonprofit charter management organizations (CMOs). 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 for a function as central to the school’s mission as the educational program. Here are some issues to consider before making any choice about working with an outside group at your charter school.

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 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 find the best fit and know how well they’ve done in the past. Interview other schools that currently or formerly worked with that provider. How has that relationship worked for that school in that community? How has the provider’s overall school portfolio performed, both academically as well as financially? There are many and varied ways to obtain the services you seek. Research whether contracting with providers of individual services would better achieve your short- and long-term goals.

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. Additionally, working with an EMO or CMO is not the only way to obtain outside expertise in areas such as back office operations, which you may not be as interested in running yourself or developing deep expertise in. Other contractors are likely available for varying services, so be sure to do your homework on the costs and benefits of different types of contractual relationships.

LEGAL STATUS

Charter schools in Indiana must be organized as nonprofit entities authorized by the state of Indiana. During the design phase, a new charter can become a non-profit by forming a board of directors of at least three people and filing Articles of Incorporation with the Indiana 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 may be in your best interest to establish a new nonprofit or at least an independent board that is associated with the existing group but is specifically created to operate the charter school. See this guide’s section on Governance, for more information.

Below we outline the basic steps for incorporating in Indiana 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 an Indiana not-for-profit corporation is a relatively quick and inexpensive process. The entire process is conducted online at the Indiana Secretary of State’s website InBiz.in.gov. The INBiz website provides a step-by-step process to complete the application for Articles of Incorporation. It usually takes one to two days to receive approval and the filing fee is $30.00 with a $1.00 credit card processing fee. You must create an INBiz account to complete.

When applying for the Articles of Incorporation, it is important to have all the required information prepared. This will include corporation name, address, and email. You will also need to list the person responsible for serving as your entity’s Registered Agent. The Registered Agent is responsible for receiving service of process should your entity be involved in legal matters. Typically, this person is an attorney or a board member responsible for administrative matters. You may also pay for a corporation to serve as Registered Agent if you preferred.

One important piece of information you will need to complete the Articles of Incorporation application is Additionally, the Articles of Incorporation specific language regarding distribution of assets upon dissolution and language for statement of purpose. The INBiz website suggests using language approved by the Internal Revenue Service. The IRS

Once your Articles of Incorporation are approved by the Secretary of State, you will have fulfilled the legal requirement that your charter school be operated by a nonprofit organization.

**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 $600. To apply for 501(c)(3) status, you will need to fulfill several requirements, including:

- Complete the Application for Exemption as 501(c)3 (IRS Form 1023);
- Receiving your approved Articles of Incorporation;
- Provide information about board members;
- Developing board bylaws; and
- Creating projected 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 authorizers 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:

- Maintain Good Standing with the Indiana Secretary of State's office by filing Business Entity Reports;
- File appropriate state and federal tax returns;
- Follow IRS Non-Profit guidelines;
- Complete Conflict of Interest Statements for board members; and
- Comply with Indiana law nonprofit corporation provisions as provided in Indiana Code 23-17.

If you wish to be exempt from Indiana sales tax, you must apply separately to the Indiana Department of Revenue. This can be done through the Indiana Secretary of State's INBiz website or the Indiana Department of Revenue's website.

**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 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 Indiana Secretary of State is the website for filing articles of incorporation and beginning the process of establishing a 501(c)3. [https://www.in.gov/sos/](https://www.in.gov/sos/) [https://inbiz.in.gov/BOS/BusinessEntity/StartMyBusiness](https://inbiz.in.gov/BOS/BusinessEntity/StartMyBusiness)

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 become located is not only essential to being approved for a charter but also to becoming successful once you do 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. It will help your authorizer to see the value of your school. Certainly community engagement should 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, in the case of innovation network charters, 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 an authorizer 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 school/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 partner of the school you’re envisioning. Having a CBO as a partner provides instant credibility and recognition. This will help when the developer needs to build a board, seek allies and resources and gather political and community influence. Partnering with a CBO is not a decision to be made lightly. Developers should consider seriously the mission and cultural fit between the CBO and school before continuing to seek a CBO as a sponsor.
Community Stakeholders

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 websites with parents in a low-income community. But don’t assume that population does not utilize any particular medium.

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 local school district data, 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., 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 following page). 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 gained 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.

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.

Strategy for Community Outreach

It is 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 gigantic undertaking. However, it should at least indicate the following:

Theme and contents of a consistent message—Messages will show the benefits 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 district leaders to support the application.”
Tactics

A variety of tactics can be used to solicit community input in 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 in which to hold 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—(maybe by going door-to-door) 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

Spend time researching how to organize and conduct an effective community meeting, ensuring you maximize your efforts on this area.

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.

**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
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 this guide’s section on Family and Community Partnerships for more information on sustaining relationships with parents and the community once the school has opened.

FUNDAMENTAL DESIGN DECISIONS: OUTCOMES, MISSION, AND VISION

Clearly articulating the outcomes you seek for students, your mission and your vision 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. The best charter schools start by clearly articulating the outcomes they seek for students and then write a mission and vision derived from those outcomes.

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.

A good mission statement should be 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:

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

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 interpersonal skills, conflict management and self-perception?
- How will they advocate for their needs?
- How will they solve problems both in and outside the classroom?
- What will students be able to do?
- 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?
Ensure that your mission is attainable and that your statement is measurable. Realistic goals that are still inspiring will attract and support students, and provide the faculty, administration and board of directors with guidance that is actually useful in 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 charter 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.

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 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 district?

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

- 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.

**Soliciting Community Input into Mission and Vision**

There is no one way to create the school’s vision and mission. 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. You can research and find specific resources on how to develop your mission and vision.

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: from “kitchen table” conversations with community representatives, educational leaders, etc.
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 vision and mission 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.

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. Frequently, this leader is called “Principal,” “Director,” or “Head of School.” 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 “Head of School”) 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 for 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 which explains which job titles are 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 Indiana and across the country recognizes the need for exceptional leaders in charter public schools. The charter school leader, whether titled “Principal,” “Executive Director,” or “School Head” and in any model above- will have full oversight over 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 build the team’s knowledge, skillset and mindsets aligned 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 must reflect 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 against goals to continuously improve and strengthen the culture and academic success of the school.

Business Leadership and Community Leadership

The school leader must be able to engage effectively and invest multiple stakeholders into the school experience. Stakeholders include— but are not limited to—families, community-based organizations, political leaders, community neighbors, school district staff and leaders, 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**

Many authorizers require an identified school leader in the charter application, though it is possible some may not. In the case that the authorizer does not, 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 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 counts 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 plans or strategic plans to address bringing 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 EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM**

In addition to being the primary way to achieve the school's central purpose—educating students—the educational program is a key area of a charter school's autonomy and ability to innovate. 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 explore and 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.

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 Indiana Academic 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 or community?
- 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

The 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. Harvard researchers found the following three 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, authors 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 bigger school system. Innovation is obviously still necessary and needed, but it is important to balance it with some models that have worked elsewhere. A robust knowledge of your proposed population will help you develop a program that will be defensible to the authorizer but 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.

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 authorizer 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. The academic goals are likely the goals to which your authorizer will hold you accountable. A good idea is 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 think through what you hope to achieve from the beginning to help you to 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.

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. In Indiana, charter school standards must be aligned with the Indiana Academic Standards.

Find Indiana’s Academic Standards at this site.  
Find Indiana’s Graduation Requirements at this site.  
Learn about Indiana’s Graduation pathways at this site.

However, this does not mean that you should simply adopt the Indiana Academic Standards and move on with your plans. You may want to supplement the standards in reading and math if your team believes that they do not fully address your school’s mission and goals. 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 state standards. 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 ILEARN assessment will be the state test upon which your students will be evaluated. You should set numerical goals for ILEARN passage (for example, 70% of students will pass the Math and Language Arts portions of ILEARN). You will also want to include a growth goal—how much are your students gaining year-over-year. Most schools have an additional academic assessment that is given more regularly than the once-a-year ILEARN so educators can regularly assess student progress. IDOE has currently approved a number of different formative assessments that can be used if your schools wants to utilize state formative assessment dollars.

Non-Academic Goals

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

- High school graduation rate
- College matriculation and graduation
- Student attendance or reduction in chronic absenteeism
- Parent involvement
- Parent/teacher/student satisfaction
- Clear financial audits
- Teacher and/or student retention
- Board effectiveness
- Board effectiveness

There is now a lot of attention being paid to social-emotional growth and support of students. Some charter schools have committed themselves to building up their students’ grit, perseverance, and self-advocacy skills. These can be tricky to measure, but remain important possible non-academic goals to consider.

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.
Putting Your Goals on Paper

In “Creating Performance Goals and Measures for Your Charter School,” 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 focusing 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 greatestautonomies of charter schools is their freedom to pick the curricula and instructional models that will allow their students to master the state standards. A school’s curriculum is the set of courses and content available to or required of students, usually including some indication of how the pupils will learn content, as well as the materials and resources their teachers will use to instruct them or facilitate learning (in the case of more online or blended learning models). Curriculum and instruction are the means to accomplish a school’s goals. Learning standards are what students should be learning, and goals should be based on the standards.

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. It can look very different in various types of schools and at different grade levels.
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, but can encompass higher grades as well, and 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.
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.

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.

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 Indiana standards and assessments
- 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
- 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.

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 (for a fee) provides access to additional resources.

The "Opening and Expanding" section of the National Charter School Center website contains links to multiple information sources on a range of educational program topics from curriculum to assessment and professional development.

**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.

**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 and how it will be used. 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
- 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 tests mandated by the Indiana State Board of Education. Currently, the primary state assessment is ILEARN. Please be sure to review the website for the [IDOE’s Office of Student Assessment](http://www.idoe.in.gov/student-assessment) to learn more about additional state assessments that may be required depending on the students you serve.

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. Among other key elements of a quality assessment plan, 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, and which might be fine to assess less frequently?
• 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?
• 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

Charter schools are charged with the same responsibility as other open-enrollment public schools—to serve all students, including those with identified exceptionalities and IEPs. It is essential to assure special education staffing, procedures, training, curricular accommodations and related costs from the beginning of the planning and application process. The following are important legal issues 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.
• Charter schools are Local Education Agency (LEA), the same designation held by school districts. In that case the charter school is responsible for meeting the needs of special education students, including compliance with IDEA (the Individuals with Disabilities Act, see below).
This section provides an overview of essential elements of a strong special education program, along with state and federal laws and regulations that govern such a program. We cannot attempt to address all of the nuances of special education within the scope of this guidebook. Even more than in other areas of charter school development, we strongly recommend that you work closely with special education experts and consult relevant resources as you develop your educational program and specifically those aspects that support the needs of students with exceptionalities. Developing a special education program is a complicated process with many legal implications. You may wish to contact your authorizer, IDEO, or the Indiana Charter School Network for local recommendations.

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. It is vital that students with IEPs are able to engage with the mission and pedagogy of your charter school to the fullest possible extent.

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, students with an identified exceptionality, a 504 plan, or an IEP may need specialized support. Adaptations to the curriculum and modifications to teaching strategies such as providing more time to complete a test or project can provide students 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 educates and guides the faculty in how to meet the needs of all 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.

There are federal, state, and local regulations specific to special education in charter schools. The chart below depicts the hierarchy of special education policies, regulations, and legislation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Americans with Disabilities (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973</th>
<th>Federal Legislation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Article 7 (Indiana)</td>
<td>State Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authorizer</td>
<td>Local Requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charter School</td>
<td>Building Level Procedures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each layer of this chart is in place to ensure that students with identified exceptionalities are ensured a high quality education that meets their individualized needs. Additionally, each layer also encompasses its own interpretation of the regulations at its level. Maintaining compliance with each layer can seem like a daunting task. Specific information for meeting the reality of each layer have been provided.

Like other public schools, charter schools must comply with the federal laws that include many specific rules for how students with exceptionalities 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, charter schools must meet state and authorizer 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 re-authorized in 2015. 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.

Some of the basic requirements of IDEA are:

CHILD FIND is the requirement that schools locate, identify, and evaluate all students between the ages of 3 to 22 years of age who are in need of special education and related services. The parent may request that an initial evaluation be conducted by either the public school corporation where the nonpublic school is located or the student’s school corporation of legal settlement (the school corporation in which the student lives).

EVALUATION: Local Education Agencies must identify all children suspected of having disabilities who attend their school(s) 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 refusal to evaluate the student. Parents may appeal such refusals. *It is important to note that families are allowed to deny evaluation and testing or stop special education services at any point in the process.

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 discusses the strengths and opportunities for growth of the student, as well as what services the school is able to provide specific to the evaluation data. Ideally, the student will be challenged, but not experience failure as a result of the plan. The IEP must be reviewed at least annually. An IEP includes measurable annual goals and short-term objectives or benchmark marks, 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. It is important to note that the relationship between educators and families are extremely important to ensuring high-quality services. Keep in mind that when the student does well everyone is happy. Keeping the student and family informed and comfortable is an important step of the process.

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

IDEA Procedural Requirements

NOTICE REQUIREMENT: The parents of a student receiving special education services must be provided with a copy of the procedural safeguards notice describing the rights they have regarding their child’s education and be kept informed regarding the student’s progress. Please see the Parent Safeguards provided via the Indiana Department of Education.
The procedural safeguards notice is to be provided to parents upon initial referral (seeking permission to evaluate), when the parent requests an evaluation for services, when the parent requests a due process hearing, and any time the parent requests a copy of information in the student’s record.

The procedural safeguards notice must include information about the process for filing for a due process hearing, timelines, participating in a resolution session, and information about mediation and how that can be pursued.

CONSENT REQUIREMENT: Schools must obtain informed, written consent from parents before conducting an evaluation for special education services, before providing a student with special education services, and before conducting any reevaluation of the student for special education services.

OPPORTUNITY TO EXAMINE RECORDS: Parents must have the ability to review their child’s records, including records relating to identification and evaluation of the student for special education services and educational placement.

Schools are expected to preserve the confidentiality of information pertaining to students receiving special education services and to keep a record of all the individuals who access the files, including names, dates, and purposes.

INDEPENDENT EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION (IEE): Parents have the opportunity to obtain an IEE from a trained examiner not employed by the school if they are not satisfied with the school’s evaluation.

Schools must provide parents with information on where to obtain an IEE and the criteria for IEEs. Parents have the right to an IEE at the school’s expense, if the school’s original evaluation is deemed not appropriate.

An independent educational evaluation (IEE) is an evaluation conducted by a qualified professional who is not an employee of the school. If the parent disagrees with the school’s evaluation the parent may request an IEE at public expense. Within 10 business days of the parent’s request for an IEE at the public’s expense, the school must either:

• Notify the parent in writing that the school will pay for the IEE; or
• Initiate a due process hearing in which the school must show that the school’s educational evaluation is appropriate.

If an IEE is paid for by the school, a copy of the IEE must be received by the school and considered by the student’s CCC. If the parent obtains an IEE at the parent’s own expense, the parent chooses whether to share the IEE with the CCC. If the parent shares the IEE, the CCC must consider that information in making decisions about the student’s educational needs. Schools must consider the results of an IEE when making decisions about special education services and placement.

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

Section 504 prohibits discrimination against persons with a disability by any institution receiving federal financial assistance. The American’s with Disabilities Act (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.

Understood.org offers an exceptionally detailed and helpful chart that lists the differences between IEPs and 504 Plans that we highly recommend. the following chart that depicts the difference between an IEP and a 504 Plan.
State Law and Regulations

Charter schools in Indiana must comply with Indiana’s Article 7, which articulates the special education rules for schools in Indiana. 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.

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. This is an area that many charter school founders try to find local experts to support in their planning process. Experts can help you learn the laws, and ensure you are appropriately planning for meeting the needs of all of your students. Below is a chart of important aspects of programming to keep in mind while designing your special education services.

Please see APPENDIX A for a charter outlining key considerations and best practices for a significant list of areas and services.

Once a charter school has established its procedures for adhering to federal and state requirements, the school must also outline procedures for determining student services, placement, and expectations of working with external vendors. The following checklists may serve as guides as charter schools develop their internal policies and procedures.

