INCS
ILLINOIS NETWORK OF
CHARTER SCHOOLS

PAVING A NEW PATH
A GUIDEBOOK FOR ILLINOIS
CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INCS
ILLINOIS NETWORK OF CHARTER SCHOOLS

Dear Colleagues:

The Illinois Network of Charter Schools (INCS) is the voice of the state-wide charter public school sector. We are dedicated to serving the interests of all Illinois students by strengthening and growing public charter schools across our state that produce dramatically better educational outcomes for all students. We bring together parents, educators, administrators, community leaders, and students who share a common goal: ensuring all students have access to a high-quality school and the education they deserve for a successful future.

Illinois parents continue to demand more high-quality options in public education. There are now 145 charter schools serving almost 60,000 Illinois students with thousands more clamoring to attend. With increased statewide activity, the charter sector is growing to meet this demand.

Parents have noticed charter schools' track record of strong per-formance as proven by Stanford University's recent CREDO report and successful high school graduation and college enrollment rates. INCS is working to expand education options to even more Illinois communities in need. We help individuals learn more about starting a charter school by publishing *Paving a New Path* and hosting our annual Charter Design Institute. Additionally, INCS Charter Starter Consulting supports teams of charter school designers through the school design and authorization process.

High-quality charter schools do not happen by accident. Students need talented, mission-driven leaders to start more excellent schools. To that end, we thank you for reviewing the information and resources in *Paving a New Path.* If you have questions or are ready to move forward in the charter school design process, we encourage you to contact us for further guidance.

Finally, please visit our website, **www.incschools.org,** to find a charter school near you, learn more about INCS, and access addi-tional information on the Illinois charter school movement.

Andrew Broy
President

SECTION 1:
INTRODUCTION

1A WHAT ARE CHARTER SCHOOLS?

For over twenty years, charter schools have been creating models for American public education and helping develop the practices that work best with 21st Century students. Charter schools…

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

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

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

Are subject to strict accountability. A charter school is held to its charter agreement with the district or State Charter Commission, with clear standards for student performance, governance and financial management. Charter school students take statewide student achievement exams, and charter schools are subject to the same safety, health, civil rights and special education regulations as regular district schools. The school is evaluated for renewal at the end of each five- to ten-year term, and can be closed at that time if not performing as promised.

May be new or may be conversions of existing public schools. In Illinois, a new charter must be authorized by a local school district or the Illinois Charter School Commission and certified by the Illinois State Board of Education. Charters can also be created by converting existing public schools or attendance centers to charter school status

with majority support from certified teachers, parents and guardians, and a vote by the local school council, if applicable.

Charter Schools Across the Country

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

Charter Enrollment by City, 2011
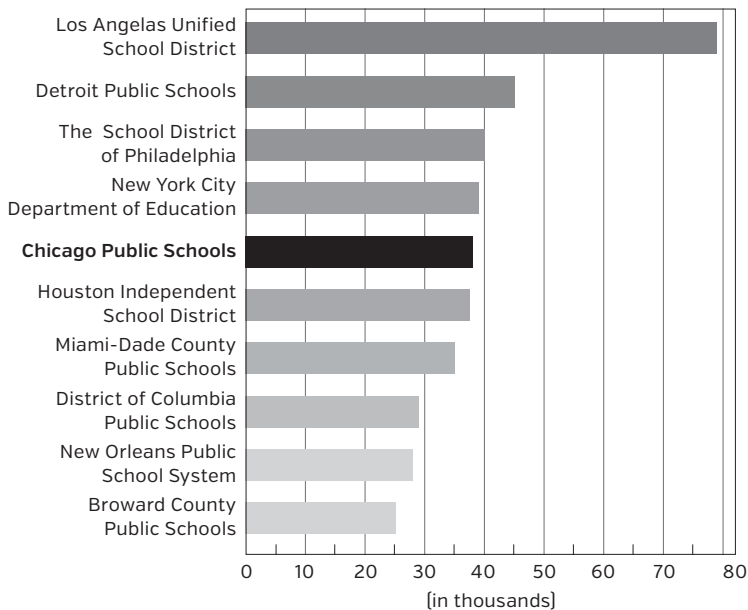
Source: National Alliance for Public Schools "'Top 10' Districts Serving the Highest Number of Public Charter School Students", Sixth Annual Edition, October 2011

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

Charter performance also varies by state. National achievement results for charter schools have been unclear and contested. Illinois' experience, however, has been distinct. A rigorous authorizing process in Chicago, where many of the state's charters are located, has resulted in approval of high-quality proposals and holding schools accountable for their performance. Again, when considering or discussing charters, we recommend focusing on local results, not necessarily national averages.

Who Can Start a Charter School?

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

People start charters for many reasons:

» To provide new educational options to students and families in their communities

» To improve achievement for students who have been underperforming in regular district schools, or help close achievement gaps between white and minority students or affluent and low-income students

» To implement innovative aspects of the school design, such as curriculum, instructional approaches, school schedules, or support for students to increase engagement and improve performance

» To create schools in which professional educators are given the freedom and authority to do their best work with students

» To bring national and community expertise and resources to public education, through partnerships with institutions such as community-based organizations, businesses, national educational leaders and universities

Whatever your reason for starting a charter school, remember that charter school development is a serious responsibility. Charter school

INTRODUCTION

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

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

TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

Two Illinois Charter Schools

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

EPIC Academy is a charter high school located in the South Chicago neighborhood of Chicago. EPIC applies the principles of Expeditionary Learning to a rigorous college prep curriculum in math, science, history and language arts. Students study history, science, and mathematics through a local lens: the rise and fall of industrialism at U.S. Steel South Works, the effects of fossil fuel pollution on plant diversity in the area, and the economic consequences of payday lending on the community.

Quest Charter Academy in Peoria will eventually serve grades 6–12, providing an innovative world class education, rich in math, science and technology focused on preparing students to become bold inquirers, problem solvers and ethical leaders. Quest was founded by education, community, and business leaders in Peoria who contract with Concept Schools to operate the school.

1B CHARTER SCHOOLS IN ILLINOIS

Illinois enacted charter public school legislation in 1996. Since then, 145 charter school campuses have opened, serving almost 60,000 students in Illinois as of 2013–2014. The state's charters have proven especially adept at improving outcomes of low-income learners and helping such students gain access to college. 91% percent of Illinois charter public school students come from low-income families, 95% are African American or Latino, and 12% are students with special needs. Charter schools are popular with families and each year there is an increase of the number of students on waiting lists for charter schools.

Illinois Charter School Demographics
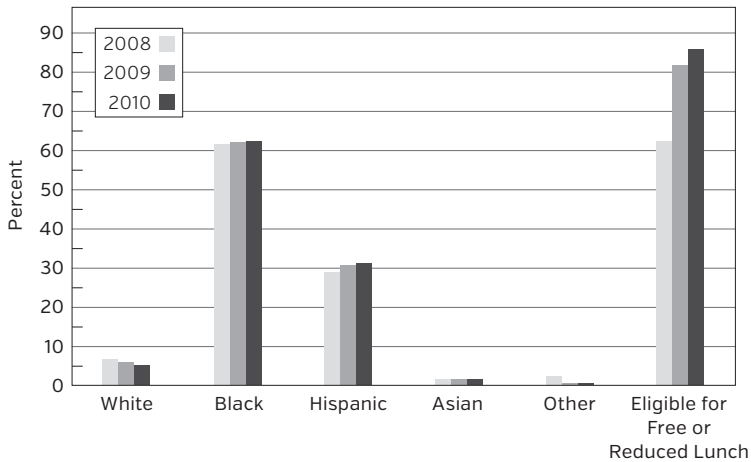
Charter School Enrollment, 2000–2011
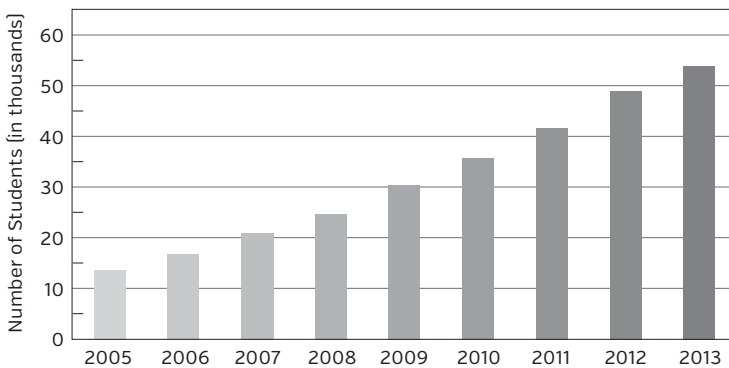
Number of Students on Waiting Lists
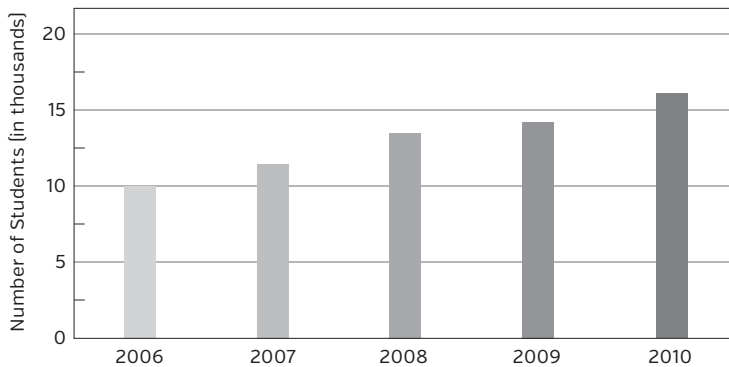
Charters Exhibit Strong Performance

Charter schools in Illinois are delivering lasting results. Statistics compiled from CPS Charter and Contract School Performance Reports 2003–2010 show that the percentage of charter schools making gains in reading, math, and all subcategories from 2010–2011 exceeds the percentage of non-charter schools making similar gains.

With respect to high school graduation, 100% of non-alternative Illinois charter high schools had graduation rates higher than the districts where they are located (for more information, take a look at the INCS Charter School Data Finder at http://incschools.org/charters/charter-school-data-finder/). Charter schools also have very high rates of college matriculation. Beyond academics, charter schools are noted for positive school culture that allows students to do their best.

Students Meeting or Exceeding ISAT Standards
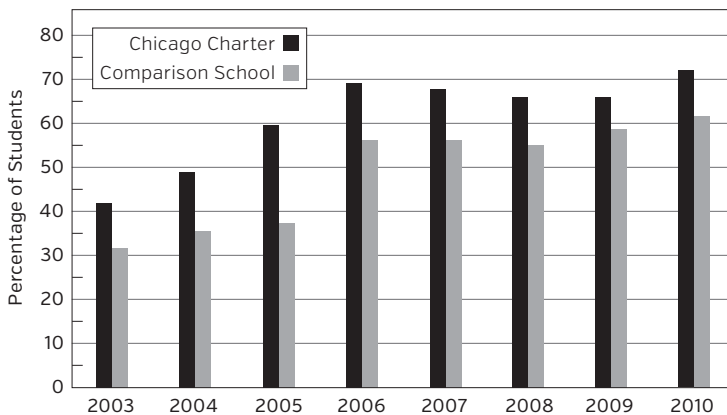
**Graduation Rates Comparing CPS D299 and
Charter School Average, 2005–2010**
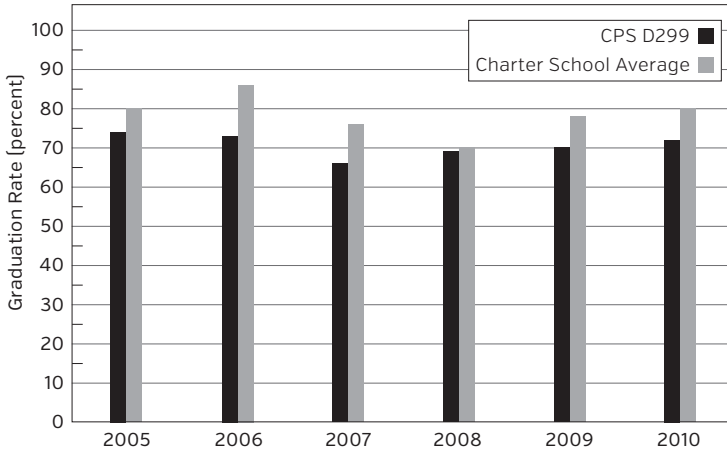
The Parameters of Illinois Charter Schools

The Illinois Charter Schools Law allows up to 120 charters statewide: 70 in Chicago and 45 in other Illinois communities, plus an additional five in Chicago limited to re-enrolled high school dropouts.

The supply of charters is not unlimited, but, at the time of this writing, more than 30 charters are still available in Chicago's suburbs and downstate, and about the same number are available in Chicago. Anyone interested in opening a charter school in Illinois has a wonderful opportunity. Approved schools may receive initial charters for five to ten years, but in Illinois, many charters have been awarded for five years. Charter renewals are limited to five years. Illinois charter holders 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.

For more detailed information about all the requirements for operating a charter school under the state law, go to Section 2B, "Understanding the Law and Authorization Process."

Restructuring an Existing School

The Illinois Charter School Law allows for existing public schools to be converted to charter schools with majority approval by the school's teachers, parents and local school council (if applicable). One reason a school might wish to convert to charter status is if it is in "restructuring" status under the federal No Child Left Behind law, which includes conversion to a charter school among the options for restructuring a failing school.

This handbook focuses on the development of new schools, rather than conversion of existing schools. Many of the steps are similar, but if you are interested in converting an existing school, we recommend that you carefully review the charter law with respect to conversions and contact INCS to discuss the process of converting to charter status.

Opening a New Charter in Illinois

The Illinois Charter Schools Law creates a powerful and active role for local school districts in chartering. In Illinois, local school districts are the primary authorizers of charter schools, and the districts are responsible for overseeing performance, holding charter schools accountable for achieving their goals and deciding whether to renew a school's charter at the end of its term. Before 2011, local districts' virtual monopoly on authorizing meant that very few charters were granted outside the City of Chicago, because charter developers lacked a meaningful way to appeal a denial.

The establishment in 2011 of the State Charter School Commission created a new path to authorization. The Commission, composed of experts in in public and nonprofit governance, management and finance, public school leadership, higher education, assessments, curriculum and instruction, and public education law, hears appeals from local district denials. The operations of the Commission are funded via a charge of up to 3% of revenues of the schools it authorizes. Thus far, the Commission has authorized two schools, both of which are in Chicago. The existence of the Commission is forcing local districts to give serious consideration to charter proposals. Nevertheless, the Commission sets high standards for charter schools, and a charter development team cannot rely on Commission approval unless its proposal is very strong.

Most school districts in Illinois have not created formal authorizing processes for charter schools, and part of your job as a developer may be to work with the district to formalize the parameters it will use to evaluate your proposal. INCS provides technical assistance to targeted school district leaders to help them establish high-quality authorizing processes.

The Chicago Public Schools has developed a rigorous, nationally-recognized authorizing process that has resulted in the development of many high-quality charter schools, and other districts, including Peoria and North Chicago, have issued Requests for Proposals that set a high bar for charters seeking to locate in those districts. In districts with formal authorizing processes, charter school developers will need to learn about application and authorizing procedures and follow district guidelines.

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

1C OVERVIEW OF THE DESIGN PROCESS

Before you begin reading about the tasks of school design and charter application, it's useful to see an overview of the entire charter school design process. You don't have to follow the steps exactly as we outline them, but this should give you an idea of what needs to happen—and in an approximate order.

The time periods listed below are not exact. Each charter school design team will need to develop its own workplan and schedule, based on the time and skill of its members. However, we estimate that it takes 9–18 months to develop a strong charter school proposal, with another 8–12 months needed as a "planning year" after the charter is approved but before the school is opened. In addition, review of the proposal by the District and the Charter School Commission, in the case of an appeal, adds an additional 45–120 days to the process. Charter schools have been established in shorter timeframes, but teams should allow at least 20 months and, ideally, 30 months between the decision to create a school and school opening.

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.

Roadmap for Charter School Development
(Adapted from US Charter Schools "Steps to Starting a Charter School")

1. **Exploration Process**
   » Investigate state laws, policies and available funding
   » Review state authorizing process
   » Visit charter schools
   » Conduct research on charter schools, school models and design, and related areas
   » Begin community engagement
   » Assess community assets and needs
   » Research district

2. Initial Design Process (3–6 months)

» Engage with the community
  – Identify community members (including planning group members, community leaders, and parents/families) who are interested in education in the community
  – Solicit input from community members
  – Hold community meetings
  – Work with community members to collaboratively develop vision for school
» Form a core design team
  – Assess skills, access experts
  – Ensure that design team is diverse in skills and experience
» Articulate initial vision for the charter school
» Apply for nonprofit and tax-exempt status
» Develop clear vision and mission statements
» Create a plan that maps out how the design team will prepare the major design areas below
» Conduct research and reach out to experts in each major school design area, as needed
  – Educational program design
  – Governance
  – Budget/Finances
  – Facilities
  – Other
» Create a basic written description of your ideas for a new charter school, including major design areas
  – Share prospectus with community members, school board leaders, potential funders and others to engage them and solicit further input for your school design
» Develop a strategy for gaining district support
» Identify possible facilities for the school
» Identify and apply for available local and national charter school start-up funding; begin to raise additional funds, if needed

3. Major Design Areas (6–12 months)

» School culture and climate
  – Articulate vision for school culture and climate, and a strategy for developing them for both students and teachers
» Educational program
  – Define educational approach and goals
  – Consider whether you will contract with a nonprofit charter management organization (EMO or CMO)
  – Define school academic standards
  – Develop or select curriculum and instructional methods
  – Develop or identify assessment methods
  – Develop special education plan
  – Develop professional development plan
  – Develop instructional calendar and daily schedule
» Parent and community engagement strategy
» School governance
  – Draft board bylaws and policies
  – Create an administrative structure
  – Identify school leaders and/or recruitment strategy
  – Identify board members and/or recruitment strategy
» School staffing
  – Identify staffing needs and develop recruitment plan
» Budget and finances
  – Develop school budget and financial plans
» Facilities and operations
  – Tentatively secure possible facilities for the school
  – Develop operations plans
» School accountability plan
  – Write an accountability plan that incorporates accountability for academic achievement, sound fiscal management, and governance
» Address other application requirements (including plan for liability and insurance coverage, transportation plan, and other areas)
» Continue building community and school board support for your charter school proposal

4. **Applying for the Charter**

» Draft the charter application

   – Incorporate all elements required by law

   – Address any application requirements of your district

   – Provide detailed information on each major design area for your school

» Review, review, review

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

» Assess whether you have gained sufficient school board support

» Submit completed charter school proposal to local school board

5. **After Submission, Pending A Decision (45–120 days)**

» Meet with school board members and other local leaders to discuss your charter proposal

   – Understand and address individual concerns

   – Show respect for opposition

   – Assess likelihood of approval

» Disseminate information about charter proposal

   – Meet with local media

   – Meet with church and community groups

   – Letters to the Editor

» Build and demonstrate community support

   – Attendance at school board meetings

   – Phone calls and letters to school board

   – Letters to the Editor

» Prepare for appeal if necessary

5. **Pre-Operations/Incubation: Getting Ready to Open (8–12 months)**

» Finalize charter agreement with the authorizer, including, for local districts, identification of services the district will provide and the terms under which they will be provided

» Recruit and hire staff

» Recruit any necessary additional board members

» Recruit and admit students

» Orient staff and bring them into the planning process

» Provide board governance training

» Formalize the instructional program

  – Refine detailed curriculum, instruction and assessment plans

  – Finalize choice of and purchase instructional materials

  – Finalize detailed school calendar and daily schedule

  – Create detailed professional development schedule based on overall plans

» Arrange for facility and support services (note that these services should be priced and budgeted earlier in the process; this step involves actually contracting for them)

  – Fiscal support (accounting, budget, payroll, banking, auditing, purchasing)

  – Transportation

  – Food service

  – Insurance

  – Staff benefits

  – Telecommunications and technology

  – Other

» Confirm relationships with community groups, supporters, the sponsor district, the media, INCS, and other partners

6. 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, INCS, and other partners

SECTION 2:

EXPLORATION PROCESS

2A RESEARCH AND RESOURCES TO GET YOU STARTED

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

Learn from Successful Charters

There is no reason to reinvent the wheel. We recommend that you become familiar with existing charter school models and 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, newspaper articles, websites and books that include descriptions of successful charter school models. A list of websites for charter school research—some of which include specific case studies—will be found at the end of this section.

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

EXPLORATION PROCESS

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.

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

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

Attend the INCS Charter Design Institute. This event provides training on charter school design for those exploring the possibility of starting a charter school in Illinois. The institute offers training and presentations from charter experts, opportunities to learn about the work of charter school design, and a tour of a charter school campus.

Get on appropriate list-serves. Once you have researched models that align with your goals as well as charter-support organizations, be sure to get on those organizations' list-serves. Good list-serves with which to start are INCS News and Events or those created by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools.

📁 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. When using resources that are not directly focused on Illinois, be mindful of policy differences in other states and seek further assistance when in doubt.

Illinois Network of Charter Schools INCS is the statewide association and collective voice of charter schools in Illinois. INCS works to strengthen charter schools and the communities that they serve through advocacy, education and direct services to schools. The INCS website includes current information on Illinois charter school policy and law, a complete list of Illinois charter schools, and a "Start a Charter" section featuring Illinois-specific tools and resources for charter school developers.

» **INCS Charter Starter Consulting Program** supports charter school developers and authorizers in the Chicago suburbs and in communities across Illinois. http://incschools.org/start_a_charter/charter_starter_program/consulting/

» **INCS charter Design Institute.** The annual Charter Design Institute provides training on charter school design for those exploring the possibility of starting a charter school in Illinois. The institute features training and presentations from charter experts, opportunities to learn about the work involved in charter school design, and a tour of a charter school campus. http://incschools.org/start_a_charter/charter_starter_program/design_institute/

U.S. Department of Education—Charter Schools Program This website provides information on the federal Charter Schools Program, which provides funding for charter school start-up and implementation. The website also provides valuable guidance on how federal law applies to charter schools and offers links to charter school resources and publications. www.ed.gov/programs/charter

National Alliance for Public Charter Schools The Alliance is a national policy organization committed to advancing the charter school movement. The group, which in 2004 replaced the Charter Friends National Network (CFNN), also provides assistance to state charter school associations. The website includes an excellent

informational dashboard, links to publications, and background information on charter school issues, including many excellent resources created by CFNN and NAPCS. www.publiccharters.org

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

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

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

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

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

2B UNDERSTANDING THE LAW AND AUTHORIZATION PROCESS

Charter school law is a product of state, not federal, lawmaking. Although not as detailed as in some other states, the provisions of the Illinois Charter Schools 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 local school district. You will need to read and become 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. Check the INCS website periodically for updates to the Illinois Charter Schools Law.

General Provisions

Basic Parameters (105 ILCS 5/27A-4)

» A total of 120 charters may be granted in Illinois—75 in Chicago and 45 outside Chicago. Of the 75 allowed in Chicago, five are to be dropout-recovery schools.

» Non-public schools may not convert to charter schools.

» Enrollment in charter schools is open to all students living in a given local school district—with the exception of up to one-third of charter schools in Chicago, which may designate neighborhood attendance boundaries to relieve overcrowding or serve low-income or at-risk populations.

» If there are more eligible applicants for a particular charter school than there are spaces available, the school must hold a lottery: preference is given to students enrolled during the previous year, their siblings, and those within Chicago neighborhood boundaries (if applicable).

Requirements as a Legal Entity (105 ILCS 5/27A-5)

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

» 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.

» School districts may charge a "reasonable rent" to the charter school for the use of district buildings. Services provided to the school by the school district must be provided at cost. These services can be negotiated between these two parties and should be set forth in the charter agreement.

Applicability of Laws and Regulations (105 ILCS 5/27A-6)

» Charter schools are required to follow state goals, standards and assessments and, in Chicago, to administer "any other nationally recognized standardized tests" that the district administers.

» Material revisions to charter agreements require approval of both the local school board and the charter school governing body, and must be certified by the State Board of Education.

Employees

Requirements for Staffing (105 ILCS 5/27A-10)

» Each school board must grant, for a period of up to five years, a leave of absence for teachers who choose to teach at a charter school, so that upon returning to their original school, their service status and retirement benefits will not be adversely affected.

» Charter school teachers should be either certified or possess the following qualifications: (1) has been awarded a bachelor's degree; (2) has been employed for at least five years in a relevant field; (3) has passed required basic skills and subject area tests; and (4) has demonstrated "continuing evidence of professional growth."

» At least 50% of teachers in Chicago charters must be certified when the school opens, and 75% of teachers in all Illinois charters must be certified by the beginning of the fourth year of the charter school's operation.

Unionization (105 ILCS 5/27A-10)

» Charter school employees may unionize, but, if they do, they must form a collective bargaining unit that is separate and distinct from other collective bargaining units serving employees of the school district in which the charter school is located.

Finances

Note: this section covers financing for charter schools generally; see Section 4G, "Finance and Operations" for guidance on start-up money."

Local Financing (105 ILCS 5/27A-11)

» The charter school and the local board of education will agree to the funding that the school will receive as part of the charter contract—not to be less than 75% or more than 125% of the district's per capita student tuition. Charter schools will receive these funds in equal quarterly installments.

» The proportionate share of monies generated under other federal or state categorical-aid programs, including special education, shall be directed to those charter schools serving students eligible for that aid.

State Financing (105 ILCS 5/27A-11.5)

» Charter schools may apply for and receive, subject to the same restrictions applicable to school districts, any grant administered by the State Board that is available to school districts.

EXPLORATION PROCESS

Application, Approval, and Renewal

Charter applications are submitted to the local school board, which is given 75 days to approve or deny the application. If denied, the applicant may appeal to the State Commission, which has the same 75 days to approve or deny the application. Here is a diagram of the application process:
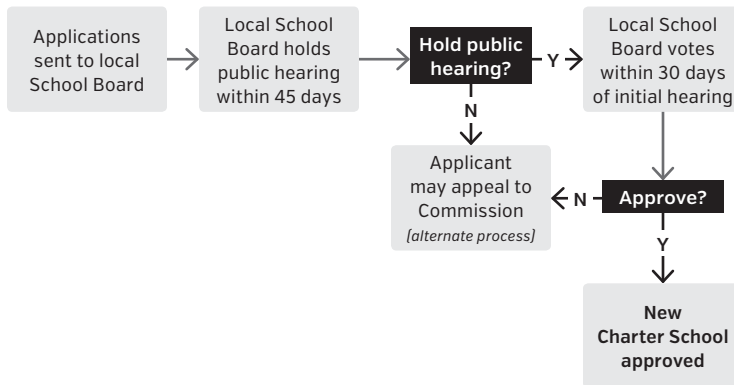
Charter Applications (105 ILCS 5/27A-7)

» There are 15 items that must be included in all Illinois charter school applications; for details, see the Illinois Charter Schools Law and Section 5B of this booklet, "Drafting a High-Quality Charter School Proposal."

State Charter School Commission (105 ILCS 5/27A 7.5)

» The State Charter School Commission is responsible for authorizing high-quality charter schools throughout this State, particularly schools designed to expand opportunities for at-risk students. The Commission may consider appeals of denials by local school boards; it may not receive applications directly.

» The Commission consists of nine members, appointed by the State Board.

» The Commission may charge a fee to a charter school that it authorizes, not to exceed 3% of the revenue provided to the school, to cover the cost of undertaking the ongoing administrative responsibilities of the eligible chartering authority with respect to the school.

Evaluation of Charter Proposals (105 ILCS 5/27A-8)

» Local School Boards are required to give preference to proposals that demonstrate a high level of local pupil, parental, community, business, and school personnel support; that set rigorous levels of expected pupil achievement and demonstrate feasible plans for attaining those levels of achievement; and that are designed to enroll and serve a substantial proportion of at-risk children. Even though these factors are not requirements for charter school proposals, it is important to keep them in mind when preparing an application.

» Existing public schools may convert to charter status with evidence that the new school has majority support from certified teachers and parents/guardians in the form of a written petition and, if applicable, a vote of the local school council at a public meeting.

» Within 45 days of receipt of a charter school proposal, the local school board must hold a public meeting or hearing to obtain information to assist it in making its decision to approve or decline the proposal; within 30 days of this public meeting, the school board must vote to grant or deny the proposal.

» If the proposal is approved, it must be submitted to the State Board for certification that the charter complies with the Charter Schools Law.

» If the local school board votes to deny the proposal, then the charter school applicant has 30 days from the date of that vote to submit an appeal to the Commission. The Commission may reverse a local school board's decision to deny a charter school proposal if the Commission finds that the proposal (1) is in compliance with the Charter Schools Law and (2) is in the best interests of the students the charter school is designed to serve.

EXPLORATION PROCESS

Charter Renewal (105 ILCS 5/27A-9)

» A charter may be granted for an initial period of not less than five and not more than ten school years. A charter may be renewed for incremental periods, not to exceed five school years.

» A charter school renewal decision must be submitted to the State Board for certification. Non-renewal or revocation may be appealed to the Commission. If the Commission reverses the decision, the Commission will serve as the chartering entity.

In addition to the charter law, review the Illinois State Board of Education's and the Illinois Charter School Commission's administrative rules for charter schools, which articulate charter school application and review procedures.

Resources

Illinois Charter Schools Law
www.incschools.org/charter_school_law.html

Illinois Charter School Rules www.isbe.net/charter

2C 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 a such a school. It might seem to you that you and such a school are a good match, but you'll need many supporters besides yourself before the first day of school—advocates in the district, colleagues, teachers, investors, parents, and students. To be able to attract all of these allies, you must show that a charter school would be a compelling addition to the school district's current educational portfolio. Would a charter school help to ease overcrowding? Would it offer a different educational approach or school type? Would it focus on underserved student populations?

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

The Needs Assessment Document

We suggest that you develop a formal, written needs assessment at the beginning of the charter school design process.

The New York Charter School Center defines a needs assessment as "a comprehensive evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of targeted student populations, with the expressed goal of determining how best to build on strengths and improve areas of weakness in order to enhance student learning." A comprehensive needs assessment:

» Is based on clearly presented, valid, empirical data

» Includes a variety of sources of information (e.g., state databases of standardized test results, census bureau data, teachers, parents, students, administrators, counselors, newspapers and websites) and different kinds of data (e.g., cognitive, attitudinal, behavioral and demographic)

» Is based on an adequate sample of individuals and groups

» Interprets the data to identify strengths and weaknesses

EXPLORATION PROCESS

» Presents the underlying causes of the strengths and weaknesses

» Sets priorities for needs in a manner that addresses student learning

Guiding questions for creating a needs assessment:

» What are students' academic strengths and weaknesses as suggested by the data?

» What patterns and trends emerge from the data?

» How well are the schools supporting students' social and emotional needs?

» What gaps exist in the district? (e.g., an arts program, a science and technology program, a different pedagogical approach, a strong middle-school program, a college-prep program, or a program designed to serve high-school dropouts)

» What needs does the district or community have? (Is the district growing rapidly? Is the district meeting "Adequate Yearly Progress" under No Child Left Behind?)

» What are the demographic characteristics of the community? (e.g., neighborhood income levels, college attainment results among adults, and employment rate)

» What is the district currently doing well?

» What resources exist in the district or community to support schools? (e.g., available facilities, potential partners such as institutions of higher education, community-based organizations or engaged businesses)

Items to include in a needs assessment:

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

- Student test performance--including performance of students in various sub-groups (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, English language learners, and students with disabilities)
- Additional measures of achievement--attendance, dropout rates, college enrollment and persistence rates, workforce readiness measures.

» Analysis of needs met and unmet

- Subgroups of students--including grades, gender, race/ethnicity, English language learners, and students with disabilities
- Kinds of needs that are unmet--academic, behavioral, social/emotional, college matriculation and persistence.

📁 Resources

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

Illinois Network of Charter Schools Charter School Data Finder An interactive data tool that puts publicly reported data about charter schools and other public schools at your fingertips.
http://incschools.org/charters/charter-school-data-finder

ISBE Report Cards The report cards provide demographic student information, student achievement data, and financial data. Using interactive report cards, you can quickly view student achievement results over time, compare schools and districts, and move between achievement results for different sub-groups of students. www.isbe.net > Report Card

ISBE District Financial Reports and Ratings Visit ISBE's School Finances section to access archived annual school district financial reports, district budgets and "School District Financial Profiles" that provide rankings of districts' financial well-being over the past five years. www.isbe.net/finance

While the resources above will give you invaluable information, the best way to assess the need for a charter school is by talking with parents, teachers, high school students, community members and other stakeholders in education. Be strategic about when and how to "go public" to district leaders with your plans for charter school development; your charter school may not be seen favorably by all at first, and initially you may need to keep your intentions close to your chest. 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 the time to understand the local politics and find key allies who can offer public support if charter opponents really voice their thoughts.

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

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

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

Starting a charter school is a tough and complicated process that may or may not be right for you. A well thought out and informed decision requires that you carefully consider the mission and vision for your school, what student outcomes you hope to achieve, the needs of your community, whether the charter school you envision meets that community's needs, and whether you and your team have what it takes to start 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 Illinois 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?

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» Have you identified what factors will make your school innovative, successful, and well-received by the community?

» Can you foresee any disadvantages to the charter route, and can you articulate what compromises you might have to make to achieve your educational vision and design?

» Are you planning a school to which you would send your own child? If so, and if you intend to start a school for your own child or children, understand that there is no enrollment preference given to founders' children in the Illinois Charter Schools Law. In other words, founders' children are not guaranteed admission. Can you accept that risk?

» Do you realize that you will have to devote a great deal of time and energy to the project?

» What skill sets do you possess that will make your school a success? Many successful schools have teams whose members have expertise in real estate, finance and accounting, legal, and public relations, in addition to backgrounds in education and community engagement. If you identify skills gaps In yourself, do you know others who can fill those gaps as well as commit the time necessary to developing an application?

» Do you realize that, in addition to the education work, your design team and school leaders will need to learn to prepare and stick to a budget, fundraise, manage payroll, buy insurance, deal with a landlord, as well as deal with numerous other non-pedagogical issues?

» Are you prepared to be a fund-raiser, even at the very beginning?

» Are you willing to be the public face of a multi-million dollar enterprise? And to be held accountable for meeting the financial, organizational and academic goals of your school?

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

SECTION 3:
INITIAL STEPS

3A THE CORE DESIGN TEAM

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

Starting a charter school in Illinois entails three challenges: operating (1) a start- up organization, (2) a non-profit corporation, and (3) 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.

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 suggestions 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.

INITIAL STEPS

» 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, like that of the Chicago Collegiate Charter School, 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 instanes, 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.

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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.

TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

Vetting Potential Team Members

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

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

Core Design Team Skills Inventory: Table 1

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

Core Design Team Members or Prospects Include Name, Affiliation and Job Title/Role			
Name:	*Jane Doe*		
Affiliation (Employer/ Organization):	*YMCA*		
Job Title:	*Assistant Controller*		
Status:	*Design Team Member*		
Skills			
Education			
Teaching Experience			
School Leadership			
Standards and Assessment			
Curriculum Development			
Instructional Practices			
Special Education			
English Language Learners			
Professional Development			
Teacher Recruitment and Induction			
Community Relations and Communications			
Public Relations, Community Relations	X		
Media and Communications, Social Media, Design			
Proposal Writing and Editing			

INITIAL STEPS

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

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

Core Design Team Skills Inventory: Table 2

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

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

Core Design Team Skills Inventory: Table 3

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

INITIAL STEPS

🔍 **TAKE A CLOSER LOOK**

How to Get Some Extra Help

When a group of passionate Chicago teachers formed the founding/ planning group for Namaste Charter School, they realized they possessed a wealth of knowledge related to curriculum and instruction. However, they lacked expertise in areas such as law and budgeting.

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

Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville, East St. Louis Charter School developed an advisory council of movers and shakers in the community—not a board of directors, but a group of willing individuals from the community who met regularly to provide advice on the development of the charter proposal (and continued to meet after the school was established to provide advice on the ongoing development of the school).