Please see APPENDIX B for a lengthy and informative glossary of special education acronyms.

National Resources

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

National Center for Special Education in Charter Schools (NCSECS): This website includes a variety of resources specific to special education and charter schools. NCSECS specifically focuses on policy and research.

Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS): This U.S. Department of Education website includes links to the IDEA statute and related resources.

National Association of State Directors of Special Education: 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.

Council for Exceptional Children (CEC): 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.

Center for Law and Education: This website includes useful briefs on issues related to implementation and enforcement of the rights of students with disabilities. Their issue briefs such as ESSA, may be useful for charter school developers as well.

Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST): The foremost national experts on Universal Designs of Learning. Started in 1984, CAST has worked with numerous universities and schools across the country establishing best practices within UDL.

IRIS Center: The IRIS Resource Center is federally funded professional development that is considered some of the highest quality in the country. Some of the leading experts in the field contribute to this content. The center is located at Vanderbilt University, but all resources are offer via their online format.

National Center on Learning Disabilities (NCLD): The largest national professional organization focused on learning disabilities and executive functioning.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL): CASEL's mission is to help make evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL) an integral part of education from preschool through high school.
**PLACEMENT DECISION-MAKING CHECKLIST**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>✓</th>
<th>Considerations</th>
<th>Prospect/Leads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General Education Supports</td>
<td>What supports have been provided to the student in the general education setting? What supports have been provided to the general education teacher to support integration of the student in the classroom? Has the student benefited from these supports?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Additional Support Services</td>
<td>If the student does not seem to be benefiting from current supports and strategies, what additional supports or services might be provided to assist the student?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Schedule</td>
<td>If the student has been removed for part of the time because of intensity of services provided, is the student integrated with peers during the rest of the school day to the maximum extent possible?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom Management</td>
<td>What is the effect on the student’s peers of the services being provided to the student in the general education setting? Can services be provided with limited interruption and distraction?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alternatives</td>
<td>If the student is not benefiting from the general education setting, what alternative setting might be more appropriate and why?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Indiana Resources**

**Special Education at Indiana Department of Education:** The website includes a range of helpful resources on special education including state-specific information, webinars specifically for charter school leaders, and a listserv to sign up to receive updated guidance.

**Indiana Institute on Disability and Community (IIDC):** A research and policy center located at Indiana University in Bloomington, IN focused on advancing the improvement of policy and practice across the disability lifespan.

**Dyslexic Institute of Indiana (DII):** A non-profit organization in Indianapolis providing specific support for students with Dyslexia. Additionally, the institute serves as an IDOE training site for Dyslexic services, trainings, and support.

**INSOURCE:** Statewide non-profit providing support for collaborating with families and community engagement.

**HANDS in Autism:** Interdisciplinary resource and training center for Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) in partnership between IUPUI and Riley Children’s hospital.

**Indiana Council of Administrators of Special Education (ICASE):** Indiana’s professional organization for special education administrators.

**Indiana IEP Resource Center:** Indiana’s resource center focused on supporting IIEP in collaboration with Indiana State University.

**The Arc of Indiana:** The Arc of Indiana was established in 1956 by parents of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) who joined together to build a better and more accepting world for their children.
With over 27,000 members and 43 chapters in Indiana, and 140,000 members in over 700 chapters nationwide.

**PATINS Project**: The PATINS Project is a state-wide technical assistance network that connects Indiana's local education agencies (LEAs) to Accessible Materials, Assistive Technology, Professional Development & Technical Support through the Indiana Departments of Education and Administration. PATINS helps to ensure that ALL students can access, participate, and progress within their general curriculum.

**Project Success of Indiana**: Project SUCCESS is a resource center that supports higher academic achievement for students with disabilities. We are building local capacity to ensure that students with significant cognitive disabilities achieve increasingly higher academic outcomes and leave high school ready for post-secondary options.

**English Language Learners**

Numerous languages are spoken by students attending Indiana schools. Spanish is still the most common language spoken, other than English. Among the other more common languages are Burmese, Vietnamese, Mandarin, and Arabic. In Indiana, counties with the highest populations of English language learners that are also home to charter schools are Marion, Allen, and St. Joseph. Nationally, one in four children in American schools is Latinx. While initially charter schools served more African-American students, the Latinx population in charter schools is increasing. 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 the strategies, determine whether they are working and reevaluate programs that are not serving ELLs well.

**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.

National Charter School Resource Center  This site has constantly updated links of ELL resources for charter starters.

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

Indiana Department of Education English Learners Office  The IDOE has a page rich with resources, including state and federal programs, policy guidance, a series of topical videos, and a list of educator resources.

Professional Development

Professional development is no longer just a workshop here or there or an outside speaker brought in for a one-time topic. 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. 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. Involve teachers in professional development planning when possible. Faculty members are 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 new teacher orientation. 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.

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.
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 to Better Serve Specific Communities and Populations

If your school will be working with student populations with specific needs or characteristics, preparation may include training aimed at these groups.

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 Indiana, 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. 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 exceeds the state minimum of 180 days. To be clear, charter schools in Indiana are not required to adhere to the 180-minimum day requirement, though most if not all choose to meet or exceed that number.

Charters could choose to implement a year-round schedule to eliminate the loss of learning that can occur during summer break. They can also offer 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:

- 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
- Cost implications
- Advantages and disadvantages of coordinating with local district schools’ calendars
- Any constraints you might have on your facility

TEACHERS AND STAFF

More than anything else, the people in front of 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. This section focuses on recruitment, selection and retention.

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.

When recruiting and selecting the staff of a new school, experts recommend that the first step is to 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 a significant portion 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 August should ideally have the full staff hired no later than the beginning of June, to ensure time for intensive staff development, team building, refining curriculum and assessments.

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 options you will have. Highly-effective, 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 look like 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, and lack of information or misconceptions can be a barrier to connecting with candidates.

Expand advertising to sites 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.

You can read much more and access tools you can use to implement national best practices in staff hiring by using a tool created especially for ICSN. Please take some time to review this guide, Best Practices: Recruitment and Hiring in Charter Schools, created for ICSN by national human capital experts at EdFuel.

**Teacher Certification and Qualifications**

Charter schools are allowed substantial flexibility in hiring personnel. Like any employment situation, hiring teachers and other staff members is a process that requires adherence to federal Equal Employment Opportunity requirements that all applicants/employees must, by law, be given equal opportunity regardless of race, religion, color, creed, national origin, gender or age. The Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits employment discrimination on the basis of disability and requires “reasonable accommodation” on behalf of an employee with a physical disability.

**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 such things. 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 so that they 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.

### 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 and families and community partners will bring resources to the school and help your faculty serve the students’ needs. Student enrollment materials 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 of the elements of the school community can also serve as evidence in the application that your group has thought through fully 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 a 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 help define what the culture should be and plan how
to get it there.

Though it may not be mandated by your authorizer’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, 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 good 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. Since elementary
school children are forming attitudes about education and
older students are often fighting against societal attitudes
about enthusiasm for academics and simple adolescent
boredom, a supportive team approach can be doubly
important.

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.

**Learn From Experience**

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. Borrow and take good ideas back to your
school.

**Creating a School Culture**

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 the book Shaping School
Culture: The Heart of Leadership (For more information, see
“Reading Up On Culture” below):

Start, as with most aspects of creating a school, 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?

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 unconsciously 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.

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 have award and recognition events to honor people who are making a difference and exemplify what your school is about. 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, for instance, 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.

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 the collapse of a few. The good news is that, with foresight and planning, governance can be a source of strength for your school, instead of a problem. In Indiana, all charter schools
must be operated by a nonprofit organization, either an established nonprofit that has launched the school or a new organization created solely to run the school.

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 Indiana education law and nonprofit corporation governance. Remember that both may be revised, but must be filed with appropriate agencies to be effective.

Indiana’s charter schools are subject to the state’s Open Door law. The Open Door law applies to the “official actions” discussed or taken by a majority of a quorum of the charter school’s board of directors. Closed meetings are permitted (but not required) for discussions involving matters such as employment issues and student disciplinary cases. Final

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### MISSION/VISION AND VALUES

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### CULTURE GOALS

### CULTURE STATEMENT

- 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.

### STRUCTURE

- 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.)

### CULTURE ACTIVITIES / ONGOING ACTION
action must be taken at a public meeting. 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 48 hours posted notice of the meeting. The notice must include the date, time and location of the meeting.

Consult the website of the Indiana Public Access Counselor to learn about Indiana Open Door and Public Access laws and to read advisory opinions that might help you with specific questions you are facing. You can also contact their office with questions and concerns.

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.

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, management is about tactical ones. 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 (an older, but well-reviewed book), 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 choices.
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. 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 enough 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. Having the process written down—and followed—makes sure that new board members are not added willy-nilly and 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

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<th>BOARD DECISION MAKING</th>
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<td>BOARD OF DIRECTORS</td>
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<td>- Strategy Decisions</td>
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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 a full complement of 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.

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 Indiana Charter School Law doesn't require board members to be from your area, we suggest keeping a strong majority of 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, while other schools try to be sure to have parents represented on the board, even if it's not an official mandate. Still 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, be sure they bring the skills and commitment that any board member should possess. Just being a parent isn't enough.

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.
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<td>Asian</td>
<td>Latino/a</td>
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<td></td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>Occupations</td>
<td>Accounting/Finances</td>
<td>Fundraising/Developements</td>
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<td>Construction/Real Estate</td>
<td>Legal</td>
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<td>Technology</td>
<td>PR/HR/Communications</td>
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<td>Community/Volunteer</td>
<td>Board Experience</td>
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Introduction

This chapter is intended to be a comprehensive guide to charter school accounting policies and procedures, and a reference to other valuable financial and accounting resources. Its intent is to help charter schools navigate accounting policies and procedures, as well as other common functions. It is not prescriptive for items not required by law; rather, it is intended to be assistive in your School’s operation and success.

Because current laws do not cover every aspect of charter school operations, the guidance in this manual goes beyond the law and official regulations to include information based on best practices and sound internal controls essential to successful charter school operations throughout Indiana. Charter schools come in many shapes, sizes and configurations, so not every practice in this manual will apply to every charter, nor will position titles used always match those in charter schools because of variations in schools’ sizes and structures.

It is best practice for charter schools to consider creating and adopting the following:

- Comprehensive governing board policies and administrative regulations regarding accounting, operations, and human resources that provide guidance for school governance, finance and operations beyond what is in the law, including policies, procedures, best practices, and internal controls.
- A detailed, comprehensive and user-friendly charter school accounting policies and procedures manual; employee manual; human resources policies and procedures manual; facilities and operations manual; and
- Ongoing professional development, training and access to resources for staff members who work in finance and accounting for the school

This manual includes links to sample downloadable forms to help charter schools as they develop their own forms and procedures.

This section may also be adopted to supplement a charter school’s board policies or procedures even if the charter school already has an accounting manual. Sample board policy language for this is as follows:

The Governing Board of the __________ Charter School adopts, on an ongoing basis, the most recent Indiana Charter School Finance and Operations Guide as the __________ Charter School’s accounting policies and procedures manual or to supplement the __________. Charter School’s accounting policies and procedures manual or to supplement the __________. Charter School’s accounting policies and procedures manual or to supplement the __________. Charter School’s accounting policies and procedures manual or to supplement the __________. Charter School’s accounting policies and procedures manual or to supplement the __________. Charter School’s policies and procedures will prevail.

This type of language gives a charter school clarity and the flexibility to follow its own policies and procedures when they differ from those in this manual.

THE NEED TO FOCUS ON FINANCE

Historically, when a charter school fails it is often because of one or more of the following: lack of knowledge about school finance and business; lack of appropriate accounting practices; lack of proper financial management; or uncontrolled spending. Charter operators often focus their energies on the mission, vision and educational program and not enough attention to the school’s fiscal management. Sound financial management, including understanding, establishing, implementing and monitoring
proper internal controls and accounting policies and procedures, is essential to a charter school's ability to achieve its vision and mission.

Many new charter schools begin without a deep understanding of the knowledge, competency and time needed for charter school fiscal management. In addition, when established charter schools experience changes, such as rapid growth, added schools, or changes in administration or management, fiscal policy and oversight is essential to maintain integrity and build capacity. Staff should ensure that they follow established accounting procedures and internal controls, and administrators should ensure that staff have sufficient guidance and training to do so.

Appropriate communication, standardization, training and oversight are critical to ensure that the correct processes and procedures are followed. Local communities may be sensitive to charter schools' challenges, and the media are also often quick to report on these types of issues.

FINANCE OVERVIEW

Your charter school, as its own non-profit organization, will need to have the ability and capacity to establish and maintain sound fiscal management, which include:

- Budgeting
- Financial Management
- Monitoring and Review of Monthly, Quarterly and Annual Financial Statements
- Grant Management and Grant-Related Reporting
- Purchasing
- Accounts Payable
- Accounts Receivable
- Bank Reconciliations
- Insurance Policies
- Revenue Collections

STAFFING AND GOVERNANCE OVERVIEW

It is important to think through how your school will staff for, or potentially contract for, financial operations and oversight in your start-up period, as well as over the entire term of the charter. Your school might grow to support a small team to conduct financial operations. This may not necessarily happen in year one, but it is important to think about your operations team and structure as you grow. It is important to articulate how the planning year and year one of operations will be staffed or serviced for financial operations and how this may transition and evolve as the school grows.

Consider bringing someone onto your founding team who has relevant experience with non-profit and/or educational finance. If you cannot find someone with this experience to serve on your founding 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 optional models. Staffing capacity can vary from school to school depending on enrollment. Here are a few optional ways to structure your business office staff:

- 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 for various functions (Human Resources, State Reporting, etc) and hire a business staff member to oversee, delegate and be responsible for the financial and operational functions of the school.

Regardless of their specific roles, plan to hire qualified and capable personnel to handle the financial management of the school. The individual for this role needs to be separate from academic and cultural management of the school. The school leader, in some cases, will not have financial expertise, nor will have the capacity to conduct day-to-day work directly related to the school's finances and operations.
Therefore, the school leader needs to be able to staff and oversee qualified, dedicated personnel responsible for the financial management of the organization. Having an effective and efficient team to provide non-academic services will also allow the school leader to remain focused on student achievement, while being able to still be cognizant of the school's financial standing.

In addition to general finance, accounting and operations expertise, key skill sets to look for in these positions include:

- Ability to balance an enormous number of tasks and projects concurrently
- Highly detail-oriented
- Ability to maintain professional and cohesive professional relationships
- Experience in Finance and Operations with an operations/procedural-type mindset
- Strong organizational and communication skills
- Ability to plan/execute and work independently

In addition to your finance and operations team, recruiting board members is important to help with financial management and oversight. As you are recruiting board members, you should seek at least one to two board members with considerable financial expertise to help with ongoing financial oversight. You will need a board treasurer and, possibly, 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. The board should look closely at expenditures over certain thresholds or any that may vary from the approved budget. This approval threshold needs to be clearly defined and outlined in your Accounting Policies and Procedures Manual. The board’s treasurer and Chairman should be involved in reviewing financial statements, working with the approved financial consultant, if one is selected, and help with selecting an independent auditor. In addition to monthly financial oversight, the board should also be involved in approving the school’s annual budget before fiscal year end. Typically, schools choose to operate within the fiscal period of July 1st - June 30th. This is in alignment with many financial reporting requirements and is parallel to the school's academic calendar year, as well.

Charter School Funding

CHARTER SCHOOL FUNDING

The school funding formula uses Average Daily Membership (ADM) for the student counts. The Average Daily Membership is a count of students enrolled and expected to be in attendance for Kindergarten through Grade 12 in Indiana public school corporations and all charter schools on two count days in September and February of each School year.

The IDOE pulls Pupil Enrollment from the Real Time data collection while ADM is collected through the Membership data collection. A single student count, taken in the fall, was used for the school formula prior to fiscal year 2014. Beginning in fiscal year 2013, two student counts were taken: one in the fall and one in the spring. Although the February 2013 count was not used for funding purposes, it was a required count. Both count dates annually required approval of the State Board of Education. The ADM was the sum of the following: Resident Enrollment. Resident enrollment for a school corporation included those students with legal settlement in, and who enrolled and attended school in the school corporation.

For a charter school, resident enrollment included Indiana students who enrolled and attended an individual charter school, regardless of legal settlement.

As of July 2019, the state returned to two count days - one in September and one in February.

Tuition Support and Funding Legislative Session Updates

- Appropriates $763M in new dollars for K-12 education
- Increases K-12 tuition support by $539M over the biennium
  - 2.5% increase in FY20 ($178M)
  - 2.5% increase in FY21 ($361M)
- Increases the Foundation Grant from $5,352 to:
  - $5,548 (3.7%) in FY2020
  - $5,703 (2.8%) in FY2021
- Increases the Complexity Adjustment Grant from $3,539 to:
  - $3,650 (3.1%) in FY2020
  - $3,675 (0.7%) in FY2021
- Artificially caps the complexity index so no school’s index drops more than .025 over the previous year
- Provides a complexity bump for schools with high ELL student populations
  - School corporations with an ELL student population of 18% or more receive an additional $128 per student.

Tuition Support Formula FY19-FY20

Enrollment & Admission

A charter school is a public school, open to students from anywhere in Indiana, and is subject to all federal and state laws and constitutional provisions that prohibit discrimination on the basis of the following: (1) Disability. (2) Race. (3) Color. (4) Gender. (5) National origin. (6) Religion. (7) Ancestry. Charter schools must be operated by a non-profit organizer (the entity that seeks and holds the charter).

Kindergarten Cut-Off Update

Adjusts the kindergarten start date (from August 1) only for purposes of providing funding to kindergarten students that are five years of age:

- September 1 – 2019-2020 school year
- October 1 – 2020-2021 school year

On April 29th, 2019, the Governor signed a bill that changed the Kindergarten eligibility birthday cutoff. The change is as follows:

- If your child will turn 5 on or before September 1, 2019, you are eligible to apply to Kindergarten. Previously, the cutoff was August 1st.
- If your child will turn 4 on or before September 1, 2019, you are eligible to apply to IPS Pre-K.
- If your child will turn 5 from August 2, 2019 through September 1, 2019, you can apply to Kindergarten OR IPS pre-K. You may not apply to both.

Note: The below ONLY APPLIES TO CHILDREN WITH AUGUST 2nd - SEPTEMBER 1st BIRTHDAYS.

Indianapolis Student Unified Enrollment

https://enrollindy.org/

Finance & Accounting Basics

ACCOUNTING VERSUS BOOKKEEPING

Accounting, which starts with bookkeeping, is the foundation of successful financial management for a charter school. Every charter school must know how and where money is being spent and when money is coming in.

Key management and business/ operations staff should understand two important concepts:

- The flow of accounting information and how that information is translated into meaningful reports for management, supervisors and other interested parties.
- Accounting is a basic component of fraud prevention and the internal control environment.

Many charter schools use external back office business service providers to perform bookkeeping and accounting services. Charter school administrators should be knowledgeable about their school’s financial position and familiar with the components that drive revenues and expenditures.

Bookkeeping entries are used to establish the accounting records, and the accounting records are used to produce financial reports. Bookkeeping and accounting have two common purposes:

- To accurately record and track income and expenses. Administrators use this information to assess whether financial activities are occurring as projected or whether revisions are needed.
- To collect and process the financial transactions needed for the charter school to file required federal, state, local, and organizational reports, including payroll tax reports and any other tax reports such as sales and use tax.

Finance & Accounting Basics
**BOOKKEEPING**

Bookkeeping is the day-to-day entering and recording of transactions. Examples include writing checks, recording disbursements, processing payroll, and recording receipts.

Whether the bookkeeping is performed in-house or by a qualified back office service provider, ensuring that the charter school has knowledgeable, skilled and experienced bookkeeping staff is foundational to success in this area.

**ACCOUNTING**

Accounting encompasses the broader responsibilities of developing and maintaining the accounting system from which bookkeeping procedures are performed. Accounting involves timely and accurate recording of transactions, and providing this information to management, school administration and the Board of Directors.

**CASH VERSUS ACCRUAL ACCOUNTING**

**CHART OF ACCOUNTS**

You may be asking, “What is a Chart of Accounts and how does this tie to my Financials as a school?” That is a great question! If you are new to educational finance, you will soon come to realize that being familiar with your school’s chart of accounts is very important! You will see your school’s chart of accounts quite often and it impacts several key aspects to fiscal management of your school. Here are just a few places you will begin to see the chart of accounts and why you should make yourself familiar with it:

- School Budget
- Monthly Financial Reports
- Grant Applications & Grant Management
- Invoices
- Online Accounting System (Example: Quickbooks)
- Authorizer Reports

So what exactly IS a Chart of Accounts? Simply put, a chart of accounts is a list of accounts that have specific names and codes. These accounts help you track the money that comes in (income or revenue) and the money that goes out (expenses or expenditures) of your school's bank account. The chart of accounts helps to assign income and expenses to specific places for reporting and tracking purposes. For example, when something is purchased with school funds, it must be categorized into one of the accounts in the chart of accounts. If $1,000 is spent on classroom supplies, those funds must be coded to that specific account in the chart of accounts. For the SBOA Chart of Accounts, that account name and code would be 11100.611- Classroom Supplies. This particular account is for any expenses spent directly on Instructional Classroom Supplies.

Of course, the chart of accounts can get a little more tricky, especially as your school funding gets more complicated. It is important to reach out to a local CPA Firm, financial consultant or network with another school to learn more about the Chart of Accounts, if you are unsure. However, please keep in mind, if your charter school is its own LEA (Local Education Agency), you are required to use the Chart of Accounts that is prescribed by the State Board of Accounts (SBOA). If you do not follow the guidelines and use the prescribed Chart of Accounts, it could greatly impact your accounting and bookkeeping records.

As you think about your accounting system, spend time learning the SBOA Chart of Accounts. Again, charter schools which are their own LEA are REQUIRED to follow the prescribed Chart of Accounts established by the **State Board of Accounts**.

**Resources:**

- SBOA Charter School Manual
- SBOA Chart of Accounts Presentation - New Chart of Accounts Effective 1/1/2019

**DEVELOPING A FISCAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES MANUAL**

Accounting policies and procedures are established to provide guidance for processing financial transactions and for the operational management of the school. Auditors will ask for your financial policies and procedures, so it is VERY important to have these established, created and approved by your Board of Directors BEFORE your opening year. A complete, detailed and comprehensive accounting policies and procedures manual will incorporate some, if not all, of the following topics:
General and Administrative:

- SBOA Chart of Accounts
- Budget development and monitoring
- School site accounting and bookkeeping
- Travel Policy
- Record Retention Policy
- Conflict of Interest Policy
- Asset Inventory Procedure
- Fraud prevention and reporting

Accounting

- Cash receipts and deposits
- Donations and Contributions
- Accounts Payable
- Accounts Receivable
- Bank Reconciliations
- Check Signing Authority Procedure
- Credit Card Policy and Procedure
- Thresholds for Expenditures
- Internal Controls Procedures

Fixed Assets

- Fixed asset control and capital leases
- Capitalization and depreciation
- Asset Disposal Process

Accounting policies and procedures should describe in detail their purpose, responsible parties, and step-by-step procedures, including sample forms. Procedures may include samples of source documents; authorization forms; detailed descriptions of how to perform a transaction or complete a task; and information on authorized signatures needed.

Don’t reinvent the wheel for your Policies and Procedures Manual! See if a local charter school is willing to share its Manual as a template for you to tweak and make your own.

Budgeting 101

BUDGETING PREPARATION AND ADOPTION

Effective best practice requires a charter school to develop budgets collaboratively among school leaders, operations team, Board of Directors and a board-approved financial consultant, if applicable. Charter schools should create a budget development calendar that includes a timeline and important tasks to be completed throughout each fiscal year. Under the leadership of the chief financial officer (CFO), if applicable, and/or the operations team and the school’s financial consultant, budgets should be developed for each school in partnership with the principals and their teams, and for various departments in partnership with their respective managers and staff. All department and school budgets should be combined into an organization-wide budget that is then finalized and monitored by the school leader, Board of Directors and board-approved financial consultant, if applicable. The budget may go through several drafts and may include budget proposals from individual departments and sites.

Each budget line item should be accompanied by a detailed narrative explanation of how each budgeted amount was determined. These explanations should include calculations, references, and other metrics that show how the budgeted amounts were determined and the reasoning for the estimated amounts.
It is important to note that the main driver of charter school funding is the number and type/demographic of students that are projected to be enrolled at the school. See Charter School Funding Section for an estimated per pupil breakdown for budgeting purposes. Each grade to be served should be estimated along with the challenges associated with recruitment because, depending on the district landscape, enrollment will present various challenges. Costs should be assumed in the financial plan related to marketing and recruiting in order to ensure that the targeted enrollment and funding per pupil is achieved.

After the budget is consolidated and balanced, the school leader or executive director should review the budget and accompanying notes before final approval; the final budget is then submitted to the board of directors for review and adoption. Budget study sessions and/or financial committee meetings are often included on the budget calendar to allow discussion of various details/specific line items. This helps ensure an understanding of underlying assumptions, allows questions to be addressed, and allows modifications to be made before the budget adoption meeting.

Charter schools need to allow sufficient time to prepare and review the budget and meet the June 30 deadline for submitting the budget to their authorizing agency and/or reporting agency. In some cases, budget submission may be required by May 31st. Many entities start budget development 4-6 months before the start of the fiscal year.

Schools should consider preliminary discussions and start budget planning around February/March. Put a recurring reminder on your calendar to plan ahead!

Monitoring Performance

A charter school should monitor its financial performance by comparing and analyzing actual revenues and expenditures with budgeted amounts throughout the fiscal year. A budget will change and assumptions become more realistic as the year proceeds and estimates become actuals.

The school leader, CFO (if applicable), operations team and board of directors, and the board-approved financial consultant should monitor the budget each month by reviewing reports that compare actual year-to-date revenues and expenditures with budgeted amounts. In addition, the board of directors should also review the Balance Sheet, Profit and Loss Statement, and Cash Flow Analysis monthly. The school leader, CFO (if applicable), operations team and board of directors, should also institute an ongoing monitoring plan to ensure that fiscal operations meet all federal and state requirements and safeguard all funds and assets.

Recommended Monthly Reports for Board Meetings to Monitor Performance:

- Balance Sheet
- Profit and Loss Statement
- Cash Flow Analysis
- Budget Versus Actual

Budget Versus Actual Reporting

The Budget vs. Actual Report lets you compare your school’s actual revenues and expenses to your school’s budgeted/planned amounts. This monthly, quarterly or annual report will give you your variance amounts, respectively, to enable you to track spending and adjust accordingly. It is wise to include a Budget versus Actual Report in your monthly board meetings to monitor spending and income. Some authorizers and/or agencies may require a Budget Versus Actual Report in their quarterly reporting requirements. It is important for the school leader, operations team, board of directors and financial consultant to use this report to help provide proper and sound financial management of the school.

Budget Changes

After the board of directors adopts a budget by July 1 of each year, the CFO will need to adjust budgeted revenue and expense amounts. Any budget is a best guess based on what is known when it is developed, and expenditures must be coded to their appropriate account codes budget lines. As the charter school develops estimates, identifies unanticipated needs, or encounters the need for other changes, it must revise its budget to include these new assumptions. Budget revisions of any amount should be ratified by the board of directors.
FINANCIAL REPORTING

Reporting Overview

Each year, charter schools are required to follow reporting requirements to several organizations. While it can appear daunting in the beginning, keep in mind that you have several resources to support you in making sure you stay compliant.

Reporting requirements may vary by authorizer and if other organizations help support your school financially. Here is a quick list of possible organizations that you may be required to report to:

- Charter School Authorizer - This could be the Office of Education Innovation (OEI), Indiana Charter School Board (ICSB), Ball State University, etc.
- Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) - Several departments within the IDOE will require you to be compliant with reporting requirements, however, we will focus on those that affect the area of Finance.
- State Board of Accounts (SBOA) - It will be important for you to make yourself familiar with the SBOA and what requirements you are responsible for as a school. The specific list of Financial Reports are listed in this section.
- Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) - In some cases, Innovation Network Schools who operate under the IPS umbrella will also have specific reporting requirements directly to IPS.

These are just a few of the organizations that may require reports to on a monthly, quarterly or annual basis. To assist in keeping track of deadlines, please use the calendar of financial reporting requirements created as a compliment to this guide that enables you to see all of these deadlines in one snapshot! These deadlines are color coded based on organization.

Important Financial Reporting Deadlines & Reminders

Now, we will take a close look at some of the organizations listed above to dive into some of the specific reports you will need to be aware of and mark in the calendar.
Here is a quick snapshot of what a section of the AFR Main Menu will look like:

**Annual Financial Report Main Menu**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit Information</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unit Structure</td>
<td>Complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schedule of Officers</td>
<td>Not Complete</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Core Reporting**

- **Financial Data as of December 31:** Enter capital assets, current assets, net assets, and liabilities.

**AFR User Guide**

AFR Contact Information and Assistance

**Form 100R**

Form 100R is a report that was first required in January 2013. It is a compilation and a Certified Report of Names, Addresses, Duties and Compensation of Public Employees. Form 100R must be entered through the Indiana Gateway for Government Units (Gateway). The form must be submitted by January 31 each year by the executive officer of the government unit, but in Gateway this has been delegated to the fiscal officer. In Gateway, by default, the fiscal officer that submitted the Annual Financial Report and/or the Budget for the governmental unit is also the 100R submitter.

If submitting data via manual entry in Gateway, it would be helpful to run a payroll report prior to beginning. It may help to run a report in your payroll system with the following information/fields first:

- List of Employees who received wages and/or compensation for the Prior Calendar Year (January - December)
- Total Amount of Gross Wages for all employees who received wages and/or compensation and were employed by the School during the period of January - December. Include all Active and Terminated Employees.
- Title of Each Employee
- Department of Each Employee (Administration, Instructional, etc.) Include a breakdown of Certified and Non-Certified.

You may also choose to submit in Gateway via a file upload. Upload specifications can be found [here](#). Please note and be aware that a File Upload is not a requirement and is OPTIONAL.

### 100R User Guide

#### INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (IDOE)

While the Indiana Department of Education has many reporting and accountability requirements, this section will focus solely on those required by the Finance Division.

The division’s goal is to provide customer services, fiscal responsibility and accountability, through established best practices, to the programs incorporated in the IDE while operating with optimal efficiency and aligning all available resources around student learning.

#### Link Initiative

The IDE is working on a project that will streamline the data, resources and information regarding State and Federal Funding Streams. Formerly the Learning Connection, this new system will allow schools to easily navigate all financial information for their school in one place. Here are some details regarding the new Link Initiative:

- **INtelligrants:** The purpose of this project will be to improve the processing of the State and Federal funding streams.
- **Data Exchange:** The purpose of this project will be to improve the process of data transfer and certification for student and educator level data submitted by schools and school corporations.
- **INview:** The purpose of this project will be to improve access to IDE data and resources.
- **Unified Access:** The purpose of this project will be to establish and implement the foundational technical elements which will support the remaining projects.
• Schools 360: The purpose of this project will be to implement a tool to improve the capacity of internal staff to support customers.

• Link Initiative Overview and Update

**IDOE Finance Application Center**

The next important website that you will need to ensure your school is registered to access is the [Finance Application Center](#). This website allows you access to key funding information regarding State Aid, Per Pupil Funding Amounts and the school’s most up-to-date Form 54.

**Form 54**

Form 54 will break down your State Tuition Monthly Support Payments received and distributed by month and year. It is important to have access to view this information, not only for monthly use, but also for your Annual Audit. Form 54 will break down your Basic Grant, Complexity Grant, Adjustments and more. You can also use this website to calculate future estimations. Schools MUST be familiar with their Form 54 and your Auditor will ask for this information. Make sure you obtain your login and check it frequently so you are familiar with the Basic Funding for your school.