Rather Stanton, co-Founder of Legal Prep Charter Academy, created both an Advisory Board and Associate Board to support the planning of the school in 2009—and especially to tap into and cultivate support from the Chicago legal community. Managing these groups required significant effort. His key tips:

» Create structure and goals that add value

» Keep your boards busy and communicate with them frequently

» Keep structures simple enough to manage—and to avoid distracting from other important goals

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 sources 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. Management consulting firms, such as Bain and BCG, have also provided valuable support to design teams, Finally, sometimes design teams receive in-kind support such as office space to use while planning the school.

» **Recruit university and college students as volunteers** or student interns. Students learning how to be accountants or public relations executives, for example, can be a great resource. Several teams have tapped into graduate school volunteers (often in already-organized groups seeking a great project). Think business school, public policy, urban planning… not just education departments.

» **Access leads through professional associations and resource centers.** Directories of member organizations and conference agendas full of expert presenters can be great resources for identifying consultants and other service providers in your areas of need. Many directories and conference agendas can be found online.

The bottom line is that—whether specifically recruiting volunteers, identifying paid professionals to support your work, 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.

TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

It Takes a Village

Montessori School of Englewood developed partnerships with multiple community organizations, including social service organizations that now provide counseling services to students and their families and a Brazilian cultural organization that provides Capoeira dance lessons as the backbone of the school's physical education program.

Working Together

Like any group that comes together to accomplish a task, your core design team will have to ensure the work gets accomplished and learn to work as a team. 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. Groups like Chicago Collegiate and Polaris Charter Academy have had the benefit of paid time for school planning, through the Building Excellent Schools Fellowship and a Golden Apple sabbatical, respectively.

INITIAL STEPS

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

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

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

TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

Taking Advice

When three teachers formed a core design team to create what became Polaris Charter Academy in Chicago, they reached out to many others for advice–founders of several other charter schools, people from colleges of education and colleagues from the institutions where they were working, who in turn were able to suggest lawyers and businesspeople for guidance.

While all those consultants were crucial to learning how to create a school, they also brought a lot of different points of view. "Be prepared to receive conflicting advice and to make tough decisions about what advice to take," says Tracy Kwock, one of Polaris' founders. "Always weigh advice against the mission."

Charter school applicants are hoping to create a public school. As such, the core design group needs to operate in the same way the law requires of the charter holder. Members of the applicant group should recognize and avoid potential conflicts of interest. Lawyers who help found the school, for example, should not become its counsel without an open bidding process. Teachers who found the school should not automatically become employees, 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. This guide's Roadmap for Charter School Development in Section 1C, "Overview of the Design Process," can serve as a guideline, but adapt it to fit the unique factors of your situation. A well-thought out project plan includes tasks within the major areas, as well as individuals responsible for each task. Talk with your team about what process you will use to make adjustments, if needed, once work is underway.

Goal	Task	Person(s) Responsible	Beginning Date	End Date

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. INCS has created templates in Excel and Google Drive. Teams have also used online tools like Basecamp and Trello. Find or develop one that works well for your team, and ensure that any tool you use incorporates these **Non-Negotiables of Project Management:**

» Category of Work/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.

🔍 TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

Real-time Example

Erie Elementary Charter School's charter school development pro-
cess spanned two years, from initial conception to the opening of
the school. While your process may be dramatically different, it's
valuable to keep in mind that charter school development takes a
lot of time.

October 2003	Initial idea conception/discussions of charter school began
October 2003– January 2004	Further exploration of charter idea and feasibility
February 2004	Began school visits, scouting for facilities and contacting community supports: alderman, consultant
April 2004	Drafted mission and vision statements
June 2004	Completed first draft of five-year budget
July 2004	Hired principal
August 2004	Negotiations to secure a facility
October 2004	Completed and turned in application
January 2005	Charter awarded
February 2005	First board meeting
Spring 2005	Interviewing prospective staff
September 2005	First day of school!

INITIAL STEPS

Educational Services Providers and School Management Organizations

In recent years, many local and national groups have sprung up that offer school management services to charter schools. These groups include for-profit education management organizations (EMOs) such as Charter Schools USA, and nonprofit charter management organizations (CMOs) like Concept Schools and Lighthouse Academies. 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 some flexibility and day-to-day control, increased financial costs, and blurred or weak accountability if the relationship is poorly structured.

» Shop around. Even if you think a specific group is a great match, it's worth learning about other organizations—even if it just ends up helping your team learn more about how to create a strong relationship with the service provider you first heard about. Also, conduct due diligence by researching any

potential providers to find the best fit and know how well they've done in the past.

» Take your time. Don't enter into contracts quickly or lightly. It is essential to think through and clearly negotiate the roles and responsibilities of each party in order to avoid problems later and ensure the success of the school.

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

Resources

"Charting a Clear Course: A Resource Guide for Building Successful Partnerships between Charter Schools and School Management Organizations" by the **National Association of Charter School Authorizers** (NACSA) is a resource guide addressing the key issues a charter school board (or core design team) should consider in finding and contracting with a school management organization.
http://www.publiccharters.org/data/files/Publication_docs/548_file_Charting_a_Clear_Course_2005_reprint_final_20110402T222338.pdf

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3B LEGAL STATUS

Charter schools in Illinois must be organized as nonprofit corporations or "other discrete, legal, non-profit entit[ies]"authorized by the state of Illinois. During the design phase, a new charter can become a nonprofit by forming a board of directors of at least three people and filing Articles of Incorporation with the Illinois 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 Section 4F, "Governance," for more information.

Below we outline the basic steps for incorporating in Illinois 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 Illinois not-for-profit corporation is a relatively quick and inexpensive process. It usually takes less than three weeks, and as of October 2013, the filing fee is $77.75. 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 $850. To apply for 501(c)(3) status, you will need to fulfill several requirements, including:

» Receiving your approved Articles of Incorporation

» Developing board bylaws

» 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

» Filing your approved Articles of Incorporation with the Recorder of Deeds in your county

» Registering with the Office of the Illinois Attorney General

» Filing an Annual Report with the Illinois Secretary of State

» Filing IRS form 990 annually with the IRS

» Filing form IL990-AG annually with the Illinois Attorney General

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

Raising Funds as a 501(c)3

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

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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

Executive Service Corps of Chicago (ESC) provides affordable consulting services to non-profits, including help establishing 501(c)3 status. www.esc-chicago.org

The Illinois Donors Forum provides advice, instructions, and links to additional resources related to nonprofit organizations and fundraising. www.donorsforum.org

The Illinois Secretary of State is the website for filing articles of incorporation and beginning the process of establishing a 501(c)3. http://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/business_services/business_not-for-profit/home.html

The Internal Revenue Service publishes "Applying for 501(c)(3) Tax-Exempt Status" www.irs.ustreas.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p4220.pdf

3C CULTIVATING YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE DISTRICT

In Illinois, local school districts are the first stop on a charter school designer's journey to starting a charter school. However, since the Illinois Charter School Commission began in 2011, local districts are no longer the only authorizer in the state. Despite the Commission's presence, the local school district remains an important entity to get to know in the charter development process.

The information below will help you research and develop a strategy to build support from your local district (or districts in the case of a charter that encompasses two or more districts). Even beyond having your proposal approved, you want to develop an open and productive relationship with the school district. If approved, your charter school will be connected to the district in a multitude of ways once it is open: from enrolling students who have attended the district schools, to fiscal pass-throughs from the district to the charter. The district may help you search for school space, obtain needed information and coordinate critical services, such as special education, transportation and food service. Clear communication and cooperation with the district will make your school operations run much more smoothly.

With the option of appealing a local denial of a charter application to the Illinois Charter School Commission, some applicants might be less concerned with the politics and the relationships at the local district level. However, the Commission has clearly stated that they expect applicants who come to the Commission to have submitted a **quality** application to their local district first, and will only approve applicants of the highest quality. Indeed, the law mandates that applicants apply locally first and only go to the Commission to appeal denials. It is always in the best interest of applicants to build bridges with the local district. Contentious relationships can take charter operators' time and attention away from their mission of educating students.

The sections below are mainly targeted toward potential charter school applicants in Illinois cities other than Chicago. Because the district has been authorizing charter schools since 1997, applicants are not in the position of having to educate school board members and district personnel about charter schools; however, understanding the politics around charter schools in Chicago is critical.

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The District Role in Authorizing the School

While Chicago remains the only district in the state that releases a Request for Proposals (RFPs) for charter developers, the 877 other school districts must respond to charter applications within 75 days. Your work with the district may be impacted by how familiar the district is with charter schools. In some cases, you will be educating the district; in other cases, you may have to overcome negative attitudes that district personnel have toward charter schools. Whatever the case, your team should develop a strategy to advocate for your proposal both locally and at the district level.

Whether or not your district has authorized other charters, you will, at a minimum, follow the basic process outlined in the Illinois Charter School Law. See Section 2B, "Understanding the Law and Authorization Process." After receiving a charter school application, the district has 45 days to hold a public hearing and then another 30 days to make a decision on the charter application. If the district denies the application or doesn't rule at all, the applicant has 30 days to file an appeal with the Illinois Charter School Commission. The Commission will interview both parties within the first 45 days of receipt of an appeal. By the 45th day they will hold a public hearing to gather more information about the appeal from all parties and, no later than 30 days following the public hearing, they will announce their final decision.

For a district that has already considered charter schools, you should review any published guidance for charters and/or its charter school policies; research what applications have been accepted; and learn why others were rejected. In Chicago for example, the district has invited charter applicants to apply for over 15 years and they have implemented a comprehensive charter school authorizing process.

When a district hasn't received charter applications in the past, officials may be unfamiliar with charter public schools and the Illinois Charter School Law. Your first job in gaining support for your application is to learn what district leaders know about charter schools and whether they are supportive or fearful of new charters in the district. Many districts may outwardly resist charters, viewing them as threats to their school system. But it's worth your time to educate and advocate for charter schools with board members and administrators and share how a charter school can be an asset to their district.

While the Commission is an independent charter authorizing body for the State of Illinois, applicants should take their application to the local district seriously. The Commission will consider appeals of charter school proposals and renewal applications that have been denied, revoked, or not renewed by a local school district. However, even if the school is authorized by the Commission, the school will still reside in the local district and it should be your goal to do your best to get along with the local district.

Learn About the District

Before you even begin discussions with the school district, learn as much as possible about how the district operates. We recommend you research the district by checking online resources, records and articles. Many school districts post board meeting minutes and actions online. Information to look for includes:

» Issues that are important to board members and the superintendent

» The district's views on choice and charters and its openness to innovation

» The district's previous experience with any attempts to start charter schools (in districts with no charter schools)

» Any district-administered tests

» The district's financial picture and per pupil revenues and expenditures

» Whether the district is under academic performance pressures

» If the district is considered overcrowded or under-enrolled

» If there are specific needs in the community, like English as a Second Language, with which the district is struggling

» Which union represents their teachers

» What metrics the district uses to evaluate its schools

Your needs assessment will no doubt cover much of this. See Section 2C, "Assessing the Need for a Charter School." Some of the supporters you identified in the Community Engagement section may also help you to learn about the district and its political nuances, which may be difficult to learn from Internet or print resources alone.

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Plan Your Strategy

The ideal outcome of a district outreach strategy is a mutually respectful relationship with your local school district officials. Your knowledge of the district and its political situation should help you develop an informed strategy for building district support. How you approach your school district to make a case for your charter concept depends on the factors at play in your unique situation.

Meet with district leaders during the charter school development process and share your ideas with them early, well before you submit the final proposal. Provide your one-page concept paper. Learn what they think about charters in general; take the opportunity to correct misconceptions. For example, a common argument against authorizing charters is that they would represent an overwhelming financial burden on the district, drawing money away from existing public schools. While financial challenges are valid arguments in some districts, charters are public schools and every student in a charter school is drawing the same public dollars to the district as they would draw to a regular district school. Ideally, you can convince the district that the addition of your charter school would be an asset to the school district in its attempt to meet the needs of every family.

As you develop your application further, consider sharing a prospectus that provides more detail in the major design areas. This ensures that you are not "springing" the proposal on the district. Additionally, soliciting district input into your design may lead to increased buy-in from district leaders. You may discover areas of your proposal that need strengthening or that are likely to raise district concerns. Consider the political context, personalities, and other factors in deciding when and how much to share with district leaders, and whether to adjust your plans in response to their concerns.

Here are some factors to consider as you sketch out how to best advocate for your charter school at the district level:

Strong community demand for charter schools can be a powerful motivator for districts to seriously consider your proposal. If you can demonstrate that large numbers of parents support your school and wish to enroll their students, school boards may be more apt to listen.

Building a bench of advocates from the community who have either specific influence on school board members and the superintendent, e.g., elected officials, community leaders, etc.; OR are noted community leaders in a certain area such as technology, early childhood, at risk youth, etc. If those people already support your work, enlist them to help develop a strategy for gaining district support. They may be able to meet one-on-one with district leaders and/or provide guidance to you in developing effective tactics to gain the support of your targets in the district.

Target your outreach efforts. The superintendent and individual school board members may have different interests and personalities. Customize your approach to appeal to different agendas and interests.

Reach out to other elected officials. Increasingly, mayors, city councils, state legislators, and members of Congress are supportive of school choice. However, be careful that the district officials don't feel that you're "going over their heads." Bringing in other supporters can provide cover for district leaders to support your application.

Don't throw the district under the bus. Refrain from criticizing the district publicly or in meetings with them. Focus on the positive aspects of your charter, not the negative aspects of the local district or its schools. The message to stress is this: Charter schools are not "better than district schools." Rather, they provide new, innovative and possibly alternative educational options for students. They represent a different way of providing public education, and, while the district does not manage these schools directly, charter schools are strictly accountable to the district for results, and, when successful, will contribute to the district's overall performance picture.

Seek out ways to work collaboratively with the district. Complement or supplement programs that the district offers. Becoming a part of the district's educational portfolio is not just rhetoric—make the district's needs a consideration for what kind of school you propose. Consider and discuss how the charter school could pool professional resources and knowledge with district teachers.

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Maintain open, courteous lines of communication. Provide clear, accurate information to the local board and superintendent about charter schools in general, and your proposal in particular. Attend school board meetings, show sensitivity to the district's perspective and needs, and respond to questions and concerns as they arise.

We encourage you to gain more support than you think you need and to use a variety of tactics as part of your strategy for building support. A charter proposal must gain a majority vote by the school board to be approved. Some charter developers have taken this to mean that they need only gain support from a simple majority of board members in order to secure their school. This has led to situations in which votes changed at the last minute, and a charter was denied.

If your application to the district is denied you now have the option to appeal to the Commission. This is an excellent option for charter applicants who have done everything possible to produce a high quality application, demonstrated need in the community, and provided evidence of broad community and civic leadership support.

🔍 TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

Working Together

In many ways, Springfield Ball Charter School functions as a laboratory for innovation for the local school district. For example, the district liked Springfield Ball's Spanish program and promoted it in its own schools. On the other hand, the district has provided administrative resources to help the school grow. The charter and district work as a team in many other ways as well. "We share professional development with the district for a math program, and we work in a joint family engagement program from a federal grant. We're in a district building and maintain routine communication with the district, rather than just an annual report," says Scott Brower, Springfield Ball's Business Manager.

Messaging of the Value of Charter Public Schools

We encourage you to use your own knowledge of the district (and the knowledge you gain through a needs assessment and your outreach) to construct a strong argument for charter school development in the district. To keep a positive relationship with the district, you may want to emphasize:

» Charter schools are only one strategy in an overall effort to improve schools; not an attempt to overthrow the current system.

» Charters are part of the public school system.

» Charters can address gaps in the district and help meet the needs of students who are not thriving in traditional settings. In this way, they are complementing traditional schools, not supplanting them.

» Charters offer parental choice, satisfying parents who want options in public education.

» Charters can fuel district improvement by serving as laboratories for innovation and/or bring successful school models into districts. (This is a tougher sell to districts but can help you in recruiting business, civic and philanthropic leaders to your effort).

Whenever you discuss your charter school idea with the district, keep your school's mission in mind and be careful not to compromise that mission in order to suit the district's wishes or requests. This does not mean that you never adjust your plans to accommodate the district's interests. However, remain clear about your non-negotiables and never agree to changes that would be detrimental to your school's mission and goals.

Negative messaging about charter schools has been perpetuated by charter opponents, especially teachers' unions, over the past several years. In Chicago, charter critics have been especially loud. On your charter journey, you will undoubtedly encounter detractors. You will need to develop talking points that address arguments against charters as well as be able to articulate your passion, drive, and commitment to bringing your school to fruition. All the members of your team should be on the same page and articulate the same message.

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3D 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 in Illinois. 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 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 core design team, you already have a leg up on the process of engaging the community since your organization has a 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 sponsor of the school you're envisioning. Having a CBO as a sponsor 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.

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Erie Elementary Charter School

Erie Elementary Charter School was launched in 2005 by Erie Neighborhood House, a 136-year old organization from the well-known Chicago settlement house tradition. Erie House offers services tailored to the needs of low-income families and immigrant residents, including well-run preschool and childcare programs. Erie Elementary is an extension of that mission, utilizing the flexibility afforded charter schools to meet the needs of neighborhood children. The school focuses on "nurturing bi-literate, culturally confident students," and incorporates lessons about community, history and cultural identity. The school's charter is held by a board of directors independent of Erie Neighborhood House to insure that governance is fully focused on the needs of the school itself.

Community Stakeholders

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

Learning from and about the parents in the community will reduce the risk of inappropriate planning for parent involvement. Explore existing community information using sources such as the school district, census data and talking with local residents. As parents become involved in initial planning activities, gather more detailed information. Methods for gathering information can be traditional (i.e., surveys, focus groups, telephone surveys) or more informal and innovative (i.e., 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.

(See sample Community Mapping
template on following page.)

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Community Mapping: Table 4

Community Mapping–Community Leadership and Potential Supporters				
Categories	Names of Community Leaders and Education Stakeholders	Relevant Background Info and Relationships	Views on Education Including Charter Schools. Note any Relevant Voting	Strategy and Tactics to Engage
Education Leaders				
Official • Individual school board members • District and school administrators • Teachers union • School-based parent/teacher groups • Elected government officials				
Unofficial • Parents and families • Individual teachers/ educators • Community-based organizations • Neighborhood groups • Religious leaders • Donors/ funders • Business and civic leaders				
Other Community Leaders				

Strategy for Community Outreach

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

Once you have determined the community leaders, potential supporters and potential opponents, develop a strategy for engaging them and gaining their support. A basic community organizing strategy does not have to be a 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."

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Media Matters

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

If you do think that having your story in the paper or on the news is appropriate, remember to be clear on what message you want to convey and have your facts straight. It's okay to not know yet where your facility will be, for example, but you don't want to say that you have something lined up when it's not finalized. Once your plans to open a school are "out," write and share press releases about the development of your school. Run advertisements for community meetings and later for enrollment in the school. Develop relationships early and maintain contact with the local media because it may lead to editorial endorsements down the road.

Resources

Illinois Network of Charter Schools (INCS) works with charter schools to craft a media campaign. Contact us for more information or to receive a copy of the INCS Communications Guidebook.

http://incschools.org/about/contact_us

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

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

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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 infor-
mation 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

INITIAL STEPS

Young Women's Leadership Charter School

During the planning year for Young Women's Leadership Charter School (YWLCS), the core design team project manager met with more than 100 community-based organizations, school principals, religious leaders and elected officials. Not only did YWLCS receive many letters of support for their proposal, some groups they met with before the school opened eventually became important part-ners in the school's operations, providing resources, partnering on programs, and eliciting student applicants from their various constituencies.

Ongoing Support

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

» Collect contact information when you hold meetings or meet individuals.

» Maintain an organized database of contacts so you can contact your supporters again.

» Use a petition or polling sheet to make records of new contacts and people who say they will support your efforts.

» Keep key targets and committed supporters and partners personally informed of your process and progress.

» Keep stakeholders involved as you keep them informed; remember that if you have a way for supporters to give input and feedback, they're more likely to feel part of the process.

See Section 4I "Family and Community Partnerships," for more information on sustaining relationships with parents and the commu-nity once the school has opened.

SECTION 4:

FUNDAMENTAL DESIGN DECISIONS

4A 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.

Student Outcomes → Mission and Vision → School Design
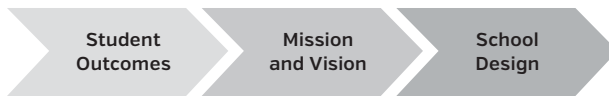
STUDENT OUTCOMES

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?

MISSION

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

Creating a Mission

A good mission statement 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?

Ensure that your mission is attainable and that your statement is measurable. Realistic goals that are still inspiring will attract support and 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.

Creating a Vision

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

» What 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:

» Inform the public of your school's purpose and aims

» Serve as the common motivator and focus for all staff and the entire school community

» Drive every school program and decision

» Help build the school's accountability plan and let others know how well your school is succeeding

» Provide meaningful guidance to the future leaders of your school in making important decisions and resolving conflict

» Provide clarity of purpose that will guide and sustain the school over the long term

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

Over time and through transitions, new people will be in charge of management and governance of the school and new challenges and opportunities will arise.

A clear mission and vision that have been used to build the school's institutions, governance and culture will help ensure that teachers, administrators, parents and students all understand the fundamental purpose of the school and help it continue to strive to meet these goals.

Examples of Missions and Visions

Below are examples of vision and/or mission statements from a number of charter schools in Illinois. As you can see, there is no one correct way to create these tools. Note that some include values or statements of philosophy. Components like these may be helpful to clarify and communicate what your school will be like once it opens. As you read the mission and vision statements below, ask yourself to which student outcomes they align.

Erie Elementary Charter School

Vision: Erie Elementary Charter School (EECS) is a community where students, parents and educators work together to develop children who are confident in their culture and ethnic origin, bi-literate in Spanish and English, achieve academic excellence, and are firmly placed on a path to higher education.

Mission: At the elementary level, it is critical to develop learners who explore, inquire and are able to work collaboratively to construct knowledge and develop skills. At EECS it is not enough to learn concepts from books and memorize facts. It is necessary to approach all content areas from both a foundation of discipline-specific knowledge and an inquiry-based, hands-on approach.

Young Women's Leadership Charter School

Vision: All young women will have the skills, tools and opportunities to develop as ethical leaders shaping their lives and the world.

Mission: The Young Women's Leadership Charter School of Chicago inspires urban girls to engage in rigorous college preparatory learning in a small school focused on math, science and technology that nurtures their self-confidence and challenges them to achieve.

Core Values:

» We value equitable access to resources and opportunities for every student.

» We value the contribution a single-sex education makes to educating the whole woman and promoting her leadership.

» We value inquiry, self-reflection, critical thinking, problem solving and real world experience.

» We value the diversity in our school community.

» We value parents and families as partners.

» We value integrity, honesty, and perseverance.

» We value professionalism in education through reflection, collaboration and shared leadership.

North Lawndale College Preparatory Charter High School

Mission: North Lawndale College Preparatory Charter High School (NLCP) will prepare young people from under-resourced communities for graduation from high school with the academic skills and personal resilience necessary for successful completion of college. To this end, NLCP will:

» Expect nothing less than high academic standards for all students

» Provide a challenging curriculum, extra resources and the support necessary to achieve those standards

» Assemble and support a superlative faculty, staff and administration to collaboratively accomplish this task

» Integrate the best technology to assist in all aspects of student development

» Serve the wider North Lawndale community

Prairie Crossing Charter School

Mission: Prairie Crossing Charter School is a child-centered community of learners. We use an ecological, integrated, experiential approach to learning, which utilizes unique environmental and community resources. We develop students who demonstrate environmental stewardship and responsible, global citizenship.

Betty Shabazz International Charter School

Mission: Betty Shabazz International Charter School has an African-centered model central to its philosophy, curriculum and pedagogy. It strives to link students symbolically to family, community, African people and those in Diaspora. It links them technologically to local and international resources, and to school children from South Africa, Brazil and Ghana. The school is committed to improving the lives of our African-American schoolchildren, and to creating a model for a diverse school system. Our African-centered model recognizes and nurtures different ways of knowing and different ways of demonstrating that knowledge. Our philosophy embraces the different forms of knowledge students bring to school and enables us to integrate cultural knowledge and life experiences into a challenging curriculum.

Passages Charter School

Mission: Passages Charter School provides immigrant and refugee children and their families an education geared toward high achievement standards. To meet the needs of immigrant learners, the school will offer comprehensive social support services through its founding organization, Asian Human Services.

[Note: that while Passages was created to address specific community needs, as with any other charter school, Passages is open-enrollment and any student may apply and be accepted, even if they are not a member of the main target population.]

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.

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, district officials, etc. See Section 3D, "Engaging with the Community."

Clarifying Underlying Assumptions within the Core Design Team

Because the mission and vision guide all other aspects of the school, it is important that once a direction is set, a strong consensus exists around the charter school's vision and mission amongst core design team members—and ultimately among staff and school leadership. Drafting the 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. See section 3A, "The Core Design Team" for more on building your design team.

4B LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

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

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

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

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

Still other models choose to contract out 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 Illinois and across the country recognizes the need for exceptional leaders in charter public schools. The charter school leader, whether titled "Principal," "Director," or "School Head" and in any model above- will have full oversight 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, district office departments, district 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 some do 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 following are education-specific job search sites that can help you find strong candidates:

» www.topschoolsjobs.org

» www.incshools.org

» www.essentialschools.org

» www.teachforamerica.org

» www.idealist.org

» www.newleaders.org

Overall, keep in mind that the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium has articulated standards for school leaders that address how the "Principal," "Director," or "School Head" can help promote learning for all students as well as promote overall effective management of the school. Standards such as these can help charter design teams frame their search for an effective school leader, evaluate candidates and can support the school in evaluating school leaders throughout the course of the school's operations. Many districts, schools of education, and other organizations have adopted and/or adapted these standards for school leaders.

RESOURCES

Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Website with information and resources on school leader standards. The website also includes information on the knowledge and disposition of school leaders who meet these standards. www. ccsso.org

Charter School Center, Newsletter on Principal Evaluation A great place to learn more about principal evaluation; recent updates on the topic are found in the February 2013 newsletter from the Charter School Center. http://www.charterschoolcenter.org/newsletter/february-2013-principal-evaluation-comes-tighter-focus

4C 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 Common Core State Standards or supplement them with additional standards?

» How will the educational opportunities offered by the charter school differ from those of other schools in your local school district?

» Will your team develop the educational program from scratch? Will you purchase or use existing curricula or will you do some combination?

» Will you contract with an educational service provider to deliver your educational program?

» What instructional methods will you use?

» How will you assess student progress?

» How will you ensure that you are meeting the needs of all students, including students with disabilities and English language learners?

» How will you support teachers to effectively use the school's curriculum and instructional methods?

» How will you ensure that teachers receive the ongoing support needed to continue improving their instruction?

Best Practices

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. The Education Innovation Laboratory at Harvard found the following five best practices in the New York City charter schools with the highest tests scores:

» an extended school day and year

» the use of data to drive instruction

» devotion to high-quality human capital

» a culture of high expectations

» small group tutoring

This is not to say that your charter school needs to adopt all of these practices; however, authorizers 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. Consider the following options:

» Educators active or retired

» Local organizations educational nonprofits, such as museums, libraries, or research centers, interested in partnering with new school developers

» Colleges and universities professors and/or graduate students in education schools as well as business/management, social policy, psychology, sociology and other related fields

» Curriculum development and other education-focused organizations

Review the Illinois Charter School Law for Specific Learning Program Requirements

Even if you have never read a law before, you should take a look at the Illinois Charter School Law. The statute outlines exactly what needs to be in a charter application. This is especially relevant if you are applying to a school district that doesn't have a Request for Proposals to which you can respond.

No matter where you are applying, your design team should become thoroughly familiar with state requirements, especially as they relate to content, performance standards and assessment. For example, Illinois requires that all charter schools align their programs with the Illinois Learning Standards. Illinois has adopted the Common Core standards, but the language in the statute has not been updated yet. Presenting a clearly articulated alignment between the proposed educational program and Common Core State Standards is a must. Charter school

design teams also should include in their assessment plans the administration of state-mandated assessments. The current plan is for the ISAT to be administered in spring 2014 for the last time. State and federal law both demand you plan for the provision of special education services. See the application requirements for charter schools in Section 5B, "Drafting a High-quality Charter School Proposal." The law also includes the role and protocol of the Illinois Charter School Commission which is important to understand.

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 and
» 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 it 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. See Section 4K, "Accountability." Academic Goals, Standards and State Assessments

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 Illinois, charter school standards must be aligned with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), which have been adopted by most states. Schools opening in the 2015, 2016 and 2017 school years will be the pioneers taking the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARC), the assessment that Illinois will use to measure student mastery of the CCSS. We suggest you become as familiar as possible with the Common Core and build your program around it. Common Core State Standards have only been adopted in math and language arts so you will need to rely on the Illinois Learning Standards (http://www.isbe.net/ils/) for standards in all other disciplines.

📁 Resources

The Web Site of the Common Core http://www.corestandards.org/

Common Core State Standards Assessments and Charter Schools
http://www.charterschoolcenter.org/newsletter/september-2011-common-core-state-standards-assessments-and-charter-schools

Information on **Illinois' Implementation of the Common Core**
http://www.isbe.net/common_core/default.htm

Common Core in Illinois Tailored to Families http://commoncoreil.org/

Learnzillion–Helping Educators to Navigate the Common Core
http://learnzillion.com/common_core/math/k-8

However, this does not mean that you should simply adopt the CCSS and move on with your plans. You will still need to establish goals around the standards for science, social studies, and the remaining Illinois Learning Standards (ILS). You may even want to supplement the CCSS in reading and math if your team believes that they do not fully address your school's mission and goals. You might also supplement the ILS as well. 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 ILS. Some charter school developers also create or adopt an additional set of standards—one

that is more rigorous than the CCSS and ILS, for example, unique graduation standards or "exit outcomes" related to your school's goals.

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

The PARCC assessment will be the state test upon which your students will be evaluated. You should set numerical goals (for example, 90% of students will show mastery of the standards on the PARCC). You will also want to include a growth goal—how much are your students gaining year-over-year. Most schools, and INCS would recommend all schools, have an additional academic assessment that is given more regularly than the once-a-year PARCC so educators can regularly assess where students are on the CCSS. You might create your own assessments aligned to the standards and the curriculum, or here are some suggested supplemental assessments you can buy:

» NWEA to devise a formative testing system that responds dynamically to the child, and gives educators detailed insight into kids' learning.to devise a formative testing system that responds dynamically to the child, and gives educators detailed insight into kids' learning.is a formative assessment program that is aligned to CCSS that schools can purchase (some districts that use it might purchase it for their charter schools) to administer quarterly (or more often) online assessments. NWEA provides professional development and student level results of every assessment.

» Textbook assessments are becoming aligned to the CCSS and can be included as additional accountability measures for your school.

» Achievement Network (ANet) also provides interim formative assessments aligned to the CCSS. ANet has a strong professional development component for school leaders and teachers to help them analyze the data and reteach standards.

The Achievement Network now has a large number of charter schools in their network and many are now building them into their applications. See the excerpt below from Chicago Collegiate's application:

TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

APPLICATION EXCERPT

Using the Achievement Network assessments administered first as a formative assessment at the start of the year and approximately every eight to nine weeks thereafter to guide monthly, weekly, and daily planning, teachers drive all curricula towards measurable, rigorous, and pre-determined goals to best ensure that daily academic standards are taught to the appropriate level. To assure that teachers understand College Readiness Standards, professional development supports teachers to understand the key cognitive strategies that students need to succeed in college, such as problem formulation and problem solving, research, reasoning and argumentation, interpretation, precision and accuracy. To ensure that students exit each grade with the level of proficiency required for the next grade and on track according to college-readiness standards, each grade has clearly articulated exit requirements, measured through essays, projects, work in class and on assessments, to ensure that they are measurably and reliably on track. Significant time and practice are dedicated to ensuring teachers understand the nuances of these standards and the exit requirements which are based on them, as well as what proficiency looks like in each content area and at each grade level. One example of an exit requirement is a fifth grader who is given a logic problem to solve, for which they must outline their thinking and plan of action including an alternative course of action to approaching the problem. In eleventh grade, students write a research paper on an assigned topic, with MLA footnotes and bibliography, as well as thoughtful integration of multiple primary and secondary sources. Teachers regularly meet as departments to discuss the quality of student work, gaps in student performance, and interventions necessary to ensure that students reach the high bar set for them in content and cognitive strategies. Vertical alignment is stressed in weekly department meetings, particularly to ensure rigor increases every year as students grow.

Source: Chicago Collegiate charter application 2012

Non-Academic Goals

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

» High school graduation rate (for high schools but more and more for elementary and middle schools)

» College matriculation and graduation

» Student attendance

» Parent involvement

» Parent/teacher/student satisfaction

» Clear financial audits

» Teacher retention

» Board effectiveness

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

Mission-Specific Goals

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

TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

Unique Learning Standards

North Lawndale College Prep Charter School developed the following unique learning standards in the area of public speaking. Note that, in this case, the standards are written to include a rationale for their importance in preparing students for college, the work world and life in their community.

» Students will become more conscious of the way they speak and listen and gain experience and skills in the various methods of communication because all meaningful human interaction involves the key skills of listening and speaking. People who are able to formulate their ideas on sound research, logic and insight and are also able to express those ideas clearly and articulately will be successful in college and their post-graduate careers. People who listen well are able to gather important information that will help them in their relationships, decision- making and problem solving.

» Students will practice a variety of oral communication forms. They will study great communicators and analyze the tech-niques that make them the best. They will become conscious of how they listen to others and learn how to listen intention-ally, analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of others' public communication.

» Students will present and analyze a variety of public speaking techniques: poetry, dramatic monologue, non-verbal commu-nication, persuasive speeches, impromptu speeches, political speeches, interviews and news broadcasts. Students will also attend enrichment experiences during which they will ana-lyze the speaker's strengths and weaknesses and integrate those rhetorical skills into their own communication style.

Writing Up Your Goals

In "Developing Sound Performance Goals and Measures: Guidance for Charter Schools," Margaret Lin (a nationally-regarded charter school expert) recommends developing ten to twelve broad "SMART" goals for the entire school. The goals should include educational program, governance, financial management and operations, with most of these goals 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:

» **S**pecific (and for educational goals, tied to learning standards)

» **M**easurable

» **A**mbitious and attainable

» **R**eflective of your mission

» **T**ime-specific with target date

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

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

» How will you know if your school is succeeding (or not)?

» What will be important characteristics of "educated students" at your school?

» What will students learn, know and be able to do after a certain period of time, before promotion to the next grade level, or before graduation from your school?

» What should your graduates permanently possess as a result of their time at your school?

Curriculum and Instruction Models

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

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 teacherdirected scheme. Your decision about what kind of curriculum the school will choose should be based on a thorough understanding of your options and what best matches your school's mission, vision, and educational goals and standards. In addition, you will need to provide evidence that your curriculum and instructional approaches are research-based and will achieve the stated learning goals with your target population.

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

Below are a few examples of curriculum approaches. Your school does not have to follow any of these, and in practice there may be considerable overlap. For example, even a traditionally organized school may involve students in projects part of the time. Adopting an established approach allows you to focus on a proven strategy that you can document effectively in the charter application. We present this list to help your team identify approaches about which it would like to learn more.

Blended Learning A blended learning model is one in which a portion of in-person, face-to-face, instruction is replaced with online learning. Generally, a student in a blended learning school receives 30–70% of his or her instruction online.

Project-Based Students learn to find information on a topic from a wide range of sources, organize their findings and make presentations. Two alternatives are used in the project-based program: Teachers determine projects for students or students decide on topics that interest them. Most learning is interdisciplinary, and often the presentations are organized as exhibitions for the public. Many schools use this approach in one subject area, such as social studies, instead of across the board.

Montessori The Montessori method focuses primarily on younger children, emphasizes the uniqueness of each child, and recognizes that children differ from adults in the way they develop and think (they aren't just "adults in small bodies"). Montessori differs from a play-based approach in the very early grades. It features the use of authentic measures of student progress and pushes students toward mastery on a set of activities.

Core Knowledge A national program for pre-K through 8th grade, begun by E. D. Hirsh Jr., the Core Knowledge program has specific ideas and skills spelled out in considerable detail for each subject and grade level. The program emphasizes the importance of students learning a large body of "common knowledge" that an educated person would be expected to know.