**State Reporting**

State Reporting is a requirement for all schools through the STN Application Center. While most of these reports are not finance related, it is important to note that reporting can directly affect funding for the school. Those specific reports include Student Counts, Textbook Data, and School Data, to name a few.

State/ Data Reporting Resources:

• [Data Reporting Calendar](#)
• [Data Reporting List and Layout Requirements](#)
• [DOE Data Reporting Contact List](#)
• [STN Application Center Login](#)

If your school does not have staff familiar with State Reporting to IDOE via the STN Application Center, you may want to strongly consider hiring an experienced state reporting consultant.

**IDOE Finance Department - Staff Directory**

**ANNUAL AUDIT REQUIREMENT**

Charter schools must conduct an annual audit. Charter schools should plan to choose an independent auditor or private examiner in April/May for planning purposes and work with their provider to schedule the audit well in advance of when it will actually take place. Most audits are scheduled between September-November to have final copies ready for submission to SBOA prior to the December 31st deadline. Authorizers will also require a copy of the audit.

More information regarding the annual audit process can be found in Section [7 - Annual Audit](#). In addition, please reference the [Guidelines for Audits of Charter Schools](#) published by the SBOA.

**INDEPENDENT CONTRACTORS AND 1099 REPORTING**

A Form 1099-MISC is IRS proof of how much money you received for independent contract work from the company that hired you. If the company paid you less than $600, it doesn’t have to send you a 1099-MISC. A Form 1099-MISC is to independent contractors what the Form W-2 is to employees.

Throughout the year, it is important that the operations manager and/or the person who handles Accounts Payable, keep a W-9 on file for each independent contractor. Check the IRS website for how an independent contractor is defined.

*Keep an Electronic Copy of the most current W-9 on your computer desktop to save you time when needing to send/print quickly for a vendor.*
State Board of Accounts (SBOA)

OVERVIEW

Learning about the State Board of Accounts (SBOA) can be daunting. This section outlines key takeaways regarding SBOA compliance and highlights some areas of focus.

While SBOA mandates many charter schools and requires specific items, it is important to always stay abreast of the most recent changes and how they may affect your school. It is important to assess and review your processes each year after your annual audit to ensure your school is using proper and efficient ways to remain in compliance. It is important to frequently check the State Board of Accounts website to have an accurate understanding of regulation and compliance requirements. The most up-to-date and recent copy of the SBOA Charter School Manual can be found and downloaded here.

PRESCRIBED FORMS

A charter school needs to understand and be aware of certain forms that are required for use in day-to-day finance and accounting operations. These forms are designed to be used in conjunction with accounts payable, receipts, purchasing and requisitions, to name a few. A full list of the prescribed forms can be found here. While the list may be all inclusive, a few of the forms, which are noted, are most important and frequently-used.

Accounts Payable Voucher

One of the most frequently-used forms is the Accounts Payable (AP) Voucher Form (523), also known as the AP Voucher. Auditors will conduct audit checks of the AP Voucher to ensure it is properly completed. An AP Voucher must be completed for all accounts payable items (invoices) which are processed and proper signatures must be obtained according to the thresholds set and approved by the board of directors outlined in the school's Financial Policies and Procedures Manual. A minimum of two signatures are needed for every invoice, statement or payable the school processes. Here is a quick view of what a Sample AP Voucher Form looks like:

Sample AP Voucher Form

Purchase Order

Some vendors may require a school to submit a purchase order (PO) when ordering a large quantity of items or a particularly large order. Frequently, purchase orders can be created using your accounting system or platform. The most important aspect of a PO is that the number should not have the ability to be altered. A pre-populated PO Number is best. Here is a glimpse at an example of a SBOA Prescribed PO:

Sample Purchase Order Form
CHART OF ACCOUNTS

The Chart of Accounts is a list of categories divided into account names, object codes and funds as a way to track expenses and income for a school. The State Board of Accounts mandates that certain, and most, charter schools use their designated Chart of Accounts for accounting records. Regardless of the type of accounting system or platform that a school chooses to use, it is imperative that charter schools recognize the importance of utilizing the SBOA Chart of Accounts immediately, whether that is pre-opening or Year 1.

You can find more information about the Chart of Accounts Here.

INTERNAL CONTROL STANDARD

Each school that operates as a separate LEA is required to adopt the Internal Control Standard set by the SBOA. The adoption of this standard must occur and appear in board-approved minutes in preparation for the annual audit. The school is responsible for ongoing training and certification of any staff members that would apply according to the set compliance guidelines.

If you do not complete the SBOA’s Internal Control Standard Training for each staff member that handles cash on-site, it could result in a finding. It is quite simple to complete this training. You can find information here with the Training Video and required Certification Forms for your school.

SBOA Internal Control Standards Training

- Guidelines and Overview
- Training Video
- Certification Form
- Training Requirements

CONCLUSION

While the SBOA provides a significant amount of data around the governance, requirements, compliance and training(s) required for a charter school, here are the important highlights to keep in mind and make yourself familiar with:

- Reporting Requirements:
  - **100R** - Annual report due by January 31st.
  - **Annual Financial Report (AFR)** - Annual Report due by August 29th for the July 1st - June 30th Fiscal Period
  - **Annual Audit** - Due by December 31st each year

- Internal Control Standard Training - Complete this training for all applicable staff

- Chart of Accounts - Make sure your school is utilizing and implementing the SBOA Chart of Accounts immediately for accounting purposes.

- Prescribed Forms - SBOA will require your school to use several prescribed forms and procedures for accounting and bookkeeping purposes. Work with your school’s financial consultant, accountant or Contact the SBOA for more information on specific forms and guidelines.

Annual Audit

OVERVIEW & WHAT TO EXPECT

SBOA Guidelines for the Audits of Charter Schools

The State Board of Accounts (SBOA) requires that charter schools are audited annually by an Independent CPA. While an audit happens every fall, schools should really be preparing throughout the entire school year for their audit. They can do so by making sure they are up to date with SBOA Requirements (listed throughout this document) and having thorough processes in place. More importantly, and for the reason of the Audit, it is crucial to have detail-oriented folks helping manage the financial and operational components of the school.

If a school is in its pre-opening year, the school administration and board of directors should begin discussions around the process for selecting an independent auditor within the first 6 months of opening. Being proactive about the audit process will ensure the school is prepared and that not only the audit but the school’s operations run smoothly during the first year of operation. Many school leaders and boards of directors engage in an RFP process to select their auditor. Schools should reach out to their network of leaders and other established entities if you are unsure of where to begin the search. In addition, many organizations have preferred vendors that they can recommend for school leaders to choose from. For example, Indiana Charter School Network has a list of preferred audit vendors that
are listed as a resource. At the very latest, you should have an auditor chosen by the end of March in your first year. For example, if your school opens in the Fall of 2019, your auditor should be selected and board-approved by the end of March 2020. Some auditors choose to perform a “Pre” Audit in May or June, prior to the full audit in the fall following your first fiscal year end. If an auditor is selected by the end of March, it enables all parties to have ample time to prepare.

**Audit Checklists & Preparation**

Many times, auditors will provide schools with an audit preparation checklist. This checklist can provide insight to the type of information the auditor will look for and how a school can be prepared. Below is a link to a sample checklist from an independent CPA firm.

Take a look at [Sample Audit Checklists](#) now!

If you clicked on the link above, you will see that there are two sample audit checklists. The reason there are two Audit Checklists is because there are two parts to an audit - the financial portion and the SBOA portion of the audit. Some key items from the checklist that need to have processes in place for from your first day of school are:

- [Deposit Procedures](#) with an approved [Receipt Book](#)
- [Invoice Approval](#) Procedure
- [Internal Control Standard and Training](#)
- Access to all Payroll Reports and Employee Files, including Employee Contracts
- Meal and [Textbook](#) Applications
- State Reporting Documents (via the STN Application Center)

**AUDIT RESPONSIBILITY AND COSTS**

The audits of charter schools may be initiated and administered by the State Board of Accounts; by state or local government funding agencies; or by the entities themselves. Audits may be performed by the State Board of Accounts or private examiners approved by the State Board of Accounts and hired by the charter school. Audit costs are always the responsibility of the charter school. Costs for an audit vary depending on the audit firm chosen and can range anywhere from $10,000 to $20,000 depending on the size of the school and other variables involved.

Communication of audit status, findings, audit results and comments, financial statements, and notes between the private examiner and charter school management (executive director and those running the charter school on a day-to-day basis), and governance (charter school board and organizer) is appropriate and necessary. It is important for the private examiner to remind management and governance that any discussions between the private examiner and management or governance is not public information or for public disclosure until the report has been filed and publicly released.

**Audit Filings and Extensions**

Audits performed by private examiners are to be completed and all required reports issued within 180 days after the close of the audit period. Any requests for an extension of time must be made by emailing the State Board of Accounts at charterschools@sboa.in.gov. The request shall include the reason an extension is needed and the amount of extra time being requested. Extensions may be granted by the State Board of Accounts for up to an additional 60 days. Requests for extension must be received no later than 30 days prior to the report deadline indicated above to be considered for approval. Extensions are not automatic; any request for an extension may be rejected by the State Board of Accounts. Any extension approval shall be in the form of a written response. Any charter school that does not have an audit completed and reports submitted by the deadline or request an extension as indicated above will have their audit completed by the State Board of Accounts.

**AUDIT REPORTS**

**Financial Audit Report**

The financial report must contain the financial statements of the charter school and the private examiner’s opinion thereon. The financial statements may be prepared by the
school on the [GAAP](#) basis or one of the following other comprehensive bases of accounting: a) modified cash basis or b) cash basis. If the charter school is required to have a [Single Audit](#), the report must include a Schedule of Expenditures of Federal Awards. The Schedule of Expenditures of Federal Awards must meet the requirements as set out in Uniform Guidance, and it must be in the format outlined in accordance with the SBOA.

If the financial statements are prepared on a basis of accounting that would not require the charter school to report on the face of the financial statements or in a written note disclosure information concerning outstanding debt, capital assets, or receivables and payables, the report is required to include a Schedule of Long-Term Debt, a Schedule of Capital Assets, and a Schedule of Receivables and Payables as Supplementary Information. If a Uniform Guidance audit is required, two additional reports must be issued:

- Report on Compliance With Requirements That Could Have a Direct and Material Effect on Each Major Program and on Internal Control Over Compliance in Accordance With Uniform Guidance.

The financial audit report shall include a reference to any other reports issued by the private examiner for the charter school.

**SBOA Supplemental Report**

In addition to the findings required to be included in the financial audit report for compliance with Government Auditing Standards and Uniform Guidance, a supplemental report is required to be issued to identify noncompliance with laws, regulations, and the Accounting and Uniform Compliance Guidelines Manual for Indiana Charter Schools established by the State Board of Accounts. IC 5-1-11-9(d) states that on every examination performed, inquiry shall be made as to:

- The financial condition and resources of the school;
- Whether the laws of the State of Indiana and the Accounting and Uniform Compliance Guidelines Manual for Indiana Charter Schools issued by State Board of Accounts established have been complied with and identifies the required minimum compliance testing. In addition to the required minimum compliance testing, the audit shall include additional compliance testing as deemed necessary for the risks identified during the examination process; and
- The methods of preparation and accuracy of the accounts and reports of the charter school.

The supplemental report shall also include any response from the school officials concerning the audit. Before an examination report is signed, verified, and filed, the officer of the state office, municipality, or entity examined must have an opportunity to review the supplemental report and to file a written response to that report. If a written response is filed, it shall be submitted by the entity to the private examiner and become a part of the supplement report.

**AUDIT REPORT DISTRIBUTION**

Upon completion of the financial audit report and supplemental report on compliance if applicable, the private examiner shall send the reports to charterschools@sboa.in.gov in an unlocked pdf, Microsoft Word, or Microsoft Excel document. A copy of the draft or final Data Collection Form is also required to be sent with the reports when the charter school has contracted for an audit under Uniform Guidance. The reports will be reviewed and approval returned to the private examiner via email. The reports shall not be issued until reviewed by the State Board of Accounts and approved by the State Examiner. Therefore, the private examiner cannot disclose any information gained from the audit process prior to this approval. When approval is received from the State Board of Accounts, the private examiner shall issue the reports to the charter school. Additionally, the private examiner is responsible, after State Board of Accounts approval, to file the report with federal awarding agencies and pass-through entities when an audit is performed in accordance with Government Auditing Standards and/or the Single Audit Act.
AUDIT REVIEW AND ACCEPTANCE

Due to the oversight responsibility for audits performed in accordance with IC 5-11-1-9, a quality control review of a private examiner's work for sufficiency in scope and adequacy in quality may be performed at the State Examiner's discretion. In addition to a quality control review of the audit, the SBOA will evaluate findings of noncompliance for further action required of this department. The auditee will be responsible for any cost related to any review performed by the State Board of Accounts. Any reports submitted to the State Board of Accounts shall be at no cost to the State Board of Accounts.

RESOURCES

• GUIDELINES FOR THE AUDITS OF CHARTER SCHOOLS
• INTERNAL CONTROL MANUAL
• INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY MANUAL
• CHARTER SCHOOL MANUAL (Scroll down page; Under Uniform Compliance Guidelines)

Accounting Policies & Procedures

AUTHORITY & INTERNAL CONTROLS

When forming your financial policies and procedures, one of the most important overarching factors to keep in mind is how your school manages authority over finances and the internal controls you have set in place. How you determine who is involved in all processes related to finance and operations for the school should incorporate a minimum of two individuals and signing authorities.

When an auditor visits your school for your annual audit, their job is to ensure the school has proper internal controls in place for all financial transactions. For example, your examiner will want to see that there are two signatures for all invoice approvals on your accounts payable voucher form. They will want to see that the proper individuals are not only processing, but approving payables for the school. An auditor would be concerned if only one person was approving, signing and processing payments to vendors. This would not show that the school has made sufficient effort to prevent fraud and misconduct.

Pay close attention to your processes and ensure there are proper signing authorities and no less than two individuals responsible for approving and processing payables and receivables for the school.

In addition, each school should be sure to establish a threshold, or maximum spending amount, that triggers a requirement for board approval. This is another safeguard that shows auditors the school has been thoughtful regarding making sure internal controls are in place to maintain proper financial accountability.

ACCOUNTS PAYABLE (AP)

Accounts payable, AP for short, is an accounting entry that represents a company's obligation to pay a short-term debt to its creditors or suppliers. It appears on the balance sheet under the current liabilities. Another common usage of AP refers to a business department or division that is responsible for making payments owed by the company to suppliers and other creditors (Investopedia, 2019).

More than likely, your business operations manager will help manage and process the accounts payable for the school. The school leader, and even board of directors, should be involved in accounts payable, however, the school leader may not have the capacity to be the person who handles the overall process. For example, the operations or business manager may receive and enter invoices, and create the AP voucher for approval and payment. The school leader would be involved in the high end review of the process, but not necessarily the details leading up to the point of approval.

Regardless of the school's internal operations and procedures, accounts payable must be properly managed and administered. Here are a few important items to keep in mind and tips that may help when it comes to processing accounts payable:

• Create vendor files by vendor name for accounts payable
• Be sure to use an approved AP Voucher for all invoices, expenditures and receipts (including credit card statements). NOTE: Your AP Voucher must have a MINIMUM of two signatures and additional board member signatures if it exceeds the maximum threshold set.
• For each new vendor or payee, be sure to obtain their W-9 and file in their vendor file. This will make the process run smoothly when it is time to process 1099's after year end.

• Tip: The business operations manager should have a set date to enter all invoices and a consistent date by which checks are issued to vendors. Example: Enter all invoices into the accounting system on Monday mornings and process checks every other Friday.

• Ensure your business office is familiar with all grants and expenditures for each grant so that all accounts payable items are coded properly.

ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLE (AR)

Accounts receivable (AR) is the balance of money due to a firm for goods or services delivered or used but not yet paid for by customers. Said another way, accounts receivable are amounts of money owed by customers to another entity for goods or services delivered or used on credit but not yet paid for by clients (Investopedia, 2019).