Constructivist Constructivism derives from research about learning and knowledge or the "construction of learner-generated solutions." Constructivist schools guide students to develop their own understanding of "big ideas" or primary concepts. They aim for relevance to the learner, modifying and adapting that content to meet what students need and/or want to improve their own individual circumstance. Lucy Calkins (founding director of the Reading and Writing Project at Teachers College/Columbia University), Ted Sizer (founder of the Coalition of Essential Schools) and Deborah Meier (educational reformer and founder of multiple small schools) are leading proponents of constructivism.

Direct Instruction A national program mostly for elementary grades designed by Siegfried Engelmann, Direct Instruction includes tightly scripted, sequenced lessons that teachers use to lead students to give specific responses, frequently oral, often chorally. The model emphasizes well-developed and carefully planned lessons designed around small learning increments and clearly defined and prescribed teaching tasks. It is based on the theory that clear instruction eliminating misinterpretations can greatly improve and accelerate learning.

Thematic Thematic schools emphasize a particular subject area, such as math, science, STEM or the arts. For example, in an arts school, perhaps half of the day will be devoted to areas of the arts (music, visual arts, and technology) and the other half will be for the remaining subjects of the typical curriculum. Alternatively, a thematically-based curriculum may integrate the theme into most or all subjects throughout the day, as well as into co-curricular or extra-curricular activities. A social justice-focused school may read many texts related to social issues in English classes and include the topic in other core classes, require students to volunteer in the community and offer extra-curricular clubs such as Model U.N. that relate to the social justice theme.

Experiential Learning Also described as schools that utilize hands-on learning or active learning, these schools exemplify "learning by doing." The emphasis is on students setting goals for themselves and establishing learning experiences that help them accomplish their goals. Perhaps the most extensive application of this approach is found in the Big Picture high schools, begun in Providence, RI. These schools are not organized around traditional courses. Instead, students arrange internships with businesses, nonprofits or other agencies, and their learning is built around these. While there are over 60 Big Picture schools in the world, the two in Chicago were closed.

Traditional or Conventional These schools are what most of us have experienced. Students are taught in grade levels, and the curriculum is organized into specific subjects of language arts, social studies, math, science, physical education, health, music, art and electives such as foreign language and others. Classes are taught mostly through lecture and tests rather than experiential activities or student inquiry.

Classical Classical education uses history, from ancient to modern, as its organizing theme, offering programs based on the ancient pattern called the trivium, which correlates to what is asserted are the natural developmental stages of children. Students learn through written and spoken words instead of through images such as pictures and videos. The ultimate goal of this type of education is to develop students who think logically and who express themselves convincingly.

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

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

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

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 CCSS and related assessments (although it is unlikely there will be unaligned curriculum available at all)

» In-depth study of significant concepts

» Connections within and across the disciplines (for instance, students studying the Renaissance in their regular classroom are also learning about Renaissance paintings and music in their arts classes)

» A balance of skill development and knowledge development

» Experiences and applications of information for real-life connections

» A variety of formative and summative assessments to guide future curricular adjustments

» Appropriate age and developmental instructional levels and techniques

» Vertical alignment between the grades and horizontal alignment across topics

» Technology requirement and online resources

» 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.

TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

Mixed Curriculum

Several Illinois charter schools have developed their own curricula and assessments, but not everyone designs every course from scratch. For example, Namaste Charter School in Chicago developed its own literacy curriculum because its founder had expertise in that area, and created special courses in health and fitness, the focus of the school. For math, though, the school adopted an existing curriculum that matched Namaste's goals and standards for students.

Working with a Consultant

Springfield Ball Charter School hired a consultant with expertise in middle grades education to develop its middle school program, a multi-age program that focuses on project-based learning. The consultant's expertise in middle school best practices saved the school an enormous amount of time and resulted in professional development support to help teachers learn the new curriculum. As a bonus for Ball, the consultant stayed on as a teacher.

📁 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. www.eric.ed.gov

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) is a "community of educators, advocating for sound policies and sharing best practices to achieve the success of each learner." The website includes resources and information on a wide range of topics in education. Membership (beginning at $49) provides access to additional resources. www.ascd.org

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

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

Coalition of Essential Schools is a network of small schools begun by Ted Sizer, with a shared philosophy of a small, democratic environment, personalized instruction and community partnerships. While the majority of the information available on this site is submitted independently, it gives a broad picture because of the number of schools involved. www.essentialschools.org

Sample Education Plans:

» https://www.coloradoleague.org/uploaded-files/Veritas_
Education_Plan_Section.pdf

» http://pcs.k12.nj.us/PCSCharternode6.cfm

» http://www.coloradoleague.org/uploaded-files/Montessori_del_
Mundo-Charter_Application_Ed_Section.pdf

» http://www.mdcharternetwork.org/ppt/II-education_plan.pdf

Assessment Methods

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

Designing an effective assessment plan requires absolute clarity in the purpose of the educational program and its component parts 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

» Pre-test, post-test

» Essays, written assignments

» Student notebooks

» Demonstrations of projects/exhibitions

» Oral presentations

» Daily work, homework assignments

» Teacher observation

» Oral response, class participation

» Personal growth, self-evaluation

» Ability to work independently and cooperatively as appropriate to circumstances

» Attitude, general behavior, cooperation, citizenship

» Social and emotional development

» Parent, teacher, student surveys

State Assessments

As public schools, charter schools will administer the tests mandated by the Illinois State Board of Education. The currently administered ISAT and PSAE will be replaced by the PARCC assessments in the spring test administration in 2015. With the advent of the Common Core State Standards, states will no longer create their own standards or assessments. Mostly what is discussed in this section are the school-based assessments that will complement the PARCC. Typically charter schools will have two other types of assessments: school-based and mission based. The school-based assessment will be interim assessments quarterly or every six weeks which will be aligned to PARCC and inform staff of where students are related to mastery of the Common Core. A mission-based assessment may or may not be administered more than once a year and will measure a specific goal or standard for that school in addition to the CCSS.

Local District Assessments

Some school districts supplement statewide tests with additional standardized tests that are administered each year to all students in all grades; currently the NWEA provides additional assessment data in the Chicago Public Schools. You should be very clear about what assessments are administered in the district to which you are applying. State law does not require charter schools to administer these tests, although most charter schools in Illinois have included these additional standardized tests in their assessment systems. In some cases, individual authorizers may suggest or require that charters administer tests used by the district.

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

📁 Resources

The following resources provide guidance to develop useful assessments linked to school accountability. The guiding principle is that the assessments are based on the standards and the assessment results prompt individualized instruction, professional development and lesson planning.

Alberta Assessment Consortium Assessment Overview The AAC, an independent voice, has created this collection of assessments built to measure how a school is impacting student learning. www.aac.ab.ca/public/ASCD.doc

Principles and Indicators for Student Assessment Systems This framework, from the National Forum on Assessment, shares some principles of assessment from an organization that works to end the misuses and flaws of standardized testing. www.fairtest.org/princind.htm

Education Northwest has a variety of resources related to the CCSS and related assessments. http://educationnorthwest.org/resource/focus/Assessment

Paul Bambrick and Uncommon Schools Bambrick is a pioneer of data driven instruction and written a book (Driven by Data) that is widely referred to as the best book on the subject. http://uncommonschools.org/our-approach/thought-leadership/driven-by-data-book-paul-bambrick-santoyo

UCONN This overview of the learning cycle is helpful in understanding how all the pieces fit together. http://assessment.uconn.edu/primer/cycle.html

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, every six weeks and which might be fine to assess quarterly?

» How will you report and record student progress toward outcomes externally?

» How will teachers receive assessment results (will they correct the tests themselves, will they be online?) and what is the protocol for analysis and planning?

» 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 disabilities. It is essential to consider special education staffing, training, curricular accommodations and related costs from the beginning of the planning and application process.

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 disabilities.

Developing a special education program is a complicated process with many legal implications. You may wish to contact your authorizing district. At the very least, as part of the charter application process, you will need to negotiate with your district to determine the specific special education services and funding your school will receive. It will be helpful to understand the district's special education program when you do this.

Special Education in the Whole School Context

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

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

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

The unique challenges and demands of providing services to students with disabilities will require a trusting and collaborative relationship between charter schools and other education agencies. Building these relationships requires ongoing commitment and hard work. In Illinois, the allocation of special education funding and personnel from the district to charter schools has changed over the years. If your district has a charter or charters, you should find out how special education students in the charter school are served. If your district doesn't have a charter school, you need to plan as if you will have to meet the needs of all your students, regardless of disabilities which is a challenge.

The following are important legal points of which all charter developers must be aware:

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

» A charter school's authorizing school district holds the legal responsibility to ensure that all students with disabilities in the charter school receive appropriate special education services. School districts fulfill this responsibility by (a) providing funding and/or services to the students with disabilities in the charter school and (b) ensuring that special education requirements are met in the charter school. According to the Illinois Charter Schools Law, the district must provide the charter school with its "proportionate share of state and federal resources generated by students with disabilities," which may include providing staff to deliver special education services to the students. Note that in practice authorizing districts do not always provide all the services or funding the charter school may feel are necessary.

» In cases where the charter is authorized on appeal by the Illinois Charter School Commission after a district denies its charter school application, the charter school becomes its own

Local Education Association (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).

» Special education teachers in a charter school must be certified, even though the Illinois Charter Schools Law does not require this of all regular education teachers as long as they fit the law's definition of "highly- qualified" teachers.

Laws Governing Special Education Services

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

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

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

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

Evaluation School districts must identify all children suspected of having disabilities who attend school in their district and, with parental consent, conduct evaluations of those children. This includes

participation in their state's "Child Find" system to assure that early identification of eligible children takes place. Schools and districts must also respond to requests for evaluation of students by either conducting an evaluation or advising parents of the school's or district's refusal to evaluate the student. (Parents may appeal such refusals.)

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

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

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

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

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

Section 504 prohibits discrimination against persons with a dis-ability by any institution receiving federal financial assistance. ADA prohibits discrimination by any local or state governmental entity, including the public schools, and by any private school unless it is reli-giously controlled. Both acts define disability more broadly than IDEA does, including any individual who has a physical or mental impair-ment 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 ser-vices. Section 504 requires institutions (including schools) to provide educational and related aids and services designed to meet the indi-vidual educational needs of the child. Section 504, does not, however, provide funding for these aids and services.

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

State Law and Regulations

Charter schools in Illinois must comply with Article 14 of the Illinois School Code and with the same special education regulations as other public schools. Those regulations are included in 23 Illinois Administrative Code 226. 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.

Corey H.

Corey H. is the lawsuit that challenged the failure of Chicago Public Schools to include special education students in regular classes. Its success established that the legal requirements for public schools in Illinois would indeed be enforced. It is, therefore, referred to widely by special education experts. *Corey H.* established specific requirements for Chicago schools, with which charter school developers working in Chicago will need to become familiar.

🗁 Resources

IDEA www.idea.ed.gov

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

ADA www.ada.gov

Article 14 of the Illinois School Code http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/ilcs4.asp?DocName=010500050HArt.+14&ActID=1005&Chap-terID=17&SeqStart=107200000&SeqEnd=112700000

23 Illinois Administrative Code 226 http://www.isbe.net/rules/archive/pdfs/226ark.pdf

Corey H. http://www.isbe.net/coreyh/default.htm

Developing the Special Education Plan

We strongly emphasize that even though the district is legally responsible for ensuring that students with disabilities in charter schools receive appropriate services, the charter school—in line with its goals to educate its students—has the responsibility to develop sound plans for providing special education services to its students and to work with the district to arrange for appropriate funding, resources or staffing from the district as part of that plan.

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

The following components—drawn from Chicago Public Schools and the Illinois State Board of Education—should be included in a special education program:

» **Personnel** Hire qualified, certified teachers and teaching assistants and establish who among the staff is responsible for case management (oversight and coordination of a special education program).

» **Student Identification** Incorporate systematic procedures to identify students at risk for disabilities, including Child Find, followed by a systematic referral system to evaluate students' more specific needs for special education services. Note that both parents and staff have a right to refer students for

evaluation; however, students may not be evaluated without written consent from the parents.

» **Free Appropriate Public Education and Least Restrictive Environment** Plan to provide a continuum of services that delivers free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Note also that new IDEA requirements require that special education programs be based on peer-reviewed research, to the extent practicable.

» **Parental Involvement** Include parental education, notification and involvement in the special education process. Note that schools have very specific obligations related to informing parents of students with disabilities, or those suspected of having disabilities, of their rights. Schools must ensure parental participation in the special education evaluation, planning and review processes.

» **Individual Education Program** Plan for creation of an Individual Education Program (IEP) for each student eligible for special education services, along with ongoing implementation of required services and resources. Each IEP must be developed by an eligibility team. The IEP development, review and evaluation process should include timelines for tri-annual re-evaluations and yearly review or development of IEPs, and required parental notice and consent forms.

» **Assessments** As part of the IEP process, enumerate the accommodations students need for the statewide assessments each student will take (ISAT, PSAE or Illinois Alternate Assessment).

» **Discipline** Schools must follow specific, more stringent rules for disciplining students with disabilities. It is critical that administration and staff be familiar with these special rules, which can be found in the due process sections of IDEA, the Illinois School Code and the Illinois Administrative Code. (See the resource box above for links to these laws and regulations.)

» **Transportation** Offer special transportation for students with disabilities, if needed.

» **Compliance Plan** Create a compliance process to ensure the school is in fact providing free appropriate public education, IEPs, Assessments, Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), procedural safeguards, confidentiality, parent involvement and full educational opportunity to all students.

» **Public Awareness** Design a public awareness plan to educate the community about special education and related services in all necessary languages (address dissemination and implementation strategies).

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

📁 Resources

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

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

Special Education Services at the Illinois State Board of Education The website includes a range of helpful resources on special education including data, information webinars, and other guidance. www.isbe.net/spec-ed

Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) at the U.S. DOE This website includes links to the IDEA statute and related resources. www.ed.gov/osers

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

Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) is dedicated to improving educational outcomes for individuals with exceptionalities, students

with disabilities, and the gifted. CEC advocates for appropriate government policies, sets professional standards, provides continual professional development, advocates for newly and historically underserved individuals and helps professionals obtain resources. www.cec.sped.org

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

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

English Language Learners

One in four children in American schools is Latino/a. While initially charter schools served more African-American students, the Latino/a 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, full report below, 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.

» **Teacher qualifications** A teacher of ELL students needs to meet the definition of "highly qualified" under Illinois law.

» **Exiting students from the program** The school needs to have an objective assessment that it uses to test students before they can exit the ELL program. The school must follow the student's progress upon leaving to ensure his or her progress is satisfactory in the regular school program.

» **Program monitoring** Like all of your education programs, you should consistently monitor the program and make adjustments and changes as needed. You could include a calendar in your application that shows how and when you will reevaluate.

» **Parental communication** You need to outline a plan to communicate with parents that includes several modes of communication, all in the home language.

📁 Resources

The National Alliance of Public Charter Schools The National Alliance of Public Charter Schools provides the nuts and bolts of serving English Language Learners in your school.
http://publiccharters.org/data/files/Publication_docs/NAPCS_ELL_Toolkit_04.02.13_20130402T114313.pdf

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

The National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition This website includes resources on grants, data, professional develop-ment and best practices for teaching English Language Learners.
http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/accellerate/

A strong sample of one charter school's English Language Development Program:
http://www.csi.state.co.us/files/_dBDFF_/
ececfc72dccd3b123745a49013852ec4/Pinnacle_ELD_Plan_2011_12.pdf

Professional Development

Professional development is no longer a workshop here or there or an outside speaker brought in to teach about cooperative learning. Professional development needs to have a laser-like focus on the stan-dards 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. For instance, at University of Chicago Charter School Donoghue Campus, teachers have daily planning and team meeting time, one hour of school-wide professional development a week, a series of full-day professional development sessions and a two-day spring retreat. Quarterly sem-inars are also provided by the university's Center for Urban School Improvement. At Noble Street Charter School, students are released early every other Friday in order to permit regular professional devel-opment time for the staff. Some schools have early release for students on Wednesday. Some schools are committed to more time for instruc-tion and pay teachers to stay later for PD and planning or hire extra staff so teachers can plan during the school day.

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

Best Practices in Professional Development

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

» **Involve teachers in professional development planning.** Faculty members are much more likely to buy in and the work is more likely to be relevant if representatives are involved in the planning. While a framework is important in the initial planning stage, it is equally important to have teachers contribute to it as soon as they become part of the school. It's also critical that the entire school community should understand the plan.

» **Allow time and resources for orientation for new teachers.** For example, an extra week at the start of a teacher's first year at the school can provide time to help a teacher get up to speed on curriculum, pedagogy, culture, assessment, etc. Boston Collegiate has new teachers meet regularly with a coach to discuss their challenges and provide tailored support.

» **Support job-embedded professional development.** Professional development is most effective when work takes place in the school, is aligned to the school's curriculum and instructional approach, and is focused on carefully analyzed teacher needs. One-shot workshops are designed to impart information to teachers all at once, whereas ongoing job- embedded training creates a support system that allows teachers to learn, refine their skills, implement new techniques and reflect on the results collaboratively and over time. Examples include in-school study groups for teachers, peer coaching, teacher-to-teacher collaboration and partnerships between schools and universities. External workshops may still be valuable in imparting new knowledge and skills to teachers. However, they should supplement a job-embedded program, rather than substituting for it.

» **Coaching and mentoring** Pairing a young teacher with an experienced member of the faculty can help to increase his skill. However, many schools also use instructional coaches to support their entire faculty. Effective coaching is grounded

in inquiry, involves teachers in the collaborative exchange and construction of knowledge, is ongoing and is connected to teachers' classroom practices.

» **Professional development laboratory** In this model, a seasoned teacher or resident teacher accepts a number of visiting teachers into his or her classroom for three weeks of observation and practice.

» **Observation/modeling** Classroom observations can greatly enhance teachers' understanding of teaching and learning within specific content. A collaborative approach to classroom observation—where the host teacher and observers are active in not only evaluating the work, but also in helping to design the evaluation methods—enhances the skills of all involved.

» **Training for serving specific communities** If your school will be working with student populations with specific needs or characteristics, preparation may include training aimed at these groups. For example, the Council of Great City Schools and Urban Deans program recommends that training for faculty working in at-risk communities focus on issues of child development and multiculturalism specific to children living in poverty.

» **Reflection** A peer critique methodology, Critical Friends, has colleagues gathering on a monthly basis to discuss and examine one another's teaching practices. The program helps keep teachers motivated, engaged and continually learning, which, in turn, builds skills and increases job satisfaction. While this approach makes reflection a focus, most professional development practices will involve reflection. The National School Reform Faculty has some helpful guidelines on critical friends groups. http://www.nsrfharmony.org/faq.html

📁 Resources

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

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

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

» From PBS http://www.pbs.org/teacherline/

» Read Write Think http://www.readwritethink.org/professional-development/online-pd/

» PD 360 http://www.schoolimprovement.com/products/pd360/

» True North Logic http://www.truenorthlogic.com/educator-effectiveness/

Instructional Calendar and Daily Schedule

Once you have defined the goals and primary components of your school's educational program, design your instructional calendar and daily schedule to support your program. In Illinois, 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 starts in August or lasts well into June. Charters are also not bound to include the same holidays and teacher institute days as the district, although many do, to help families that have one or more children at the charter and others at the district schools.

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

» 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 (the calendar should be designed to maximize average daily attendance)

» Advantages and disadvantages of coordinating with local district schools' calendars

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

Because of their autonomy and because they aren't always bound by union rules limiting the number of hours staff can work, most charter schools have longer schools days and years than traditional public schools.

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

» Students attending KIPP Chicago Schools have an extended school day, attend one Saturday school session per month and attend class for three weeks in the summer. More time enables them to acquire superior academic skills as well as broaden their horizons with extra-curricular experiences.

» The Achievement First school day is nearly two hours longer than the traditional public school day, allowing many students to have two reading classes and an extended math class every day, with tutoring available during and after school, an average of one to two hours of homework per night, and an intensive independent reading program so that students READ, READ, READ both at home and at school.

» With longer class periods, a longer school day, and a longer school year, Noble provides students with substantially more instructional time than the traditional Chicago public high school. This extra time, combined with a disciplined, consistent school culture, high expectations and a team of dedicated teachers, results in dramatically improved academic performance.

4D TEACHERS AND STAFF

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. Professional development is inextricably linked to the education program and therefore more information and resources on professional development are in 4C, "The Educational Program."

Staff Recruitment and Selection

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

When recruiting and selecting the staff of a new school, experts recommend that 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 approximately 70% of your budget, so judge carefully the number, responsibilities and compensation levels of administrators, teachers and other staff you hire to begin the school.

» Begin an active search at least eight to nine months before the start of the school year. Schools opening around the beginning of September should have the full staff hired no later than the beginning of June, with as many staff members as possible in place 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-qualified, committed teachers are a valued and too often scarce commodity. Some tips for finding faculty:

» Identify organizations and individuals that can connect you to top talent. These organizations may 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 newspapers across the country and attend job fairs.
» If possible, offer enticing incentives and alternative-training programs (e.g., signing bonuses, performance-based teacher bonus).
» Emphasize your school's special features including mission and vision, location and student population.

It may be useful in your recruiting to know that Section 27A-10(b) of the Illinois Charter School Law allows teachers who have previously taught in Illinois district schools and accept employment in a charter school to be granted a leave of absence for up to five years. This means that if your teachers leave a district school to come work for you, they can return to the district within five years at the same salary and with their seniority status and retirement benefits preserved.

Teacher Certification and Qualifications

The Illinois Charter School Law allows charter schools substantial flexibility in hiring personnel (with two notable exceptions, which we discuss below). Regular education teachers at charters outside of Chicago do not need to hold a state teaching certification. However, they must be "highly-qualified," which the state defines as a teacher who:

» has earned a bachelor's degree,
» has five years of work experience related to their content area,
» has passed the state basic skills and content area tests for teachers,
» shows evidence of continual professional growth.

These requirements allow charter operators to hire highly-qualified individuals who, while they may not hold traditional teaching credentials, bring relevant and interesting experiences to their classrooms. For instance, charters may hire practicing artists to teach art class, or a biologist to teach biology. Of course, knowledge of a particular field does not necessarily translate into effective teaching, but many of Illinois' successful charter schools have found outstanding non-certified teachers who have real-world experience that enhances their students' classroom experience. Note, however, that charter school teachers providing special education services must be certified in Illinois.

In addition, the Illinois Charter School Law requires that at least 50% of teachers in new Chicago charters must be certified when the school opens, and 75% of teachers in all Illinois charters must be certified by the beginning of the fourth year of operation (Illinois Charter School Law, Section 27A-10(c).

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.

Note that in Illinois, charter school teachers can join a union. However, they must form a collective bargaining unit that is separate from any collective bargaining unit representing other schools in the district. For example, the teachers of Springfield Ball Charter School recently organized as part of the Illinois Education Association, a union that represents teachers in many districts across the state.

📁 Resources

The Long Term Impact of Teachers, Teacher Value-Added and Student Outcomes in Adulthood This research shows the importance of a high quality teacher and catalyzed new interest in the importance of teacher quality. http://obs.rc.fas.harvard.edu/chetty/value_added.html

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

National Charter School Resource Center, Human Capital This website includes research, resources, and funding opportunities relevant to charters thinking about recruiting and hiring staff.
http://www.charterschoolcenter.org/priority-area/human-capital

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

4E SCHOOL CULTURE

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

Charter developers should consider the school community as part of their planning. The core design team should take into account what the school will "feel like" when it opens and how you will involve various groups. Will you hire a parent coordinator in the first year? Should the school offer parents and community groups meeting space? Plans for all 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 school district'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.

TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

Three Cultures, Coming Alive

Perspectives Charter School To foster a structured, caring and academic culture, the founders of Perspectives Charter School in Chicago developed a statement of principles and expectations for the school community called "A Disciplined Life." It focuses on three areas: self-perception, communication, and productivity. To ensure that the statement became a living document, all students, parents and teachers sign a contract outlining their responsibilities, and students complete a course on its principles. In addition, the school provides teachers with specific suggestions for reinforcing the principles in their classrooms.

Urban Prep Charter Academy for Young Men At Chicago's Urban Prep Charter Academy for Young Men, students are reminded of their culture of academic achievement and professionalism every day through a school-wide morning meeting, when student successes are celebrated. Students are held publicly accountable for infractions against the school's code of conduct and community discussions take place. Each meeting ends with students reciting the school's creed, which focuses on college aspirations, tenacity and responsibility. Students also meet daily with a teacher in smaller advisory groups called "Prides" to receive mentoring and support. Teachers call students by their last names (*e.g.*, Mr. Smith) and all students wear a jacket and tie to foster respect for themselves and their education.

Passages Charter School The culture at Passages Charter School is integrated into the fabric of each classroom. The school emphasizes respect for diverse cultures and personalization. Students participate in interdisciplinary projects focused on various cultures and parts of the world, and work in collaborative groups, further underscoring the school's values. Students in this small school are truly well-known by their teachers, and the school provides families with needed assistance through its parent organization, Asian Human Services. Faculty members describe the school's atmosphere as family-like and supportive—both for themselves and students.

Why School Culture is Important

Culture is not a separate aspect of the school that only encompasses or impacts social relations. It's tightly linked with the school's educational program. Research suggests that in all levels of schooling, but especially at the high school level where it is often lacking, it is important for students to feel that they belong. A caring, supportive and respectful culture that encourages academic achievement and hard work can help students learn. Students who are having difficulty feel safer asking for help. And teachers know more clearly who is struggling and who is making new strides. Conversely, a negative school culture—where students do not feel respected, where they fear for their safety, where students who achieve are viewed as "nerds," for example—can become a roadblock to 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 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 comes in without a uniform, follow through with the stated consequence.

School Culture Plan

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

Student Outcomes

Mission/Vision and Values	
Mission	Values

Culture Goals

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

📁 Resources

There are many good books available that delve more deeply into organizational culture and how to foster a positive one. The titles below have been recommended by Tantillo at North Star Academy. Some of these books are about schools in general; some are about any type of organization:

» *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice and Leadership,* by Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal

» *Shaping School Culture: The Heart of Leadership,* by Terrence E. Deal, Kent D. Peterson

» *Revisiting "The Culture of the School and the Problem of Change,"* by Seymour Bernard Sarason

» *Organizational Culture and Leadership,* by Edgar H. Schein

» *Building Community in Schools,* by Thomas J. Sergiovanni

Another frequently recommended book on creating a positive, professional culture within a small school is *The Power of Their Ideas,* by Deborah Meier.

4F GOVERNANCE

Governance Structure

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

Governance has proven to be one of the greatest challenges faced by charter schools. Along with facilities and financial hurdles, confusion or disputes about governance have seriously threatened the survival and stability of numerous charter schools around the country and have caused 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 Illinois, 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. See Section 2B, "Understanding the Law and Authorization Process," for more information about the implications and requirements of operating a nonprofit.

Bylaws and Open Meetings

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

Illinois' charter schools are subject to the state Open Meetings Act, which 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. 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. Illinois law requires that one representative of each school take the on-line training annually at the Illinois Attorney General's website, and that each board member take the training at least once, within 90 days of taking office.

The Board of Directors

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

» Provide oversight. Just like the board of directors of a corporation, a charter school's board makes the school's management accountable to a diverse group of people who have the general interest of the school at heart and are not directly involved in the operations of the school.

» Oversee the finances. Boards establish fiscal policy and boundaries, approve the budget, exercise financial control and review and approve major commitments of funds.

» Promote the charter school's mission. Board members advocate for their school by promoting its mission and goals within the community and in the wider education reform arena.

» Hire and supervise the charter school administrator. One of the most important roles of the board is to recruit and support an administrator who can provide vision and leadership to the charter school. The administrator is designated to act on behalf of the board to implement its decisions. See more on this relationship below.

» Set important policies. The board makes major financial and operational decisions for the school, setting policies that impact how or whether the school makes progress toward meeting its student achievement goals. The board also engages in long-range planning.

» Raise funds. The ability to raise funds is an important measure of a board's effectiveness in serving a charter school. Building a group of regular financial donors will make it easier for the charter school to fulfill its mission and achieve its goals.

📁 Resources

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

Open Meetings Act The text of the law and a guide to the open meetings act can be found online. www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/government/open_meetings.html, www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/government/openmeet.pdf

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

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

Board Café Board Café is a short monthly newsletter that provides "a menu of ideas, information, opinion, news, and resources to help board members give and get the most out of board service." www.compasspoint.org/boardcafe/index.php

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

Illinois Network of Charter Schools Contact INCS for additional advice on charter school governance. www.incschools.org

Governance vs. Management

There is a difference between governance and management. Governance focuses on "big picture" decisions, long-term planning, policy development and enhancing the future of the school. Management addresses decisions about daily operations and the staff. To put it another way, governance is about strategic decisions, 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, 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.

Board of Directors	Shared between Board and School Leader	School Leader
• Mission • Sustainability • Leadership • Strategy Decisions	• Finance Policies • Employment Terms • Enrollment • Student Expulsion	• Staffing • Academic Program • Student Disciplinary Policies • School Operational Systems

📁 Resources

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

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

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

"Charter Schools: Creating Effective Governing Boards" is a part of a series of resources for charter operators that covers every-thing from identifying board members to developing effective board

self-assessment. A PDF of the short version is at www.uscharter-schools.org/gb/governance. The full version is available, with each chapter a Word document, at www.uscharterschools.org/governance/contents.htm.

Building a Strong Board From School Design Team to Long-term Board

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

The leadership and management skills needed during start-up are different from those needed to govern and guide the school over the long term. Discuss the desire, time and abilities needed to serve on the board of directors with members of the design group and be sure everyone feels comfortable 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 commit-ment. Be sure everyone understands that before signing on.

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

It's typical that in the pre-opening phase, before you have 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.

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

Top 10 Characteristics of a Highly-effective Charter School Governing Board

1. **Passionate, unwavering belief in the charter school's mission and core values**

2. **Clarity of collective vision—where the school is and where it wants to be in the future**

3. **A firm understanding of the charter's promises and a clear, consistent way to measure them**

4. **Clarity of roles and responsibilities for the full board, individual trustees, committees and the school's chief administrator(s)**

5. **Demonstration of a clear understanding of the difference between governance and management**

6. **Focused on results**

7. **The right structure in terms of board size, composition, committee structure and officers**

8. **Board meetings focused on strategic questions, not just reporting**

9. **A school leader who has the time to assist in the creation of effective governance**

10. A strong partnership between the board and the school leader, built on mutual trust and respect

Board Must-Haves

A strong charter school board is diverse in terms of sex, age, race and occupation. Additionally, the board as a whole should have expertise or experience in:

» Accounting/Finance

» Fundraising/Development

» Construction/Real Estate

» Legal

» Technology

» PR/HR/Communications

» Education

» Medical

» Community/Volunteer

» Board Experience

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

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

» Industry—willingness to commit the time and energy to the work that needs to be done

» Intellect—intelligent people who understand education, including the "big picture"

» Expertise—individuals with experience in real estate, law or other useful areas

» Affluence—individuals or corporations can contribute funds as well as in-kind donations

» Influence—political, social, economic

Board Diversity: Table 5

													Board Members	
													Male	**SEX**
													Female	
													21–35	**AGE**
													36–50	
													51–Over	
													White	**RACE OR ETHNICITY**
													Asian	
													Latino/a	
													African-American	
													Other	
													Occupation	
													Accounting/Finance	**EXPERTISE/EXPERIENCE**
													Fundraising/Development	
													Construction/Real Estate	
													Legal	
													Technology	
													PR/HR/Communications	
													Education	
													Medical	
													Community/Volunteer	
													Board Experience	

» Leadership—proven skills in more than one setting

» Time—available time and willingness to commit time to the board

Additionally, though the Illinois Charter School Law doesn't require board members to be from your area, we suggest keeping the board local, both for logistical reasons and because local members are more likely to be invested in the success of the school. The charter law states that preference will be given to applications that "demonstrate a high level of local pupil, parental, community, business and school personnel support."

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.

TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

Parents on the Board

Arletta Lock, a parent on the board of KIPP Ascend Charter School in Chicago, brings an important perspective to governance of the school, but she carefully differentiates her role as a board member from her role as a parent by wearing different "hats." At most board meetings, to ensure that her decisions are not influenced by what would be best for her child, she's careful to wear the board hat in order to consider policy issues from an objective, big-picture perspective.

However, she puts on her parent hat in some situations: "As a parent I can tell the board certain issues are big issues because I have a lot of parents calling me. Other times, I interject because most of the other board members don't have kids in the school. They're looking strictly at the business side. They also need the human side."

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.

4G FINANCE AND OPERATIONS

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

Finance

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

1. **Developing budgets and financial plans**
2. **Recording all activities in an accounting system**
3. **Producing monthly and annual financial statements**
4. **Executing loans and soliciting other external funding**
5. **Producing grant related reporting**
6. **Making purchases**
7. **Paying vendors**
8. **Funding payroll**
9. **Reconciling bank accounts**
10. **Executing and maintaining insurance coverage**
11. **Managing revenue collections**

Finance Staff & Governance

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

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

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

» Hire a full-time business manager to run the business office, staffed by personnel that handle all the responsibilities of the office.

» Hire a full-time business manager to run the business office, and outsource some or most of the office's routine activities, such as bookkeeping, human resources and/or payroll.

» Contract with a private business services provider and hire a staff member to carry out certain day-to-day functions at the school.

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

As you are recruiting board members, you should seek at least one to two board members with considerable financial expertise. You will need a board treasurer and a functioning finance committee of

the board. In order for your board to effectively oversee the financial management of your school, board members will need to fully understand your financial plan and compliance requirements. The board of directors should have an explicit and clear role in oversight of the school's finances, especially for approval of expenditures over certain amounts or that vary from the approved budget. The board's treasurer and chair should be involved in reviewing financial statements, hiring the auditor and approving the school's annual budget. See 4F, "Governance".

Financial Responsibilities

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

» **A comprehensive set of fiscal management policies and procedures,** clarifying who has authority over the school's fiscal affairs, internal controls, accounting practices, purchasing and personnel practices. As your finance staff commences its work, it will be important for them to establish systems of checks and balances with the school leader, to limit any financial pitfalls from bounced checks to embezzlement. For example, different people should be responsible for writing the checks and reviewing the bank statements, and checks should require two signatures.

» **A budget development calendar and budget monitoring system.**

» **An accounting system,** usually consisting of a computer-based accounting package with a chart of accounts customized to the school's needs.

» **A system of conducting timely and accurate payroll** and ensuring that appropriate tax and retirement funds are withheld and forwarded to the appropriate agency.

» **Establishment of external review of reports** by qualified personnel including board members, CPA and auditors.

  – Once your charter is approved, check with your district about the timetable for annual audits. In Chicago, for example, a charter school's first audit is completed after

the first full year of operations and is due to the district by November 1 of the school's second year of operations. An auditor can help guide the school through its development of internal controls and accounting systems, ensuring that everything needed for the audit will be collected during the first year of operations.

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

Budgeting & Financial Planning

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

Enrollment The main driver of charter school funding is the number and type/demographic of students that are projected to be enrolled at the school. 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 is achieved. Ideally your charter school will achieve and maintain a waiting list in order to have more predictable finances and instructional planning.

Revenues Each charter school will have a varied combination of revenue sources depending on location, student demographics and other factors. Charter schools receive funds from the charter authorizer for each student who is enrolled, referred to as "per-pupil funding." These per pupil revenues are the main source of income revenue for most charter schools. Revenues introduce the need for fund based ac-

counting within charter schools. Each revenue source is treated as a separate fund and each fund will have various reporting and compliance requirements associated with it. It is important to understand the requirements of each funding source in order to properly receive and retain the revenues.