Most schools do not perform specific services that would involve money owed to them by vendors. For the first few years, at least, most schools have accounts receivable items from Basic Tuition Support and other federal and local grants. For example, an accounts receivable item that a school more than likely receives each month would be their ADM Payment for Student Tuition. This amount is based on the student enrollment for the school. See Section 2 - Charter School Funding, for specific funding details.

When income is received for the school, the business office must enter and code monies received according to the SBOA Chart of Accounts. Funds received should be tracked by account and class. For example, all Basic Grant funds should be coded toward the 3111 Basic Grant Account within the School’s selected Accounting System.

A school's business office should maintain appropriate records for accounts receivable. Here a few important things to keep in mind and some tips to help make your accounts receivable process run smoothly:

• Register for email notifications for all State of Indiana deposits that are processed for the school. Email vendors@auditor.in.gov to add, change or remove any school staff members to these email notifications.

• When grant checks are received for deposit into the school’s account, be sure to make copies of the check and any other documentation that would be helpful to reference in the future.

• Tip: Create a deposit binder for each school year and create tabs by month to track all deposits and related documentation. More about this is mentioned in the next section titled Cash Receipts and Deposits.

CASH RECEIPTS AND DEPOSITS

As mentioned in the above section, schools must implement necessary procedures related to money that is received at the school, whatever form that may be. This section will provide examples for types of funds that may be received at the school and how to properly document those to remain compliant for audit purposes.

Each time a school receives money, it must be documented and tracked until it is deposited into the school’s bank account. The following are helpful resources to effectively process school deposits and a sample procedure:

Deposit Resources:

• Sample Deposit Procedures
• Donation Letter Template
• Grant List Tracking Template

Deposit Processing Items:

• School Deposit Ticket
• Bank Deposit Book (Duplicate or Triplicate; Comes from Bank)
• Approved Receipt Book
• Back Up Documentation, if applicable (Example: Copies of checks being deposited)

The above resources may serve as a starting point related to processing deposits for your school. Again, record keeping is extremely important. One best practice is creating a deposit binder with tabs by month for each fiscal year (Example: July 2019-June 2020). This will help you keep all of your receipts, deposit tickets with two signatures and back up documentation in one place. In addition, this type of filing system can be helpful for school staff to easily access for an audit.
Donations

Keep in mind, any donations received at the school need to follow the same deposit procedures above. A receipt should be issued to person or organization making a deposit. The second copy of the receipt, a copy of the check, and a copy of the donation letter should all be kept with the school deposit ticket records.

Auditors will look for proper receipts and that donation thank you letters have been issued. Create a donation thank you letter template for your school to have on file to easily customize for any incoming donations.

Receipts

While the receipt book is mentioned in the above deposit resources several times, it is important to point out that it is crucial for a school to be aware of this requirement. Many schools, especially their first year, do not realize that having a triplicate receipt book at the school is required. Again, any funds coming into the school, cash, check or money order, need to have a receipt issued for each separate amount. The receipt book should be kept in appropriate hands and the school should be sure to outline how the funds should be managed.

Each receipt issued should have the following information:

- Name of person or organization from which funds have been received
- Type of funds being received (cash, check, etc.)
- Amount of funds received (separate receipt for each amount received)
- Signature of person receiving funds
- Receipt Copies:
  - Top Copy -----------> Person/ Organization you are receiving funds from
  - Middle Copy -----------> Placed with School Deposit Ticket to stay on-site in binder
  - Bottom Copy -----------> Stays in Receipt Book for tracking purposes

Be sure that your receipt book is triplicate. Here is an example of an SBOA Approved Receipt Book.

CREDIT CARDS

For many first year schools, cash flow can be challenging. A temporary solution for some schools to help manage their finances during pre-opening, year one and beyond is to apply for a corporate school credit card. While having a school credit card is helpful, it can also be an area where schools need to apply great caution. During pre-opening, and especially year one, it can be quite difficult to manage a corporate credit card. Depending on a school's staffing structure and capacity, schools may struggle with documentation and maintaining proper internal controls around a credit card. Historically, schools have struggled with the following tasks when it comes to a corporate credit card:

- Missing Receipts
- Excess spending and over usage
- Improper tracking of expenditures in accounting system
- Improper approval of expenditures using the AP vouchers and established thresholds

While this section is not intended to dictate whether a school uses a corporate credit card, it is intended to caution schools to consider the pros and cons with having a school credit card.

If a school chooses to apply for a corporate credit card, it should create a policy within the fiscal policies and procedures manual. This enables the school to have guidelines and approval by the board of directors for the authorized card holders and procedures for ensuring accountability measures are in place. Here are some additional resources that can assist in ensuring sound procedures around the use of a school credit card:

- Sample Credit Card Policy
- Receipt Tracking Form

Tip: Print out several of these and keep in a folder. Each time you have a receipt from the school credit card, tape the receipt to this form and fill out the information regarding coding in QB. This can help make sure the process is easier when organizing receipts to the statement at the end of the month.
In addition, if a school card is used, monthly reconciliations must be completed and included in all financials.

**ACCOUNT RECONCILIATION**

Reconciliation is an accounting process that uses two sets of records to ensure figures are correct and in agreement. It confirms whether the money leaving an account matches the amount that has been spent, and ensures the two are balanced at the end of the recording period. Reconciliation provides consistency and accuracy in financial accounts (Investopedia, 2019).

In order to accurately provide financial reports for your board of directors, process the necessary required financial reports and prevent inaccurate accounting records, it is important to reconcile the school’s bank accounts at the end of each month. In most cases, schools hire a financial consultant or accountant to assist with the monthly bank reconciliations.

**FACILITIES**

Identifying and securing a facility to house your school is an essential and challenging piece of the charter school development process. Charter schools do not receive facilities funding through local property taxes like traditional public schools, and unlike traditional public schools, charter schools do not have the ability to raise funds dedicated 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 early in the charter school development process and have a realistic timeline of what is required.

Despite the challenges of the facilities process, every operating charter school has found a facility, and many have wonderful school buildings that help provide an appealing and appropriate setting for learning. The process does require planning, perseverance, creative thinking, and the help of skilled individuals. Some charter schools ultimately find housing in old district buildings or former parochial schools or other educational / training facilities (i.e., community of private colleges, training centers, etc.). Others use converted office, commercial or light industrial space, trailers, and other types of buildings.

Please also note how far into this guide the discussion of facilities comes. Too many potential charter schools attempt to BEGIN the planning process with a particular building in mind. If you do not have a significant number of the aforementioned issues hammered out, you are not ready to choose and facility. While it is exciting to imagine your school coming to life inside of a facility that you can see and visit, you cannot let the facility drive your planning in the earliest stages. Concentrate on your core team and the major facets of how your school will education kids and operate.

**Starter School, Then a Permanent One**

Some charter schools begin operations in buildings that will not be their permanent homes. A school may open with a few grade levels and grow over the course of several years, changing the school’s need for space. Some schools don’t have sufficient funding at their launch to rent, buy or build an ideal facility that can accommodate the school’s full student body when attendance is at capacity. Others aren’t able to find or prepare the perfect building before the first school year starts.

If you encounter any of these situations, consider the option of moving after a few years into a long-term site. There may be more small-school facility options available in your community, and starting in a temporary space can give you a chance to build a track record of success, which can allay potential creditor concerns about lending money to a brand new organization. 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 operations, a charter school can exhibit to potential lenders and funders positive and/ or improving test scores, a growing and active waiting list, and solid audited financial results and request funding for a more permanent facility.
Many of the steps involved in finding a permanent facility are relevant for the search for the school’s first site, from determining the best fit for your school to financing the deal. However, be sure to have a long-term and short-term plan working side-by-side if you decide to go this route. Some advise that a charter school should not immediately buy a facility in the first year of operation, but you have to judge whether you have found a good deal or the perfect location and are prepared to determine your long-term home from the get-go.

Overarching Ideas

There is some basic advice to keep in mind throughout the facility search:

- 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.
- Consider getting these individuals to be members of your founding board.
- If possible, hire an experienced project manager 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.
- Start with sufficient enrollment to cover rent or debt service.
- Try to secure enough physical space for several years’ growth.

Or, alternatively, secure lease expansion or adjacent space options that will secure gradual space increases as your organization grows.

Minimize the non-instructional space (i.e., administration, storage, etc.) that do not add revenue. Make your spaces as multifunctional and flexible as possible; for instance, lunchroom and gym may be housed in the same space, small instruction or pull-out rooms can double as conference rooms via the use of changing furniture groupings.

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.

Even after you have identified where you’d like to be and think that you have secured your perfect space, have a backup 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 a plan, an outline of what you’re looking for and how you’ll find it and 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; particularly in early years)

• Access to food (this is often forgotten)

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 refer to 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:

• Applicable federal, state and municipal building codes and ordinances compliance

• Environmental clearance

• Accessibility to persons with disabilities

• Space for secure storage of student records

• Designated spaces for students with IEPs

• Access to spaces supporting graduation requirements (e.g., PE for high schools)

Finding a Site

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.) and character, transportation needs, marketing strategies, student population, and the programs you can legally offer.

Before you move into a building, you’ll have to deal with 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 that take longer than you’d expect. Give yourself at least 18 months to identify and renovate a school building.

Form a Committee

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. 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 also involves balancing a very delicate act, so that nobody feels excluded, ignored or disrespected.

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.
Lease vs. Buy

As you’re considering the 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, your hands will be full with the first year school activities; you don’t 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 you don’t build up any equity, have less control over property management and may face lease renewal restrictions. With help from experts, examine the relative merits of leasing space (from public or private agencies) as opposed to building or purchasing space. Keep in mind that a lease should not be longer than the term of the charter.

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.

Make sure you check out the 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. If your parking lot is off-site, you may want to consider an escorting officer for your staff at night.

Build relationships with local residents and businesses, and tap into networks such as the chamber of commerce. You can investigate whether your district has any unoccupied or long-closed buildings, or if the school board is considering closing buildings in the near future. Other resources might include the archdiocese, or local politicians, religious leaders, and existing charters.

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

DISTRICT BUILDINGS

Definitely investigate schools and former schools and vacant facilities owned by the school district, town or city.

Indiana’s Unused School Buildings Law

Since school corporations are frequently hostile to charters and have historically viewed sharing buildings with them as a threat, Indiana first created a law in 2011 that allowed charters to buy or lease unused school corporation buildings for $1. That law was impossible to police, and was only used successfully one time, so it was revised in the 2019 legislative session.

Under the new law, school districts must notify the IDOE within ten days of a board vote to close a building. IDOE must immediately inform charter authorizers and ICSN about the impending vacancy so they can spread to word to potentially interested schools. Schools then must claim the building within 90 days. For interested charter schools, the corporation must make the school building available for inspection, and make several pieces of information available regarding the building:

• Estimates of the operating expenses for the school building for the past three years.
• Written information regarding the condition of the building, including the age of the roof and the HVAC system, and any known conditions which likely require prompt repair or replacement.
• A description of the property as shown on the current tax statement.

Interested charter schools must provide the following:

• The name of the charter school that is interested in leasing or purchasing the vacant or unused school building.
• A time frame, which may not exceed two years from the date that the school building is to be closed, in which the charter school intends to begin providing classroom instruction in the vacant or unused school building.
• A resolution, adopted by the board of the charter school stating that the board has determined that, after the charter school has made any necessary repairs or modifications, the school building will be sufficient to meet the charter school’s needs and can be operated within the charter school’s budget.
There is a somewhat different procedure for school buildings over 200,000 sq. ft, such as a tradition, large high school building. Charters interested in such soon-to-be-vacant buildings must provide additional information when requesting the building, including the charter’s expected enrollment when the school has reached full enrollment, and a letter from the school’s authorizer, stating that the school is expected to be at least 60% of the former district school’s maximum enrollment during the last 25 years.

There are additional procedures for if a charter does not use the building within two years, if multiple charters claim the same building, and if a district does not follow the law. Consult the full language of the law.

**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; their classroom sizes (typically smaller) may, or may not be conducive to your school’s educational design.

Find out when these facilities where 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.

**Non-Educational Buildings**

Office / commercial: Some charters operate in commercial or office buildings; however, such buildings will almost certainly have 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.

Multi-use facilities: In some cases, a community development corporation or other community-based organization 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.).

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 also require planning time and early ordering; during the summer, everybody competes for a spot in the modular factory assembly line.

Sharing a facility with another charter school: Many charter schools are envisioned as a small school, where students are more easily known by faculty and their peers. In Indianapolis in particular, a number of charter schools are planning to open by sharing space with another charter in grades that do not compete with each other. Such schools could even become feeders. 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 the schedule for 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 unexpectedly without a building.
• Who is responsible for facility maintenance? Who oversees the janitorial teams to assure that both schools are treated equally?

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 choose 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 organizations. 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.

Facility Considerations

A few things to consider when evaluating any facility:

Will you be the sole occupant or share with another school or organization?

If you are locating in a district facility, 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

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 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. You should brainstorm and prioritize with your architect about how to meet the school’s goals.
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.

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

When working with an architect, look for someone 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.

Final Evaluation and Feasibility

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 core design group. Have your qualified architect 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 having more than just one site to consider, even if your first choice is preferable. In any event, since you usually can’t pay for and finally 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 relative to 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, walk-ways, doors, windows, ceiling heights, etc.

Your architect can recommend a contractor to do a cost estimate of how much it will take to bring a building up to code, in both time and money. Be aware that there may be alternative approaches to meeting some regulations, through waivers, phase-in periods or grandfathering. If you have questions about the particulars 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 or owner 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.).

Resources

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

Assessing Your Space Needs Website

The Answer Key: How to Plan, Develop, and Finance Your Charter School Facility Website
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 the site and possible renovations will be financed. 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 “Finance and Operations.”

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 going to one of the school’s partners or supporters to guarantee the loan or to float a bond to secure the capital needed to finance your building needs. This option requires the guarantor to assume responsibility for the loan should the charter school default—a difficult position to put supporters in, especially when there are other options available. There is financing available that does not require this kind of guarantee.

Loans from CFDIs

Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) are alternative lenders specializing in providing nonprofits with access to financing, usually at lower interest rates. CDFIs are nonprofit lenders. In Indiana, the principal CDFIs that work with charter schools are IFF, LISC, and Charter Schools Development Corporation. The types of loans available from CDFIs vary depending on timing, the type of project, and other factors.

A loan from a CDFI can be a good option for charter schools because they are developed specifically to provide schools and other nonprofits with financing they could not easily get from traditional banks. The mission of a CDFI is to offer loans to nonprofit groups that may be considered high-risk. For example, in the case of charter schools, sometimes a CDFI will lend to start-up schools or schools with limited financial history.

During the charter school development process, design teams can contact these CDFIs to find out if they qualify for a loan. If so, one of them can grant a pre-approval letter stating that the group does qualify. Loan approvals are granted after the charter is approved. 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 seven 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 usually require a mortgage. To secure a traditional bank 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. 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 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**

Many charter schools use fundraising to pay for a portion of their facilities development costs. A capital campaign can focus fund-raising on a major facilities project. By approaching foundations and wealthy individuals for private donations, a capital campaign can raise substantial funds for facility improvements and purchases. 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 major 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.

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. Each school has unique factors that impact its facilities situation—including size of the facility, per pupil numbers at the beginning of the charter and the relationship with a lessor, etc. Facilities costs should not exceed 15% of a school's total operating budget. Another way to measure whether facilities costs are sustainable is to keep long-term facilities costs under $1,100 per student.

**Paperwork**

Investors and lenders will want to see standard financial documents. By preparing a basic financial package and keeping it up-to-date, you'll be in a better position to act quickly on financing opportunities. For most loans, the bank or other lender will want to see a financial package that includes information such as a summary of the school's revenues, costs and expenses during one accounting period, 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 statements in a realistic budget and marketing plan, along with information such as realistic enrollment projections.