School District Per Capita Tuition Charge (PCTC) The Illinois Charter School Law calls for districts to use the "per capita tuition charge" (PCTC)—the tuition they would charge an out-of-district student to attend a district school—as the base for per-pupil allocations to charter schools. The source of these funds is typically the state education budget and local property taxes. The Illinois Charter School Law allows authorizers to provide charter schools between 75% and 125% of the district's per capita tuition charge, subject to negotiated agreement with the charter applicant group. *This amount does not necessarily reflect the actual cost of educating a student, and does not include, for example, the cost of renting or purchasing facilities.* If your district is new to charter schools, work with their leadership early to determine the best assumption for planning your per pupil funding. If your district already has charter schools, you can determine how the existing schools have been funded historically. Additionally, you can review a district's Annual Financial Report (AFR 50-35) for actual calculations. More than 85% of a typical charter school's funding comes from PCTC funding, so it is critical to get the most accurate number possible to create the most realistic budget.

Categorical/Supplemental Funds A charter school may apply for and receive, subject to the same restrictions applicable to school districts, any grant that is administered by the State Board that is available for school districts. While administered by the State and often provided to the District, these funds are often sourced from the federal government. Categorical funds are directed for specific uses only and are supplemental to the general operations of the school. Some of these funds are directed at helping low-income students and might be restricted to special literacy programs, small group-learning environments and support services. Categorical funds include (but are not limited to):

» Supplemental General State Aid (SGSA)
» No Child Left Behind Title I

» English Language Learner (ELL)
» Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and state SPED funding

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

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

Special Education Funding By law, the district is required to provide either funding for special education services or special education staff to charter schools serving students with special education needs. Charter school developers will need to negotiate a plan with the district.

Charter Start-Up Grants The Walton Family Foundation, some school districts, and the Federal Government through its Charter School Program Grants provide start-up grants. Start-up grants are highly competitive and are typically available only after your school has been authorized.

Fees Charter schools can by law charge minimal fees for uniforms, books, materials, field trips, special events, and programs prior to and after school. While charter schools should not look to parents as a major source of revenue, student fees can assist the school to run certain proj-

ects or programs. Several charters use fees to help run after-school programs. Most charter schools charge fees on a sliding scale, depending on families' financial situations. For budgeting purposes, be sure to discount your projected amount receivable due to under collection of the fees.

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

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

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

In-kind donations In-kind donations are non-monetary contributions of supplies or labor. Like monetary donations, in-kind gifts are tax-deductible, with certain restrictions. Many charter schools have been able to secure full classrooms of used furniture from consolidating or closing district schools, computers from local businesses, volunteer hours from parents or other supporters, and pro bono professional services such as legal or architectural. Be cautious not to take everything

that is offered to your school, since receiving unneeded contributions can be more of a hindrance than a help. Schools should create a list of in-kind needs as a communication tool for potential contributors to make sure they get what they need.

For more information on fundraising and sources of funding see 4J, "Funding Sources and Fundraising."

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

The expenses your charter school will incur will vary with enrollment, grade configuration, mission, instructional strategy and location. While you may have to modify your ambitions down the line, there is no need to start cutting corners just yet. Estimate your expenses in the planning process by distinguishing between desired programs vs. essential programs and make sure you will have at least enough to support the essentials critical to your design. The majority of the operating expense in your budget will likely be personnel. Setting salary levels, annual pay increases, bonuses, and negotiating employee health, dental and other insurance benefits are your major budgetary decisions. While you want to provide a competitive compensation package to your teachers, paying higher salaries and benefits to your employees will impact many aspects of what your school can offer, from the creative programs provided during the school day to the student/teacher ratio in the classroom.

All services provided by the school district, including but not limited to rent, food services, custodial services, maintenance, curriculum, media services, libraries, transportation and warehousing shall be subject to negotiation between a charter school and the local school board and paid for out of the revenues negotiated.

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

» Staff (Administrative Staff, Instructional Staff, Employee Benefits)
» Purchased Services
» Food Services
» Transportation (required in charter application)
» SPED Services
» Annual Audit
» Other Services (including rent)
» Materials and Supplies
» Capital Outlay / Non-Capitalized Equipment
» Authorizer Fee (SCSC can charge up to 3% of revenue)

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

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

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

» Review currently operating charter schools comparable to the one you are planning to see how they have allocated resources.

» Try to establish a cost range—for example, state-of-the-art computers as compared to basic machines.

» Understand how expenses grow over time. For example, do you expect a line item to increase as the number of students increases (e.g. textbooks) or by a percentage rate (e.g. salaries or insurance costs)?

» Know which figures are "fixed" and which can be manipulated to fit your circumstances. Do you really need an after-school program, individualized tutoring and a state-of-the-art computer lab, or can you get by without an after-school program until year two?

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

» *Financial Projection for the initial term (usually 5 years)*
  When developing your five-year financial plan, keep in mind the effects of the following items on revenues and expenses:
  – *One-time vs. annual/recurring costs* Separate start-up costs from operating costs for the purposes of financial planning. In projecting future expenditures, remember that operating costs are ongoing, while start-up costs occur only once.
  – *Deficit* During the first years of operation, particularly for those schools that add a grade a year, a school might not be at capacity in terms of final enrollment. Consequently, the five-year financial projection may show that in the early years the school will receive less tuition revenue than is necessary to meet operating costs. While this situation is common to new schools starting at under-capacity enrollment, you must plan for how to cover your costs with

loans and grants, for instance. Although deficit spending is not unusual, it should be minimized by cost reductions.

– *Efficiency* As a charter school, you will have the freedom to institute creative solutions not available to other public schools. As a school grows, operating costs per pupil should decrease over time and schools should look for more efficient ways of providing services to their school. Utilizing the flexibility offered to charter schools, the management team should focus on challenging the financial assumptions in order to minimize costs and maximize services. Some costs are less flexible than others. By manipulating assumptions and plans in operating budgets, you should try to maximize services with respect to these constraints.

– *Enrollment growth* A growing student body should secure the school's financial health, but beware of incremental cost increases at certain junctures: an extra bus, a larger building, another teacher and expansion of facilities. The growth of the student body will affect many of the key expenditure variables, and the five-year operating budget must realistically reflect these changes

» *Plan for the annual audit*
An audit of each charter school's finances shall be conducted annually by an outside, independent contractor retained by the charter school. *Annually, by December 1, every charter school must submit to the State Board a copy of its audit and a copy of the Form 990 the charter school filed that year with the federal Internal Revenue Service.*

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

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

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

– *Start-up period* Donations and potential startup funding should be clearly planned in order to have enough resources to setup the leadership and structure of the school. Cash flow, prior to July 1 of your first fiscal year, is important to articulate and track so that the 1st year opening begins as smoothly as possible. The start-up cash flow should list expected sources of revenue used to cover these expenses, such as loans and charter school start-up grants, as well as justification of these expectations and evidence of grants that have been committed, received or processed.

– *1st year monthly* A cash flow projection should be created for the 1st year of operations that ties directly to the 1st year line item budget. The budget should be broken down on a monthly basis in order to make sure that the timing of revenues and expenses is considered and planned. A significant portion of the budget can be reimbursable funding sources meaning your school will need cash on hand in order to expend the funds and then seek reimbursement. Cash flow in year one is important to ensure proper payment of payroll and vendors and to remain compliant with reporting standards.

» *Detailed 1st year line item operating budget*
A budget requires the core design team to figure out how much money your school will have as revenue, where that money comes from, how much you'll spend and on what. Developing the school budget should be a team effort. You will require the input and feedback from multiple team members to make sure that you have developed a sound, realistic and thorough budget. Clearly defined assumptions with back-up documentation will ensure that you are creating a realistic budget that you can defend to the charter school authorizer. Create a dynamic financial model when developing your

budget that will give you the ability to link figures to a number of key variables. You can then easily view the effects of different assumptions on the entire budget. The budget is going to be updated and revised multiple times each year so having your team embrace an iterative process early on will help when the factors change that determined your initial budget.

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

📁 Resources

Illinois State Board of Education To find a district's existing "per capita tuition charge" (PCTC) visit the School Finance section of Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) website, www.isbe.net/finance. Go to "Annual Financial Report" and, within that, "Historical Archive," which includes links to archived financial reports and district budgets. A district's per capita tuition charge (PCTC) is included in its Annual Financial Report. Use the School District Directory to find the district's identification number, and then search the Annual Financial Reports for your district. Within the Annual Financial Report, PCTCs are generally listed in a tab labeled "PCTC- OEPP" (for "Per Capita Tuition Charge" and "Operating Expenditures Per Pupil"). PCTCs may change each year, but viewing the historical record can help you to make a sound estimate.

For detailed information regarding special education in charter schools review the following link: http://www.isbe.net/charter/pdf/spec-ed-compliance-pres100512.pdf

The **Walton Family Foundation (WFF)** provides start-up grants for new charter schools in Chicago and throughout Illinois. In 2012 alone, WFF awarded new charter campuses $3.8 million, more than any other city in the United States. If you are interested in applying for WFF funding, please contact INCS. INCS serves as WFF's partner for the State of Illinois to administer ongoing start-up funding for

new charters. http://www.waltonfamilyfoundation.org/grantees/public-charter-startup-grant-program

The U.S. Department of Education Charter Schools Program Grants provides startup grants for "Planning, Program Design and Implementation" of new schools, among other grant programs. INCS recommends that charter design teams apply for startup funding in the first grant cycle following their authorization. Typically these federal funds are disseminated through the state department of education; however, Illinois does not have this grant and applicants will apply directly to the US Department of Education. http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oii/csp/about-cs-competitions.html

Operations

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

Operations Staff

It is likely that the school's personnel who handle some of the tasks in operations will wear other hats in the organization. For example, charter schools often staff a Director of Finance & Operations, responsible for both facets of non-instructional activities in the school.

Create a clear system of who is responsible for and who will handle all operational tasks by aligning the organizational chart with the required tasks/responsibilities. Some schools have an operations leader and others split these duties among several staffers who have administrative duties. The size of your school and funding levels will impact whether you can hire additional operational staff. Clear roles and responsibilities will protect the school leader and the academic

staff's time and allow them to remain focused on teaching, learning and achievement.

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

Outsourcing

Charter schools must balance the trade-off for saving staff time by having a firm or the district handle one or more operational tasks. With outsourcing there can be extra cost and the loss of direct control over how well the job gets done, but it can also allow for a charter to leverage an external resource without having to recreate the function on its own. Charter schools may be able to outsource some services to the school district, which can be a big help to a new charter school, since the district may already have the capacity and scale to accomplish tasks like providing hot lunches or running bus routes.

As you are looking to outsource a specific service, research the going rates for various services and ask for references from satisfied clients. Develop formal operating agreements with the firm for any services they will provide, including the terms under which they will provide them, when they will be accomplished and consequences if the work is not done properly or on a timely basis. Have a similar agreement with the district as well—it will help you to get to your desired outcomes to have a clear agreement in writing rather than relying on promises at a meeting.

Major Operational Tasks

Illinois Charter School Law requires charter applications to include plans for insurance coverage and transportation but individual districts may require additional plans. Showing a sound operations plan for these tasks will demonstrate your team's preparation and capacity to open a high-quality charter school.

Transportation The Illinois Charter School Law requires that charter proposals include plans that address the transportation needs of its pupils and of low-income and at-risk pupils. Charters may meet transportation needs in a variety of ways, including contracting with the district or private companies to provide busing, providing bus tokens or bus token subsidies, arranging car pools and/or helping parents submit an application for the State Parental Transportation reimbursement program. It is advisable to seek legal counsel regarding liability issues in your proposed transportation plan before submitting the final charter proposal. You must address the transportation needs of your students in your proposal.

How a charter school creates transportation plan can vary widely. Examples are:

» Springfield Ball Charter School built transportation into its charter agreement. The school district provides transportation to and from school and the charter in turn takes less than 100% of the per capita tuition rate. The school pays for any additional transportation needs such as sports, field trips or other extracurricular activities.

» In Chicago, where public transportation is readily available, most charters do not provide transportation to their students. The district provides busing to charter school students with special needs at no cost to the charter school. Some charter schools that are not near public transportation have added their own buses or vans to address safety concerns in the area near the schools.

» In suburban Grayslake, Prairie Crossing Charter School organizes parent car pools to provide transportation to its students.

Insurance A charter school, at its own expense, must procure and maintain insurance covering all of its operations that are beyond any coverages provided by the district or authorizer. It is generally recommended that charter school insurers be licensed by the state and rated B+ or better by A.M. Best or a comparable rating service. The following insurance coverage is the recommended minimum. Check to see whether your authorizer imposes particular requirements.

» *Worker's Compensation and Employers' Liability Insurance*
  Worker's compensation insurance is required by state law, and
  is usually issued in the same policy with Employers' Liability
  Insurance. Worker's compensation insurance covers on-the
  job injuries and work-related illnesses. Employers' liability
  covers other claims resulting from the same causes, including
  third-party claims and claims for loss of consortium. This
  policy should also include sexual harassment.Commercial
  General Liability Insurance—For personal injury and property
  damage liability, and premises and operations liability,
  including independent contractors, contractual liability,
  and products/completed operations coverage liability for
  actions of independent contractors. Contractor's liability
  for subcontractors. No contractual liability.

» *Directors and Officers Liability Insurance* Protects the
  charter school and its directors and officers from liability
  claims arising from wrongful acts, errors or omissions that
  do not involve bodily injury or property damage. Directors
  and Officers coverage ensures against negligent hiring,
  mishandling of funds and other actions that may result in
  liability to the school. Such coverage is essential to safeguard
  the personal assets of charter directors.

» *Commercial Automobile Liability Insurance* For bodily injury
  or property damage arising from owned, leased, hired or non-
  owned vehicles used by the charter school Even if the school
  does not own or lease any vehicles, it should have a policy
  covering hired and non-owned vehicles. This coverage will
  allow school personnel to waive rental-company insurance
  (check with your insurance agent to confirm this, and whether
  there is a deductible) and will provide coverage for liability
  resulting from the use of a personal vehicle on school business.

» *Property Insurance* To insure the replacement value of school
  property, including property for which the charter school is
  contractually responsible, by lease or other agreement, for loss
  or insurance from "all risks" of physical loss or damage.

» *Umbrella (Excess) Liability Insurance* To provide excess
  protection over underlying policies.

» *"Key Man" Life Insurance* Consider purchasing life insurance, payable to the school, on the lives of key personnel, including the head of school. Such a policy will guarantee that a leadership crisis is not exacerbated by a financial crisis.

» *Errors and Omissions Liability Insurance* In addition to the directors and officers insurance, this insurance shall cover the charter school for those sources of liability arising out of the rendering or failure to provide professional services in the performance of the charter agreement. This includes all provisions regarding financial management and indemnification.

» *Employee Dishonesty / Crime Insurance* This policy protects the charter operator in the case of fraud committed by employees and its contractors against the school. These crimes can be committed in the form of paper currency (cash) or in the form of data and electronic (wire transfers).

» *Student Activity Insurance* This coverage protects students involved in extra-curricular activities occurring at school as well as on field trips and other events. In the case of football or other contact sports an additional rider for catastrophic insurance is typically required and should be separated from the original policy if those sports are not conducted by the school due to the cost of the insurance.

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

» *Contract with the district* Many charters contract with the district to provide food services as a "pass-through" of funds from federal and state school-based nutrition programs (e.g., the National School Lunch Program) to the charter school. Many charters see this route as advantageous because it saves them from having to manage the multiple details of a food service program and may save the charter money as well. Districts benefit from providing charter school food service

because it allows them to streamline the process of disbursing state and federal food service funds to charter schools.

» *Develop a food service program in-house* In order to manage your own food services your school must become a Food Service Authority (SFA). The school will also need to hire staff, ensure that they have appropriate facilities for preparing food that meet local health standards, develop menus that meet nutrition standards, and, if the school serves low-income students, apply for participation in federal and state child nutrition programs. Although managing a food service program is demanding, some schools prefer this option—either initially or once their charter is well-established—because it provides them freedom to develop a food service program aligned to their mission and goals.

» *Contract with a non-district vendor* Charter schools may contract with another vendor, such as the local archdiocese's provider. To contract with an outside vendor, charters may still need to become a Food Service Authority or be added to the non-district's Food Service Authority.

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

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

hours a security guard could be necessary to monitor the facility access.

Chicago provides charters housed in district buildings with security, maintenance and technology staff in exchange for a "facility fee" and provides a facility funding supplement to charter schools that are in non-district buildings. Charters in other districts, such as Springfield Ball Charter School, arrange and pay for their own utilities, janitorial services, technology staff and security alarm services.

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

Information Technology The use of technology in charter schools is important and connects to the idea that charters are innovative schools. Each school should have a technology plan in place and someone to implement that plan and keep your IT system running and up-to-date. In addition to having sufficient computers and connectivity to allow students to access the Internet, consider the many educational software programs, as well as technological teaching tools such as overhead projectors and student response systems.

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

» *District IT Office* It is always a good idea to check your school district website to see what information is available and what services are offered. If nothing else, it's useful to know what the state of the art is at your district, but you can also get some good ideas and maybe discover some available resources.

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

» *Human Resources* The laws surrounding employment are constantly being updated and require consistent attention and understanding. Personnel expense is the largest budget area for a charter school and HR services can provide recruiting, hiring/firing, payroll, compliance, benefits administration and employee evaluations.

» *Marketing and Public Relations* Especially in the beginning, charter schools will need to spend considerable time marketing themselves to prospective families and students and to the community in general.

» *Legal Counsel* Charter schools should plan to consult with qualified legal and other appropriate counsel on a regular basis to keep abreast of any relevant changes to the law. Schools should also have a relationship with legal counsel for consultation if legal issues emerge, especially around hiring and employment practices and special education

» *Audit Services* An audit of each charter school's finances must be conducted annually by an outside, independent contractor retained by the charter school. Annually, by December 1, every charter school must submit to the State Board a copy of its audit and a copy of the Form 990 the charter school filed that year with the federal Internal Revenue Service.

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

» *Student Discipline* Illinois charter schools may institute their own student discipline policies. This may include adapting or adopting the discipline policies of the district. If you do base your discipline system on existing policies, make sure that they are consistent with the mission and goals of your school.

» *Criminal Background Investigations* The Illinois Charter School Law requires charter schools to comply with Section 34-18.5 of the School Code requiring criminal background investigations and fingerprinting for teachers and other school personnel (105 ILCS 5/34-18.5). These should be setup during the hiring process prior to the employee stepping onto the school campus.

» *Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act* All school personnel are mandated reporters of suspected child abuse. The Illinois Charter School Law requires charter schools to comply with the Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act (325 ILCS 5/1 et seq.).