**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.

**Charter Schools Development Corporation (CSDC)** offers turnkey development services that sometimes includes development of a site and a lease with built-in incentives for charter schools to exercise a purchase on the building after 3-5 years, ultimately ending up as building owners.

**Local Initiatives Support Organization (LISC)** offers support to nonprofits in Indianapolis and, at times, has participated in supporting developing charter schools with facility loans.

**Center for Innovative Education Services (CIES)** offers strategic facilities planning support for charter schools and can assist with financing in certain cases.
FAMILY AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

In the earlier section on 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. Below are some ideas about how to think about building partnership with families and the community after your school has opened. You will want to think about these pieces during the school design process as your plans for family and community engagement ongoing 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 also a critical strategy to help your students to achieve academically. Research has shown 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, which makes parental involvement more important even than just ensuring they feel good about school communication.

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 in organizing 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 doable in your community.

Many effective schools provide specific workshops for parents, 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. www.thenewpress.com > Search for “Beyond the Bake Sale”
External Partnerships and Ongoing Community Relationships

In “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 to use partnerships flexibly.

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.

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, for innovation network charters, may be more susceptible to the changes in the partner school district’s fiscal and political environment. Maintaining a strong and diverse base of support will help protect your charter school from changing circumstances in the district or community.

Student Recruitment

For schools in their few years of operation, a successful student recruitment effort is critical to the long-term success of the school. Your entire operating budget is based upon a certain number of students enrolling, so it is critical that your student recruitment be a priority as soon as you receive your charter.

Student recruitment is challenging, and in Indiana, it is getting even more difficult. More charter schools are opening, and both the existing traditional public schools as well as private schools are increasing their efforts to attract students. Student recruitment may not have been part of your formal training, but no other factor will be as important to the ultimate success of your school as your ability to recruit a strong number of students in its first year.

Create your Marketing Plan

Developing a marketing plan to send out the messages and the selling story of your school is a critical early step. You might have created this as part of your charter application, but if you didn’t, now is the time to work on it.

Your marketing plan needs to have several components:

- Your total recruitment goals
- Your marketing calendar
- Your selling story
- Your tools
- Potential feeder locations
- Promotional activities

Your Recruitment Goals

Your first step is to clearly establish your recruitment goals. This was probably listed in your charter application, but as you begin your student recruitment process, you need to make sure that all your staff and volunteers know what number you are trying to hit, and in which grade levels.
Your Marketing Calendar

A lot of the things that you are going to be doing as part of student recruitment will need to be planned well in advance and having a calendar that lists your schedule of events will go a long way to making sure that you are maximizing your efforts.

For example, if you know that you are planning a large neighborhood open house on April 1st, then all your activities in March should be planned to support ensuring a large attendance at this upcoming event.

Planning out your events will also allow you to understand how well you are tracking against your ultimate enrollment goal. If you find that it is June 1st and you have only enrolled 30% of your targeted first year class, that information allows you to make some decisions on additional resources to devote to enrollment or to potentially scale back some of your offerings in the first year.

Develop your Selling Story

A critical step in effectively marketing your school is to develop your “value proposition” – the description of your school that will resonate with prospective parents and make them want to learn more about your school. If you are in an area with several other school choices, you will also want to think about what your school will offer that they can't get at another school. It’s critical to differentiate yourself as your target families will need some clear-cut reasons to change schools to come to yours.

Your selling story should describe your school in a way that is easily understood by your prospective audience. This is not the time to describe your school using academic jargon, but instead describe it in a way that your audience instantly grasps the benefits to their child of attending your school. Spend a little bit of time in your selling story to describe yourself and why a family should entrust their child to your school. At this point, you have no school, no track record, and no history. Parents, to a certain extent, are buying “you” – your expertise, your staff’s experience, your educational philosophy. Don’t be afraid to brag a little bit about your qualifications or why you are going to develop the best school for their child.

Finally, do not forget to mention that you are a “free, public, charter school.” Often, we forget that many people are still confused by the different types of educational options that they have available to them. It is a common misperception that charter schools cost money.

Build Your Tools

Your student recruitment is going to cost some money initially because you are going to need to build tools to effectively market your school. You may want to engage with an agency that supports small businesses to develop these tools.

Here are some critical tools that will enable a successful recruitment plan for the first year:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tool</th>
<th>Estimated Costs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. A WordPress Website that is mobile optimized</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. A commercial email system (Mailchimp, MyEmma, Constant Contact, etc.)</td>
<td>$250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. A set of collateral materials (brochure, poster, table top display)</td>
<td>$2,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Swag or give-aways (pick something that they will use and display like a refrigerator calendar or notepad, not a pen that will be thrown in a drawer)</td>
<td>$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. T-shirts for new students and or staff</td>
<td>$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$8,750</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that this is the bare minimum for a school that is trying to do this with as little out of pocket cost as possible. Also, if your school may enroll non-English speakers, make sure to have materials available in other languages as well.

Identify Where you can Reach Potential Students

The most successful fishermen tend to frequent waters where there are lots of fish. This example is also true for student recruitment. You need to identify the best places to reach families that have children who are likely to enroll in your school.
Once you have determined your school’s location, make a list of all the organizations in that area that cater to your potential families. This would include:

- Churches
- Libraries
- Community centers
- Preschools if you are a K-8 or Jr. Highs if you are a high school.

Identify contacts at each of those locations and develop a plan to engage and to build a relationship with these organizations. For example, you might have identified the two libraries in your area as a potential source of students. See if you can post information about your school in their community area; ask if you could host an information table on a Saturday afternoon; or offer to conduct a program (Reading Day, STEM demonstration, etc.) if they would help to promote you and your school.

### Promote Your School

Now that you have developed your selling message, created your core marketing tools and have identified potential “feeder” targets, it is time to start promoting your school.

This process is going to be labor intensive and will require a commitment from your staff, board members, volunteers and even families that you have already enrolled. Your goal is to try to talk to as many prospective families as possible to:

- Make them aware of your school
- “Sell” them on the great things that your school will offer their child
- Have them enroll, and
- Have them show up the first day of school

Many schools fall into the trap of just doing 1 and 2. You are in the “selling” mode here. You need to be trying to drive as many enrollments as possible. And just because a parent has filled out their paperwork doesn’t mean that they will show up the first day. You need to regularly reach out to the enrolled families and keep them committed until the first day of school.

As part of your calendar-building exercise, you have identified all the events that you can participate in with your feeder organizations. Next, you will also want to identify any community events where you can set up a table to try to drive greater awareness of your school. These are going to be labor intensive, but at this stage you are really trying to get the word out about your school.

Many schools employ door to door outreach or canvassing as part of their student recruitment plan. This is a great opportunity for you and your staff to walk the neighborhood (in your school t-shirts) and engage with potential families who may be excited that a new school is opening. If you are partnering with a marketing agency, ask them to provide you with lists of families that have children in your age group prior to starting a door-to-door effort. You don’t want to over-invest your time knocking on doors of homes of families with no children.

Don’t be afraid to try new things or be somewhat non-traditional. Setting up a table outside of the major neighborhood grocery store on a Saturday may not seem like an obvious strategy for student recruitment, but if you think about it, it is a great way to reach busy moms. At each of these events, one of your most critical action items is to gather contact names for everyone you talk to. Start developing a prospect list of families so you can begin to conduct follow ups and invite them to tour your school, participate in a neighborhood open house, etc.

Once you begin to develop your list of prospects and other key community contacts, begin to send out a regular newsletter to all of them. This includes updates on your opening process, a listing of your upcoming events, teacher profiles, and other information about your school.

If you are fortunate enough to have access to your facility prior to opening, use it as much as possible. Beyond hosting open houses and giving school tours, consider other types of events to try to get enrolled and prospective families to your school. These could be things like an open gym night or hosting a family friendly movie night in your cafeteria. The more you can get them to interact with you, the more likely you are to get them to eventually enroll and show up the first day.
Enroll Indy

Most of the public and charter schools within the Indianapolis Public Schools boundaries are part of Enroll Indy, the unified enrollment system. As a new charter school, being part of Enroll Indy may be important to your school’s future success. Enroll Indy is should be viewed as a way to expose your school to all parents who are planning on enrolling their child for the first time or are thinking of changing schools.

Think about Enroll Indy as an extension of your website. This information must be compelling and enticing so that prospective parents want to learn more about your school, and ultimately enroll their child. Do not rush or be incomplete in filling out your school’s information. Often this is the first, and if not done correctly, the last time they will see information about your school.

Here are a number of critical things to maximize your efforts with Enroll Indy.

**Be thoughtful and strategic about the information that you include in your school description.**

For a lot of parents, your page under the Enroll Indy School Finder site may be the first time that they have heard about your school or have seen detailed information about what your school offers.

The Who We Are section is your opportunity to make a great first impression. This section needs to be exciting and resonate to your potential parents. Some schools merely take the description of their school from their charter application and cut and pasted it into their Enroll Indy site. Strongly consider customizing your content.

Just like in the earlier marketing messages you developed, you need to think about who your audience is and what they want in a school. Many schools in this section use a lot of academic jargon or use non-descriptive language. Instead, give your prospective parents an easy to understand, but also a compelling, description of your school.

Next, in the School Highlights section, you can select six pictures and categories that highlight the uniqueness of your school. You want to continue to describe your school but use the visuals to create excitement and allow the parent to envision their child at your school.

Don’t use stock photography or leave this section blank. Take this part seriously because parents are taking this seriously. Make sure that you are filling out all the different programs, clubs, sports and community partnerships that your school provides. Though the filtering program allows parents to search on a specific type of activity that your school offers, right now that filter does not “knock” a school off the consideration list, so it doesn’t remove you from consideration. However, if you don’t fill this section out, you give a very incomplete picture of your school.

**Utilize the Events feature and participate in all the events that Enroll Indy hosts.**

Enroll Indy lists the dates and times of upcoming open house and recruitment events on its website. Since this is the prime place that prospective parents are going to learn about new schools, all of your events need to be listed there. Enroll Indy’s website averages about 2,000 users a month. This is a great (and free) platform for you to advertise your events. Additionally, their monthly newsletters highlight and promote these events. If you don’t list your events, you are not going to get promoted.

**Utilize the like or favorite feature to understand who is interested in your school.**

One of the challenges for schools using Enroll Indy is that schools are not able to see who is interested in their school until match date. However, on your school page in the upper right corner, there is a heart, or a favorite, button.

When a parent likes your school, they go into a separate list that you can access prior to match day to follow up with that parent. This is the only time you are going to see contact information for a parent prior to the official matching time. Encourage all families that you are recruiting to “like” you. This can be done in the description of your school or through your promotional efforts outside of Enroll Indy.

Once you have a parent’s contact information, you need to follow up with the parents who have signaled a preference towards your school. Email them, call them, send them more information, personally invite them to an event, etc. They are giving you a buying signal, so go out and court them. Personal outreach is going to make a huge impact on how they view your school.
Enroll Indy will not be a silver bullet if you constantly struggle with enrollment. You must still do the work.

Enroll Indy’s goal is not to ensure full enrollment at every school, but rather to try to spread enrollment more equally and equitably across all the schools in Indianapolis. Enroll Indy can help communicate to new parents who might not have heard about your school, but it should not in any be a replacement for the other recruitment activities that you have in your enrollment marketing plan. It is a great addition to your marketing toolkit, but it shouldn’t be your sole tactic.

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 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

Note that IDOE has federal funds that may be available to support the development of charter schools that have not yet opened. These are not currently available to groups prior to their submission of a charter school application to an authorizer. However, funding is available to help plan your school once you have submitted a charter application but prior to the school’s opening.

Strategies for Fundraising

The following strategies for fundraising are recommended by experienced fundraisers.

Make contact with veteran charter school development officers if possible. 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 “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 to 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.

When you develop your board of directors, craft it with fundraising in mind. 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 on "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 the leaders of your efforts are involved in fundraising, even if others do the background research and write the grants. 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.

ACCOUNTABILITY

The Indiana Charter School Law frees charter schools from many regulations in order to encourage the development and use of innovative teaching methods, forms of measuring pupil learning and achievement, and educational visions and goals. In exchange, charter schools are held accountable to the Indiana Academic Standards through state mandated assessments. Those assessments plus additional factors based on the grades you serve will result in an A-F accountability grade assigned to your school annually. In addition, your authorizer will place measures into your charter contract that will contribute to the decision down the road to renew your charter (or not). Ultimately, a charter school must always know the measures to which they will be held accountable and make decisions accordingly. They should never be surprised by the authorizer's evaluation of their performance.

Beyond the legal requirements of accountability, charter public schools must be responsive and answerable to students, staff, parents and the community.

As discussed in the section on Operations and Finance, you also know that you will be held financially accountable by an annual, independent audit.

A thoughtfully designed accountability plan not only ensures that a charter school meets its obligations in the areas of student performance and school operations. It also provides a powerful tool for ongoing learning, improvement and innovation at each school. The data gleaned from assessment measures allow schools to complete internal evaluation and develop strategies for improvement.

The Basics About Accountability

An accountability plan essentially summarizes the progress your school is making on several fronts. Because a charter school is responsible for many more facets of operation than a traditional district school—from educating the students to making payroll and paying a mortgage—there must be some way to measure how well the school is performing and whether it is in sound shape. An accountability plan is like a car’s dashboard: it gives information on several concurrent aspects of the school’s progress at once. Most accountability plans encompass:

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

A charter school faces several layers of accountability, all of which must be planned for. First, and most importantly, charter schools face accountability from the families they serve. Dissatisfied families are free to enroll their students elsewhere at any point, so ensuring you have your finger on the pulse of family satisfaction is very important.

Second, you will engage in accountability with your authorizer. In the next section, you will learn more about charter authorizers and how to choose one. This relationship will be essential throughout the life of your school, so choose carefully. Be very clear on how your prospective authorizer will hold your school accountable.
Each may have varied metrics for success and may even measure different areas of your operation. But they likely include academics, operations, and governance goals and metrics for measuring success under each of those goals. There is state law which holds authorizers accountable, however, so there are some metrics they are not free to alter or work around that relate to state testing and the state accountability system. Be sure you understand those.

Additionally, there are accountability systems imposed by state law for all schools. In Indiana, there is a letter grade system, into which student academic growth, academic proficiency, and additional factors are taken into consideration. There are many resources available to help you understand the state’s accountability framework, but one is this presentation. Please consider reviewing additional accountability resources available on the IDEE’s Accountability Website. Additionally, it should be noted that state law requires charter schools to engage in an annual independent audit, another layer of accountability for your school’s finances.

There is also federal school accountability under the Every Student Succeeds Act. Learn more about ESSA generally here. A brief summary of Indiana’s approved plan to comply with ESSA can be found here. The grade that the public will know the most about is your state-assigned grade, but your federal rating (it is no longer an A-F letter grade) will matter as well for purposes of accessing some federal grants including the Charter Schools Program funding.

Your school’s core design team should integrate accountability responsibilities into the work of all applicable working committees, which should be well-educated on accountability and receive reference material and templates to help them develop consistent and effective accountability plans. To coordinate this process, one planning member should take primary responsibility for monitoring accountability across the entire design team.

## Academic Accountability

For the purposes of establishing your charter school, the primary concern of most outside assessment is accounting for the academic progress of students attending the school. Generally, an academic accountability system requires three parts:

1. Set measurable standards and goals. As your core design team created an education plan, you built in specific goals for your students and standards to benchmark how well students are doing as they move toward those goals. For the accountability plan, your team will codify how to present these goals and standards. For example, note if your school will be using the Indiana Academic Standards, and explain in clear detail what you will have in their stead if your school will deviate from those standards in any cases. It is very important to have measurable goals. “Students are learning to read,” is not measurable. “By third grade, 75% of students will be reading at or above grade level, as defined by the Indiana Academic Standards Standards,” is a measurable goal.

2. Assess and monitor progress toward those goals. In your education plan, you have identified which assessment methods your school will utilize. The accountability plan will incorporate the key assessments and include a system to regularly report on progress toward goals and against benchmarks.

3. Use the data to identify strengths to be improved upon and weaknesses to be corrected. Your school should not discover months before a five-year charter is up for renewal that students have not been performing as hoped. A charter school should have systems to regularly gather performance measures and an internal system to examine the results and make necessary corrections to the school based on the results.

Keep in mind that you will be judged on metrics other than just the academic performance measures you’ve included in your education plan. Be prepared to assess a number of other student indicators. Here are some common options:

- Daily student attendance
- Graduation rates
- College acceptance rate
- Discipline rates (including suspensions)

Your educational expert should be knowledgeable about accountability requirements and able to explain the process and benefits to the other team members. If that expertise is not readily available, consider consulting an expert such as an educational consultant specializing in accountability design and management.
Multiple Measurements

Experts recommend using not only a variety of measures (e.g., a combination of standardized tests and other forms of assessment), but also using different means to analyze students’ performance on the assessments. For example, in addition to including a measure of students’ absolute performance (e.g., the number of students meeting or exceeding standards on the ILEARN), schools need to analyze students’ growth over time. You can also compare students’ test scores with local district scores, scores of schools with similar student populations, and/or the scores of students in other nearby charter schools.

Organizing Your Accountability Plan

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Measures (Assessments to be used)</th>
<th>Achievement/Completion Date</th>
<th>Corrective Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</table>

Other Accountability

Although educational achievement is rightly the main interest of those who will evaluate your school, you will be asked to indicate that all systems are working well in these primary areas:

Fiscal: Does your charter school have enough money to continue operation? Are the financial statements in order and audited?

Governance: Does your board of directors engage in real oversight over the school? Has the board complied with the public access laws?

Facility: Is the school a safe place for students to be? Is it in compliance with applicable state and federal laws and regulations?

You may want to quantify other aspects of a well-run school, particularly if these factors are part of your school’s mission or are considered important by your authorizer. Examples include professional development requirements for the faculty, teacher retention rates, parental outreach efforts, full student enrollment, having a significant number of students on a waiting list and student and family satisfaction.

Just as the core design team’s work to create an educational plan is the basis for the accountability plan’s coverage of student academic progress, the efforts to create a solid fiscal plan, operational procedures and governance will be the basis for how the school reports on these factors in the accountability plan. In other words, by developing each area of your school design, you will already be planning to have your school in good shape and will have ways of determining if everything is moving smoothly. For the accountability plan, you just need to codify that work and create a system to report on it.

Again, having goals that are linked to clearly measurable standards is key. For the accountability strategy to be effective, your core design team should insert measurement processes into personnel planning, finances, facilities and any other aspect of the school. For example, keep minutes of your board meetings and a record of how the board complied with the Open Door laws, and have a system to compile these records and include them in your accountability reporting.
Using Your Accountability Plan

When it works smoothly, the accountability plan is not an afterthought at the end of the school year or the term of your charter. The school's administrators, board members, and faculty gather and log the necessary data as a natural part of their relevant work during the year. An accountability plan should contain strategies for using its information to strengthen school performance. For the school's administration and faculty, information from the accountability plan should provide guidance on what is working in the school and what needs attention.

The school’s board of directors can and should use the accountability plan to help inform its oversight functions, particularly since the board is not typically on site to learn about the school’s performance first-hand. Regular, wide-ranging accountability information can augment reports from the staff with objective data. The core design team should include a strategy or, ideally, implement a policy to ensure that accountability results are reviewed annually and used in future plans for improving the educational program and school operations.

In addition to informing internal audiences, consider how accountability plan data will be shared with outside sources, from parents to the media. The academic performance of charter schools will be compared to that of traditional public schools and with other public charter schools. The design of the accountability plan should prepare for this inevitable comparison. Note that this comparison can be advantageous to charters. It allows charters to measure themselves to schools serving similar student populations; for example, rather than simply demonstrating their absolute test scores on state exams.

For operational, fiscal and governance measures of the school, the core design team probably has more leeway on what to readily share with the outside world. While a charter, as a public institution, is always open to public scrutiny, there is a difference between open information and actively distributing data on your website, in newsletters or other outreach efforts.

As you are developing your accountability plan, consider the audiences to whom you will ultimately provide accountability data, why you include those audiences, and the methods you will use for communicating accountability data, which could include:

- Annual reports for authorizers, teachers and parents
- Informational brochures for recruiting and marketing
- Holding an annual stakeholders meeting
- The school’s website
- A section of a newsletter

Having communication strategies identified and included in the charter application will show that your planners have not only planned accountability strategies, but know the impact of using accountability data strategically.

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 authorizer 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 and include graphic images). The document should address adequately the intended audience with the core elements of the school followed by targeted audience sections. 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 proofread any and every document that is distributed. A poorly executed document 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
- 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. Have all staff members in your organization see external documents that are created in order to have everyone on the same page so that 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 opinion 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.

**UNDERSTANDING CHARTER AUTHORIZING**

Once you have engaged in the needs assessment and feel confident there is a need for the school you are imagining, it is time to begin investigating Indiana's charter school authorizers.

**General Provisions**

Under Indiana law, an authorizer is one of the following:

- A state educational institution that offers a four (4) year baccalaureate degree.
- The executive (as defined in IC 36-1-2-5) of a consolidated city- Indianapolis is the only city that currently qualifies under this definition
- The Indiana Charter School Board
- A school corporation
- A governing board of a nonprofit college or university that provides a four year educational program for which it awards a baccalaureate or more advanced degree

All charter school authorizers for Indiana must be registered with the Indiana State Board of Education via a process described in state law. The Department of Education is responsible for keeping an updated list of all current authorizers on their website (See Resources). At the time of this writing, Indiana has eight active charter school authorizers:

- **Ball State University**
- **Indianapolis Charter School Board** (Mayor’s office or OEI)
- **Indiana Charter School Board** (ICSB)
- **Evansville- Vanderburgh School Corporation**
- **Grace College**
- **Education One, LLC (Trine University)**
- **Calumet College**
- **Ninevah Hensley Jackson School Corporation**

Certain authorizers on this list authorize a large portfolio of schools, while others authorize only a few, with no plans to expand. Different authorizers may specialize in different types of schools, or be limited in the types of schools they can approve. Adult high school charter schools can only be authorized by the Indianapolis mayor or the Indiana Charter School Board. Statewide virtual charter schools may only be authorized by statewide authorizers (not by the mayor’s office or by local school districts).

It is true that in seeking an authorizer for your school, they will necessarily be judging you and your plan. However,
the relationship goes both ways. You need to do your homework to choose the best authorizer for your needs. There are many factors that lead to success in getting your school authorized, as well as forming a strong, long-term relationship with your authorizer. Their mission and yours need to align. They need to be looking for a school to meet the kind of need your school proposes to fill. They need to feel confident in your skills and the skills of those you surround yourselves with. But at the same time, you need to feel alignment, respect, and confidence as well.

One of the most important early steps you can take is spending time reading charter applications posted on various authorizers’ websites. This is a step you cannot skip and should not minimize. You will learn the kinds of issues that must be addressed in a charter application, the level of detail needed to be successful and prepared to open a school, and of course you will learn a lot more about other charter schools. You may see things that you find worthy of more research or practices even worth adopting yourself. You will see the kind of budget projections schools use, the type of staffing structures common in charter schools, and numerous other interested details. You’ll also begin to get used to the format of a charter application before you have to dive in and construct your own.

There are many important issues you will want to consider as you interview charter authorizers to determine which one you plan to apply to. An authorizer may charge the charter school an authorizing fee that may not exceed 3% of the total amount the school receives during the state fiscal year from basic tuition support. Actual fees charged by Indiana authorizers vary, and need to be investigated as part of the process of selecting an authorizer to apply to.

Authorizer fees may be used for different purposes and collected at different times. Please be sure to discuss with all authorizers you approach whether the fees are used for any services that your school will utilize (and, thus, not have to pay for separately). Authorizers may also offer programming or trainings for members of your board or staff. Please also ask about what mandatory or voluntary training is offered when choosing an authorizer.

Each authorizer has a unique set of requirements for applying and initially gaining and charter. They may have different types of meetings or hearings at which you will be expected to appear. Please be sure you fully understand the application process before choosing an authorizer. Beyond the initial application, however, please also be sure to learn as much as you can about each authorizer’s ongoing monitoring protocols, and standards for renewal.

It may be tempting to consider all of that later on, since just starting up a school is daunting enough. However, it would be a mistake to enter into a long-term relationship with your authorizer with a poor understanding of what you will be expected to report and provide to them on an ongoing basis, and how often you will interact with them and around what issues and topics, throughout the life of your charter. Some authorizers are a more significant presence in the life of their schools, and some lay out their standards, but have less support and interaction throughout the year. Choose carefully when you decide which approaches best meet your needs.

Considerations When Choosing an Authorizer

• Does the type of school I want to open limit the authorizers to which I can apply?
• Beyond what is outlined in state law, what are the specific requirements of the authorizer when it comes to applying to open an initial charter?
• What is the authorizer’s calendar for application? Can you meet their deadlines?
• What fee does the authorizer charge?
• What services are provided as part of that fee?
• What supports does the authorizer provide in the form of online tools, access to experts in certain areas, voluntary trainings, etc?
• What required trainings or meetings does the authorizer have?
• What type of reporting does the authorizer require and on what timeline? (monthly, quarterly, annually, etc?)
• What are the authorizer’s standards for reauthorization?
• How long is the term of the charter the authorizer is willing to grant to an initial charter and a renewal charter?
• What is the expertise of the authorizer’s staff?
• Do you get along well with the authorizer’s staff? Are you willing to accept their feedback and work with them permanently?
**Application, Approval, and Renewal**

Charter applications are to be submitted to the selected authorizer. According to law, once submitted the selected authorizer has 75 days to approve or deny the application. If denied, the applicant may revise their application and resubmit to the same authorizer or may submit a charter proposal to another authorizer. Denial by one authorizer should not be taken lightly. If your application has not been accepted, you need to take serious consideration of the feedback offered, and likely take significant time to re-think sections of your application before re-approaching the same authorizer or another authorizer.

While it is absolutely legitimate that different authorizers may be a better fit for various schools, “shopping” for a different authorizer late in the life of your school is frowned upon. Having multiple authorizers is essential to having a healthy authorizer sector for any state, but it is far better to seriously consider your options before an initial charter application submission, rather than choosing an authorizer hastily and ending up needing to apply to others.

Indiana law sets out a list of components that must be included in a charter school proposal. Each individual authorizer may interpret these items in its own way through its required application processes.

**Legal Requirement for a Charter Under Indiana Law**

IC 20-24-3-4Proposal to establish charter school; required contents

(1) Identification of the organizer.

(2) A description of the organizer’s organizational structure and governance plan.

(3) The following information for the proposed charter school:
   (A) Name.
   (B) Purposes.
   (C) Governance structure.
   (D) Management structure.
   (E) Educational mission and goals.
   (F) Curriculum and instructional methods.
   (G) Methods of pupil assessment.
   (H) Admission policy and criteria, subject to IC 20-24-5.
   (I) School calendar.
   (J) Age or grade range of students to be enrolled.
   (K) A description of staff responsibilities.
   (L) A description of the physical plant.
   (M) Budget and financial plans.
   (N) Personnel plan, including methods for selection, retention, and compensation of employees.
   (O) Transportation plan.
   (P) Discipline program, subject to IC 20-24-5.5.
   (Q) Plan for compliance with any applicable desegregation order.
   (R) The date when the charter school is expected to:
      (i) begin school operations; and
      (ii) have students attending the charter school.
   (S) The arrangement for providing teachers and other staff with health insurance, retirement benefits, liability insurance, and other benefits.
   (T) Any other applications submitted to an authorizer in the previous five (5) years.

(4) The manner in which the authorizer must conduct an annual audit of the program operations of the charter school.

(c) A statement of economic interest that contains the same information specified under IC 3-8-9-8 for each board member of the proposed charter school.

(d) In the case of a charter school proposal from an applicant that currently operates one or more charter schools in any state or nation, the request for proposals shall additionally require the applicant to provide evidence of past performance and current capacity for growth.

(e) If the proposal described in subsection (a) concerns an existing charter school overseen by a different authorizer than the authorizer to which the organizer is submitting the proposal, the proposal must include written acknowledgement of the proposal from the current authorizer. Additionally, the authorizer receiving the proposal shall consult with the current authorizer before granting approval of the proposal.
For virtual schools, please note additional requirements which may be part of your application due to additional provisions in state law:

Onboarding requirements; teacher training requirements; student residency requirement

IC 20-24-5-4.5 Onboarding requirements; teacher training requirements; student residency requirement

(a) A virtual charter school shall establish and implement an annual onboarding process and orientation for virtual charter school students and the students’ parents. As part of the annual onboarding process and orientation, the virtual charter school must provide to a parent of a student:

(1) the student engagement and attendance requirements or policies of the virtual charter school; and

(2) notice that a person who knowingly or intentionally deprives a dependent of education commits a violation under IC 35-46-1-4.

(b) A student who is not enrolled in a virtual charter school before July 1, 2020, must complete the annual onboarding process and orientation established by the virtual charter school under subsection (a) with the student’s parent before the student may enroll in the virtual charter school. If a student or student’s parent does not participate in the virtual charter school’s annual onboarding process and orientation established under subsection (a), the student may not enroll in the virtual charter school.

(c) An authorizer shall review and monitor whether a virtual charter school that is authorized by the authorizer complies with the requirements under this section.

(d) An individual who is employed as a licensed teacher at a virtual charter school must comply with any mandatory licensed teacher training that is required under this title.

(e) A virtual charter school must require that if a student who attends a virtual charter school accumulates the number of unexcused absences sufficient to result in the student’s classification as a habitual truant (as described in IC 20-20-8-8(a)(17)), the student must be withdrawn from enrollment in the virtual charter school.

(f) A virtual charter school may not enroll a student unless the student is an Indiana resident. If the virtual charter school is unable to verify that a student who attends the virtual charter school is an Indiana resident, the virtual charter school must pay back to the department the state tuition support distribution in an amount determined by the department that the virtual charter school received for that student.

Writing Tips

As you approach this long list of suggested ideas to incorporate, remember that the way in which you present the information can make a difference in what the reader takes away from your proposal. Write in a professional manner, but also try to be clear and concise, avoiding too much jargon. Think about what a reader would need to know to understand your proposal fully.

Review successful applications from other schools. Use these documents to help determine a good organizing structure, how much detail to include, what kind of editorial voice to use.

Write in a respectful tone that reflects the founding committee’s desire to work with the authorizer in providing an educational choice for students. This may be especially important if you are proposing an innovation network charter that will be part of a school district. Even if your school is offering an educational alternative that the district has been unable to provide, explain the option as adding to the district’s educational portfolio, rather than correcting a failure by the district. Remember, the district is your partner, so although it may be important to your school’s mission to go beyond what the district has offered or achieved, putting the opportunity in terms antagonistic to the district is probably a bad idea.

Don’t promise more than your school can deliver in an attempt to wow the authorizer. Stay within the realm of what your core design team has found to be realistic and possible.

Include research-based evidence, whether founded on extensive formal research studies or from other schools with a solid history of academic success. Throughout this section, specifically cite the basis of your research. Do not assume that the reader of the application will be familiar with common best practices or widely-known research within the field of education or charter schools.
Balance detail. Make sure your plans are comprehensive. Skimpy or sketchy descriptions of the programs will make it seem to the reader that your group simply doesn’t know how the plan will really work. Conversely, don’t just throw every piece of information you can possibly find on the page— readers will likely miss the main points you want them to know. Edit down to the essentials.

Imagine you are sitting in the reviewer’s seat. What questions would you have? Are there areas that seem weak in your proposal? How can you address concerns that might be raised about the proposal?

When creating the final product, consider factors such as format and how the document will be used. Leave enough white space so that the document is easy to read and include space for readers’ notes. Choose a simple and easy-to-read font.

Take your time with your application. Do not draft it hastily, and ask for input from many sources as you pull the pieces together.

Have the first draft reviewed by others familiar with the school. They may recall key ideas that didn’t make it onto the page. Reviewers who have no prior knowledge of what you’re planning are also useful, because they don’t “fill in” missing information in their minds because they were at a meeting where such matters were discussed.

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

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

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

**Public Hearing**

Beyond evaluating your written charter application, the authorizer must conduct a public hearing concerning the establishment of the proposed school. The public hearing must be held within the school corporation where the charter school would be located- or within the county if the exact location of the school has not been identified.

**Charter Approval**

Evaluating a charter proposal and serving as a charter authorizer are serious public responsibilities, and it is appropriate for authorizers to embark on the chartering process with a great deal of care and attention.

Several things must be true about final charters under Indiana law. Charter schools may be approved for not less than 3 and not more than 7 years, but the exact number of years must be specified within the charter document. The charter must be formally reviewed at least once every five years, and is likely to be reviewed more often based on common practice.

There is a long list in state law that defines the elements that are required to be an executed charter that is signed by both of authorizer and the organizer. Material revisions to charter agreements require approval of the charter school governing body, and must be certified by the Authorizer.
Resources

Indiana Charter Schools Law
A list of all charter authorizers, along with approved, pending, and denied applications, as well as accountability reports

A Note About Charter Authorizer Accountability

Charter authorizers in Indiana are held to a high level of accountability. They are required annually to submit reports to the IDOE and State Board of Education. Additionally, authors are required to have school closure protocols, should it ever become necessary for a charter school to cease operations. Authorizers may also not approve a renew charter for schools that have performed below a certain threshold, or if they do, must attend a hearing before the State Board of Education at which time the State Board may close the school if it deems necessary. An authorizer can lose its ability to charter new schools or even have its authorizing powers revoked entirely if it does not meet minimum standards for the performance of its charter portfolio.
## Appendix A

**Best Practices in Special Education for Charter Schools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AREAS OF SERVICE</th>
<th>KEY CONSIDERATIONS</th>
<th>BEST PRACTICES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child Find and Enrollment</td>
<td>How will the school identify students who may benefit from special education evaluations? How will the school make the local community aware that the school is inclusive, and can screen students for eligibility to receive special education and related services and thereafter provide these services? Does the school plan to employ a staff member who is knowledgeable about the Child Find requirement? If not, how will the staff receive access to special education information and guidance?</td>
<td>Child Find is not a single action but rather an ongoing process to raise community awareness about available screening, assessment, and service provision. Charter schools must have a process to inform the community, as well as parents of enrolled students, about the availability of evaluative screenings for special education and related services. The process typically entails advertising that your school accepts students with IEPs and provides information on screening services as part of student recruitment activities as well as promoting awareness of screening and services for students already enrolled. Schools are responsible for identifying any student who is enrolled in the school who is presenting academic or behavioral problems and determining whether that child should be referred for a special education evaluation. Special education should be an integral part of all recruitment activities and materials. To make certain that the school is an attractive option for all students, the school’s marketing, application, and enrollment materials and procedures may not discourage applications from students with disabilities. Having a disability is not an acceptable reason to deny admission and would constitute discrimination specifically banned by federal law.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing</td>
<td>How will special education staff collaborate with general education teachers and administrators (e.g., co-teaching, collaborative planning)? If there is a shortage of special education teachers in the community, what creative solutions can the school practice to employ more (e.g., offer teachers support or incentives to become dual certified, investigate sharing staff with other schools)? What administrator will be designated as the &quot;point person&quot; to liaise with families receiving evaluations and special education services? If the school contracts with an external provider for special education and related services, how will these services be coordinated?</td>
<td>Schools should anticipate that at least 10–12% of their student population will require special education services. Charter schools should ensure that they adhere to federal and state laws when employing staff or contracting with others to provide services to students with disabilities (i.e., Americans with Disabilities Act, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973). Special education services involve general education teachers as well as special education teachers and related service providers. Charter schools should strive to hire and retain high-quality instructional personnel who believe that all students can learn and support the charter school’s mission.</td>
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### Appendix A

#### Best Practices in Special Education for Charter Schools (continued)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>AREAS OF SERVICE</th>
<th>KEY CONSIDERATIONS</th>
<th>BEST PRACTICES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facility</td>
<td>Is the school’s physical building accessible to individuals with disabilities?</td>
<td>Charter school facilities must be consistent with local and state health and safety requirements as well as with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Accessibility measures should be in place when the school opens, in anticipation of a student or parent having a disability, as opposed to retrofitting an inaccessible structure when needed. An inaccessible building is a potential deterrent that may limit the number of students with disabilities who enroll in the school. Building renovations must comply with applicable rules and could trigger additional responsibilities related to access.</td>
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<td>Does the school’s facility include space to provide support services outside of the general education classroom, when needed?</td>
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<td>Does the school have access to storage space to house student records in accordance with federal privacy requirements?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Per FERPA &amp; IDEA guidance: The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and Article 7 generally require the school to obtain parental consent before disclosing or releasing personally identifiable information from the student’s educational record. However, there are a number of situations in which the school may release certain information about a student without obtaining written parental consent.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>How will federal, state, and local special education dollars flow to benefit students with disabilities enrolled in the charter school?</td>
<td>Both the authorizer and the charter school should have a clear understanding of how dollars, or services purchased with funds allocated to special education, will flow to the school. Lack of transparency or overcomplicated funding procedures can lead to mistrust and incorrect assumptions about the extent to which charter schools are receiving their funding.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How will those dollars and their expenditure be tracked?</td>
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<td>Is the school eligible to receive Medicaid reimbursements?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Curriculum and instruction</td>
<td>How will the school modify delivery of curriculum (e.g., using assistive technology, universal design for learning, etc.) to ensure that all students can access the general education curriculum?</td>
<td>Supporting students’ access to the general education curriculum is the purpose of providing special education and related services. Charter schools should have a clear plan to ensure that all students can access the curriculum and that instructional techniques will be adapted to serve all students.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>How does the school plan to train teachers to modify the curriculum and instruction to address the unique needs of students with disabilities?</td>
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<td>How will curriculum and instruction decisions be tracked and monitored by IEP teams and other school personnel?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>How will the school identify students who may be struggling and would benefit from academic interventions?</td>
<td>Assessments must incorporate the same supports and accommodations that students with disabilities receive in the classroom. Charter schools also should identify alternate metrics to evaluate the progress of students with disabilities (e.g., progress toward meeting goals outlined in IEPs, amount of time in general education classrooms, success after matriculation).</td>
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<td>How will the school implement evidence-based early interventions (i.e., response to intervention) and track student progress?</td>
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<td>How will the school identify appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities taking assessments?</td>
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## Appendix A
### Best Practices in Special Education for Charter Schools (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AREAS OF SERVICE</th>
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<th>BEST PRACTICES</th>
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<tr>
<td>IEP Development</td>
<td>What are the school's procedures for communicating with parents about their and their children's IDEA rights?</td>
<td>The IEP is an evolving document that reflects the unique needs of a student with disabilities and the individual services to be provided to enable them to access the general education curriculum and succeed at school. Developing an IEP requires a significant level of knowledge of IDEA as well as state special education rules and regulations. Charter schools should be able to articulate a clear and feasible plan for how IEPs will be developed.</td>
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<td>What is the school's plan for scheduling, leading, and documenting IEP meetings?</td>
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<td>If the school is a middle school or high school, does it have an understanding of and the ability to develop appropriate transition plans in accordance with IDEA regulations?</td>
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<td>A transition IEP is similar to the IEP, but the main focus is to develop a plan to help the student move from high school to adult life. A transition IEP must include:</td>
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<td>• Present levels of academic achievement and functional performance;</td>
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<td>• Measurable postsecondary goals related to training, education, employment, and (if appropriate) independent living skills;</td>
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<td>• Annual goals which are reasonably designed to enable the student to meet postsecondary goals;</td>
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<td>• Courses that the student needs to take while in high school to reach postsecondary goals;</td>
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<td>• Documentation of whether the student will work toward a high school diploma or a certificate of completion;</td>
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<td>• The transition services needed to help the student reach the postsecondary goals;</td>
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<td>• The names of the individuals or agencies who will provide the transition services; and</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Documentation that the CCC reviewed and provided information to the parent on the kinds of adult services available through the state or local community, if appropriate.</td>
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### Appendix A

**Best Practices in Special Education for Charter Schools (continued)**

<table>
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<th>AREAS OF SERVICE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Progress Monitoring</td>
<td>How will the school track progress of students with disabilities aside from standardized state tests (e.g., progress on IEP goals, degree of inclusion in the general education classroom, student retention and graduation, post-graduation opportunities)?</td>
<td>Annual standardized assessments are a relatively blunt instrument used to track student progress. Charter schools have the ability to identify a variety of measures to track the academic progress of students with disabilities that are more nuanced than annual tests and more substantive than review of inputs (e.g., complete and up-to-date IEPs and compliance with IEPs).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>What is the school’s discipline policy, and does it address the needs of students with disabilities (e.g., students with behavioral disorders)?</td>
<td>Charter schools should have thoughtful and fair discipline policies that reflect the school’s educational philosophy and best instructional practices. These policies should be consistent with applicable laws and regulations relating to disciplining students with disabilities. The goal of discipline is to teach children how to behave and provide a safe environment in which all students can succeed absent distractions.</td>
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<td>If adopting an existing district’s discipline policy, do school personnel fully understand the nuances of the policy as applied in a charter setting and as applied to students with disabilities?</td>
<td>It is important that at least one staff member fully understand the specific requirements of IDEA and its regulations for applying discipline to students with disabilities. Schools should clearly articulate behavior expectations and consequences.</td>
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<td>How will the school train all personnel regarding the discipline policy, a schoolwide positive behavior plan, and the nuances involved in disciplining students with disabilities?</td>
<td>A <strong>behavioral intervention plan (BIP)</strong>, based on an understanding of “why” a student exhibits a behavior, is an extremely useful tool in addressing a wide range of challenging behaviors. The CCC may develop a BIP to address behaviors or may address behaviors through goals and objectives that are a part of the student’s IEP. Remember that the BIP is a plan that is developed and agreed upon by the CCC and integrated in the student’s IEP.</td>
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<td>How will the school manage manifestation determination hearings, if it as an LEA is required to convene them?</td>
<td>At minimum, the BIP describes:</td>
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<td>When a student’s removal for disciplinary reasons is a change of placement, the CCC must determine if the conduct in question was:</td>
<td>• The student’s behavior that interferes with the student’s learning or the learning of others,</td>
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<td>• caused by the student’s disability, or had a direct and substantial relationship to the student’s disability, or</td>
<td>• The CCC’s hypothesis of why the behavior occurs as identified in the FBA,</td>
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<td>• the direct result of the school’s failure to implement the student’s IEP or behavioral intervention plan (BIP).</td>
<td>• The positive interventions, strategies and supports that may be necessary to address the behavior and make sure that interventions are consistently implemented across different settings,</td>
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<td>• Any supports or technical assistance for staff that are necessary to ensure the plan is supported and implemented, and</td>
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<td>• The new skills that will be taught and how the student’s progress will be monitored in order to change the student’s behavior, if applicable.</td>
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Appendix A
Best Practices in Special Education for Charter Schools (continued)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>AREAS OF SERVICE</th>
<th>KEY CONSIDERATIONS</th>
<th>BEST PRACTICES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compliance</td>
<td>How does the charter school maintain special education records that comply with state and federal rules and regulations?</td>
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<td>How will the school document and resolve complaints related to educating students with disabilities?</td>
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<td>What is the school’s plan for mediating disputes relating to services for students with disabilities, to avoid due process litigation?</td>
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<td>Mediation is a voluntary and confidential process that allows the parent and school to attempt to resolve their issues with the help of a trained and impartial mediator. The goal of mediation is finding a solution that meets the educational needs of the child. The mediator helps the parties communicate with each other, so that everyone has an opportunity to express concerns and offer solutions. The mediator’s focus is on resolving disagreements and working toward a solution that satisfies all participants. The mediator does not make decisions. The parent and school must both agree to any decisions made.</td>
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<td>Mediation may be used to resolve:</td>
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<td>• A student’s identification and eligibility for services;</td>
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<td>• The appropriateness of an educational evaluation or the proposed or current special education services or placement;</td>
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<td>• Any other dispute involving the provision of a FAPE to the student; • Reimbursement for services obtained by the parent; or</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Any issues involved in a current complaint or due process hearing.</td>
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<td>Special education is highly regulated, and, consequently, compliance with federal and state regulations is a part of developing and sustaining a high-quality special education program. Charter schools must follow procedural as well as more substantive programmatic requirements to comply with the spirit as well as the letter of the law.</td>
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<td>Central to compliance is ensuring that students with disabilities are provided a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. Underlying these central tenets of special education are policies and procedures related to informing parents of their rights and ensuring that students are provided with timely assessments and regular monitoring of their progress toward achieving the goals outlined in their IEPs Section 504 plans.</td>
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<td>School leaders should strive to establish highly transparent policies and procedures and engage parents to the maximum extent possible. By recognizing and engaging parents as essential partners in their child’s education, school leaders can minimize and defuse problems that may arise. There should be evidence of a commitment to involving parents in clear and regular communication about services with parents.</td>
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Appendix B
Glossary of Special Education Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADA</td>
<td>Americans with Disabilities Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>ABA</td>
<td>Applied behavior analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADHD</td>
<td>Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASD</td>
<td>Autism spectrum disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASVAB</td>
<td>Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery Test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT</td>
<td>Assistive technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIP</td>
<td>Behavior intervention plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BYOD</td>
<td>Bring your own device</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBM</td>
<td>Curriculum-based measurement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCSS</td>
<td>Common Core State Standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFR</td>
<td>U.S. Code of Federal Regulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLD</td>
<td>Culturally and linguistically diverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DD</td>
<td>Developmental delay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSM</td>
<td>Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EBP</td>
<td>Evidence-based practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECE</td>
<td>Early childhood education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ED</td>
<td>Emotional disability (or disorder)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ED</td>
<td>U.S. Department of Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>ELL</td>
<td>English language learner</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESY</td>
<td>Extended school year</td>
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<tr>
<td>FAPE</td>
<td>Free and appropriate education</td>
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<tr>
<td>FBA</td>
<td>Functional behavior assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>FERPA</td>
<td>Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDEA</td>
<td>Individuals with Disabilities Education Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>IEE</td>
<td>Independent educational evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEP</td>
<td>Individualized education program</td>
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<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>Instructional technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>LD</td>
<td>Learning disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEA</td>
<td>Local education agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>LRE</td>
<td>Least restrictive environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCLB</td>
<td>No Child Left Behind Act of 2001</td>
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<tr>
<td>OCD</td>
<td>Obsessive compulsive disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OHI</td>
<td>Other health impairment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSEP</td>
<td>U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>OT</td>
<td>Occupational therapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAR</td>
<td>Public Agency Representative</td>
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<tr>
<td>PARCC</td>
<td>Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers</td>
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<tr>
<td>PBIS</td>
<td>Positive behavior interventions and supports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDD</td>
<td>Pervasive developmental disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLAAFP</td>
<td>Present level of academic achievement and functional performance</td>
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<tr>
<td>PLOP</td>
<td>Present level of performance</td>
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<tr>
<td>PLC</td>
<td>Professional learning communities</td>
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<td>PT</td>
<td>Physical therapy</td>
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<tr>
<td>RTI</td>
<td>Response to intervention</td>
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<tr>
<td>RC</td>
<td>Responsive Classroom</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLP</td>
<td>Speech and Language Pathologist</td>
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<td>SWPBIS</td>
<td>Schoolwide positive behavior interventions and supports</td>
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<tr>
<td>SRSD</td>
<td>Self-regulated strategy development</td>
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<tr>
<td>SBAC</td>
<td>Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEA</td>
<td>State education agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEAC</td>
<td>Special education advisory team</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLD</td>
<td>Specific learning disability</td>
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<tr>
<td>SWD</td>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>TBI</td>
<td>Traumatic brain injury</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOR</td>
<td>Teacher of Record</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOS</td>
<td>Teacher of Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>UDL</td>
<td>Universal design for learning</td>
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