» *Immunization* Charter schools must comply with state requirements regarding student health examinations and immunizations. By law (105 ILCS 5/27-8.1), students must have all required immunization and exams by October 15 of each year, or those students will be excluded from school until such requirements are met.

» *Student Attendance* Charter schools should develop plans to describe how they will meet their particular district's requirements on providing student attendance data. Some charters utilize the district's attendance system. There are also a number of vendors who provide online student information systems such as PowerSchool that include all manner of student information and statistics.

» *Student Records Act* Charter schools are required to maintain records for every student within the school, and are free to develop their own system. The Student Records Act (105 ILCS 10/1 et seq.) requires you to keep comprehensive records for all students. Note that it may be challenging to acquire students' cumulative files from previous schools.

For more legal considerations, see 2B, "Understanding the Law and Authorization Process."

📁 Resources

Illinois State Board of Education ISBE's Nutrition Program web-site provides information on both state and federal school-based child nutrition programs, which provide low-income students free or reduced-price meals and snacks (*e.g.*, National School Lunch and Illinois Free Breakfast and Lunch). The site also has the application for participation in these programs and additional information, resources and training workshops related to school food services. www.isbe.net/nutrition

ISBE's elearning website contains information on available technology grants and resources in Illinois. These include federal and state grants, as well as legislation, curricular programs and information on the Illinois virtual high school. www.isbe.net/curriculum/elearning

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

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

4H FACILITIES

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

Starter School, Then a Permanent One

Many 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. Many schools don't have sufficient funding at their launch to rent, buy or build an ideal facility that can accommodate the school's full 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 than there are formal school buildings, and starting in a temporary space can give you a chance to build a track record of success, which can allay potential creditor concerns 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.

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

Overarching Ideas

US Charter Schools' guide to facilities gives 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 of 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.

» Ideally get 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 (and a healthy waiting list to account for attrition) 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.Occupancy costs should be within 25% of operating revenues, depending on the neighborhood in which you are operating.

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

» 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 back-up facility in mind in case the district pulls their facility offer, or the real estate transaction or renovation hits a roadblock.

Facility Planning

Start the facility process by developing 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 most 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:

1. **Applicable federal, state and municipal building codes and ordinances compliance**
2. **Environmental clearance**
3. **Accessibility to persons with disabilities**
4. **Space for secure storage of student records**
5. **Designated spaces for students with IEPs**
6. **Access to spaces supporting graduation requirements (e.g., PE for high schools)**

Resources

The NCB Development Corporation a nonprofit based in Arlington VA, has created "The Answer Key: How To Plan, Develop and Finance Your Charter School Facility" to help charter school planners assess their needs and costs for their schools, including the total square footage. www.ncbdc.org

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. Experts recommend you begin searching for space as early as possible. In Illinois, you will need to identify a site and a back-up in your charter application.

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. We'll say it again: Start early—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, 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. Talk to your district about which of their facilities may be available and make sure your facilities committee evaluates them thoroughly. Other resources might include the archdiocese, aldermen and other local politicians, religious leaders, and existing charters.

It is always helpful to reach out to your district's Police Commander and get his/her insight on the locations you consider.

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 town or city. A district might simultaneously be closing schools in one area while building new ones elsewhere—pursue those opportunities. Many Chicago charter schools have rented buildings from the district. As a point of reference, the Illinois Charter School Law requires districts that rent facilities to charters to charge a "reasonable rent."

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

However, districts that are more hostile to charters may see leasing to them as a threat.

A few things to consider when evaluating a district facility:

» Will you be the sole occupant or share with a district school? The latter has its own host of issues (see further below re: sharing with the district).

» What are your facility financial obligations? Is it a flat fee off your per-pupil or does it involve additional fees for services like food, security, janitorial, pest control, trash snow removal, landscaping services and consumables (e.g., toilet paper, paper towel, soap, etc.)?

» Ask for a list of the capital projects performed in the building in the past ten years

» What is condition of the building you are offered in terms of:

– Exterior envelope (roof, tuckponting, windows, etc.)

– Infrastructure (mechanical, plumbing, electrical services, emergency generator, elevator, food service equipment, etc.)

» Environmental (asbestos, lead) conditions

Other school buildings Consider other vacant school buildings, such as former private or parochial school buildings. Colleges, universities or other institutions of higher education may also have available space; 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 Illinois charters operate in commercial or office buildings; however, since 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 a district school (or schools) Many charter schools are envisioned as a small school, where students are more easily known by faculty and their peers. In many large cities like Chicago, where large traditional schools are being closed due to dropping student enrollment or poor performance, the district is opening several distinct small schools in one of these large facilities. This type of occupancy arrangement may be an option for your school, but sharing a building comes with distinct advantages (e.g., shared maintenance costs) and disadvantages (e.g., the need to share common spaces, achieve consensus on some decisions and potentially share space with a school with a very different culture from your own school's culture).

Consider the following:

» Will one school's principal be considered the de facto owner of the building? In Chicago, a district-provided Campus Manager is typically assigned.

» 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?

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

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

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

» Residential space

» Warehouse space

» Houses of worship

» Community college

» Child care center

» Boys and Girls Club, YMCA or similar organization

» A "school within a school" operating in an existing school site

» New construction (not generally recommended for a brand new school due to the expense and time required)

Another option, if you chose to purchase your facility up-front, but you are not at capacity, is for the charter school to own and operate the building and rent it out to one or more 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.

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. Note that some districts require that you use an architect that is already part of their approved list. Find out if this is the case so you are not double-paying for services.

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, walkways, 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 misc. 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."**
http://www.ada.gov/2010ADAstandards_index.htm

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 Section 4G, "Finance and Operations." Funding Options

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

We do not recommend 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 the Illinois Facilities Fund (IFF)

Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) are alternative lenders specializing in providing nonprofits with access to financing, usually at lower interest rates. In Illinois, the principal CDFI is the Illinois Facilities Fund, a nonprofit financial institution. Through its Illinois Charter Capital Program (ICCP), the IFF has made forty below-market loans totaling more than $14.6 million to charter schools.

Loans from the IFF for charter schools provide:

» Capital for projects ranging from $10,000 to $1 million

» Financing fixed at 5% interest

» Terms of up to 15 years

» Loans for pre-development and start-up costs

» Loans for leased space

Most start-up charter schools will require (and be able to afford) financing in the $10,000 to $1 million range. For projects over $1 million, which tend to be related to replicating charter schools or assisting established charters that are growing into permanent facilities, IFF has developed a bond financing initiative.

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

During the charter school development process, design teams can contact IFF to find out if they qualify for a loan. If so, IFF 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 ten years), are usually considered a high-risk venture for traditional banks, making it difficult to secure bank loans and especially loans at low rates. This is why most banks look for a guarantee and 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 fundraising 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. While the unique situation of each school—including size of the facility, per pupil numbers at the beginning of the charter and the relationship with a lessor, whether it is a district or private party—national trends suggest that total occupancy costs should be no more than 15% of total expenses and debt service should be no more than 66% of that total.

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

Illinois Facilities Fund (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. www.iff.org

The Illinois Facilities Fund Facilities Resource Center offers a series of technical assistance worksheets focused on the plan-ning and implementation stages of real estate projects. Topics include: planning, budgeting, financing, project management and decision-making and includes usable Excel budget spreadsheets/templates. www.iff.org/content.cfm/facresourcecenter

4I FAMILY AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

In Section 3D, "Engaging with the Community," we described how to engage families and the community in your charter school planning efforts. As you move further into developing your school design, it is important to think about the role that families and community members will have in the school once it is open. 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. The latest research on family involvement shows that "students whose families are involved in their learning earn better grades, enroll in higher-level programs, have higher graduation rates, and are more likely to enroll in post-secondary education," according to a summary of "A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement," from Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships (see "Connecting to Parents" below).

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

The possibilities to tap into the vast wealth of knowledge, experience and skills that parents offer reach far beyond the traditional

PTA work of organizing fundraising and social events. An effective parent involvement program requires creative thinking and ongoing commitment 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 very 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"

National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools The website includes research reviews, strategy briefs and tools focused on effectively connecting schools, families and communities to improve student achievement and support students' success overall. www.sedl.org/connections/welcome.html

External Partnerships and Ongoing Community Relationships

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

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

Perhaps even more importantly, community support can be essential if your charter school is ever challenged. Charter schools are in a more tenuous position than district public schools and are

more susceptible to the changes in the 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.

Student Recruitment and Enrollment

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

Review the Illinois Charter School Law

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

» In their student admissions policies, charter schools are prohibited from discrimination on the basis of disability, race,

creed, color, gender, national origin, religion, ancestry, marital status or need for special education services.

» Charter school enrollment must be open to any student who lives within the school district of the charter school.

» If more students apply to the charter school than there are spaces available, the charter must conduct a public lottery to select students. Only siblings of students already enrolled in the school may be given preference for admissions.

Plan to Succeed

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

Materials Develop marketing materials that explain the goals and mission of the school and provide prospective students and families with information about how to enroll their children. Emphasize the basic facts about your school and include what a charter public school is and how it works. Be sure to distribute your materials widely. If you plan to serve non- English speakers, be sure to have your recruitment materials translated into other languages.

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

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

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

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

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

🔍 TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

Even if a school has as a mission to target a specific population, any student who applies must be given the same consideration for acceptance. Noble Street Charter School's application process contains specific language that shows how that balance can be struck:

"Noble Street is a non-selective school created to raise academic achievement for all children. Our marketing efforts are aimed at all CPS students regardless of national origin, race, income level, or ability. To that end, we:

» Reach out to as many elementary schools as the calendar and manpower will allow.

» Provide materials in Spanish at all of our open houses and information sessions.

» Do not ask for information about test scores or special education status at any time during the application process.

» Take care to ensure that our application process is not threatening and will encourage students of all races, languages and abilities, including special education students, to feel welcomed at our school.

» Adhere to a strict blind lottery selection process. Students must be residents of Chicago and pass 8th grade to be accepted for enrollment."

4J FUNDING SOURCES AND FUNDRAISING

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

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

In-kind Goods and Services Donated goods and services may save you considerable money and time in the charter school development process. Some Illinois 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 ISBE has state and federal funds specifically designated 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. See Section 4G, "Finance and Operations," for more detail about start-up grants.

Strategies for Fundraising

The following strategies for fundraising are recommended by experienced fundraisers from existing Chicago charter schools:

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

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

Use events to raise the profile of your school—but do not expect huge financial returns. Simple events during the school design phase—such as a breakfast featuring a presentation about the school—may help you 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 4F, "Governance" for more on establishing a board.

Involve the "face" of the organization in fundraising. During the charter school development phase, and after the school's launch, ensure that 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.

TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

Think Outside the Box

The Noble Network of Charter Schools has been incredibly successful in raising funds through a capital campaign where donors pay significant sums for naming rights to their buildings, classrooms and gyms.

Namaste Charter School hosts an annual fundraiser that involves a cooking lesson in line with the school's health focus. Because most charters depend on fundraising to get started and to supplement their public funding once the school is open, it is in your best interest to think broadly about how you might reach your fundraising goals.

🗁 Fundraising Resources

The **Donors Forum** website includes fundraising tips and resources, including the Donors Forum library and links to databases of Illinois funding sources. This regional association also holds training sessions for fundraising on a wide range of topics, including proposal writing, research methods and planned giving. www.donorsforum.org

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

National AFP website: www.afpnet.org

AFP Chicago website: www.afpchicago.org

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

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

The **National Charter School Resource Center** provides information and links to resources about charter school funding and fundraising. For more on budget and finance, see Section 4D, "Financial Management." http://www.charterschoolcenter.org/grants

Local Community Foundations Community foundations serve many communities and provide grants to local organizations. Conduct an internet search for "community foundations" in your area. The following website also links to a list of Illinois community foundations. http://www.tgci.com/funding/cfs.asp?statename=Illinois&statecode=IL

4K ACCOUNTABILITY

The Illinois Charter School Law frees charter schools from many regulations in order to encourage the development and use of "new, different or alternative" teaching methods, forms of measuring pupil learning and achievement, and educational visions and goals. In exchange, charter schools are held accountable to the Illinois Learning Standards (which will soon change to the Common Core State Standards) through state mandated assessments. In addition, the school district may add additional measures to the final charter contract. Finally, charter developers may decide to create additional performance measures in alignment with their specific model but the authorizer will ultimately decide whether to hold charter schools accountable to any additional measures. Ultimately, the charter school should always know the measures to which they will be held accountable and make decisions accordingly. They should never be surprised by the authorizer's evaluation of their performance.

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

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—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)

The Illinois Charter School Law includes requirements for some aspects of a charter school's accountability: "A description of the charter school's plan for evaluating pupil performance, the types of assessments that will be used to measure pupil progress towards achievement of the school's pupil performance standards, the timeline for achievement of those standards, and the procedures for taking corrective action in the event that pupil performance at the charter school falls below those standards."

School districts typically have other agreements within the charter agreement to ensure the school is performing well. For example, in Chicago, all charter schools meet a set of standards that include specific measurements on absolute and relative (as compared to similar CPS schools) scales, fiscal management and compliance measurements and regular audited compliance with a list of more than a dozen obligations, from criminal background investigations of new faculty to open meetings for the board of directors.

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

If your district does have existing accountability requirements, it is important that the core design team understands how the school will be judged and makes clear plans at the outset to meet these standards and report on progress. Even in these circumstances, though, your school can have an impact on the accountability plan. Chicago's plan, for example, also provides room for charter schools to incorporate a school's unique standards and assessments, based on the school's goals, culture and educational plan.

The 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.

TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

Realistic Goals are Built on Realistic Expectations

Setting ambitious yet attainable student achievement targets can be challenging, especially for a new charter school, when you may not know much about the baseline performance of your student population. One Illinois charter high school designed to serve at-risk students set what they thought were appropriate performance goals, only to find that many of their students were entering ninth grade reading at the third-grade level. The students improved during the year, but still fell short of the school's original goals. Learn as much as possible about your prospective student population in advance, and use outside expertise when you can.

Academic Accountability

As evidenced by the Illinois Charter School Law, 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:

» 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. See Section 4C, "The Educational Program." 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 Illinois Learning Standards, and explain in clear detail what you will have in their stead if your school will deviate from those standards.

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 Illinois Learning Standards," is a measurable goal.

» 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.

» 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 likely 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

» Mobility

» 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 ISAT), many schools analyze students' value-added performance (students' growth over time). You can also compare students' test scores with district scores, scores of schools with similar student populations, and/or the scores of students in the school your students would have attended if they didn't attend your charter.

TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

Goals in Clear Language

Bronzeville Lighthouse Charter School in Chicago, part of the national Lighthouse Academies network, set nine key goals with specific performance measures for students and the school:

Performance Goals	Measurements
Students	
Goal 1: All students will demonstrate academic success in all core subjects.	• All students are required to complete all work corresponding to Lighthouse Academies exit standards. Of this work students must complete at least 80% successfully. • All students who have spent two full years at the school will score at least within half a year of their grade level equivalent on the Stanford-10. • All students who have spent two full years at the school will demonstrate proficiency on Illinois Standards Assessment Test (ISAT). • The school will meet its annual AYP targets.
Goal 2: All students will make progress in all core academic subjects.	• All students taking the Stanford-10 will improve at least one grade level per year. • All students will demonstrate improvement of at least 4 Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) points (1/3 of a standard deviation) between the fall administration and spring administration of the Stanford-10 exam in the same school year.

Goal 3: Students from all demographic groups within the school will perform at comparably high achievement levels.	• Among students who have spent two full years at the school, disaggregation of Stanford-10 data will show no significant difference between groups of students from different demographic groups within the school. • Students who have spent two full years at the school will, on average, score as well as or better on ISAT than students in the same district with comparable demographic compositions.
Goal 4: All students will contribute to at least one public art demonstration or performance each year.	• Teachers will record participants. Data will be disaggregated and reported.
Goal 5: Students will demonstrate hard work, personal responsibility, and respect according to school- developed standards.	• All students will demonstrate proficiency or make progress towards proficiency on a school- developed rubric.
School	
Goal 6: Parents will demonstrate satisfaction with the school's programming and operation.	• Parents will rate the school, on average, at least 3.0 on a 4.0 point scale on a parent satisfaction survey.
Goal 7: The school will be financially stable.	• There will be no audit exceptions made by the school's external auditor. The school will have a balanced budget each fiscal year.
Goal 8: Students will participate.	• The school will fill at least 95% of available slots each year. • The school will re-enroll at least 90% of the eligible students enrolled at the end of the school year. • The school will develop a wait list equal to 20% of the school's total enrollment by July of each year. • The average daily attendance will be at least 90%. • The school will retain 90% of its eligible students from the start of the school year until the end.
Goal 9: The school will retain talented faculty.	• At least 90% of the staff eligible to return to the school for the next school year will do so. • The staff will rate the school, on average, at least 3.0 out of a 4.0 point scale on a staff satisfaction survey.

Organizing Your Accountability Plan

There are many different ways to create a template for an account-ability plan. We recommend that whatever you choose, pick a simple system that illustrates the connection between goals and measure-ments, 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 articu-lating goals for any sort of project: What is the goal? What will you do to achieve it? How and when will you measure your achievement? Here's one basic structure:

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

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 Open Meetings Act?

» 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, partic-ularly if these factors are part of your school's mission or are considered important by the local school district. 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 Meetings Act, 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 five-year 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.

Resources

National Association of Charter School Authorization Visit the National Association of Charter School Authorization for information, resources and guides for creating a strong accountability plan. http://www.qualitycharters.org/

SECTION 5:
SELLING YOUR IDEA

5A DEVELOPING A PROSPECTUS

An extensive amount of work will be done to design your charter school across the major areas of mission, culture, curriculum, grade configuration, finances and operations. The details of this plan are important in order to receive approval from your 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 proof-read any and every document that is distributed. A poorly executed document that has misspellings, typos and incorrect punctuation can be devastating, especially as a first impression. Think of this document as a professional resume that you tailor to fit each individual job description for which you are applying. The prospectus can include:

» Mission, vision, school focus/curriculum, and how the school fits the needs of the community

» All necessary contact information and school location or planned location

» Financial reports including budget, actuals and fund usage

» Staff bios for leadership

» Board member information

» Important policies and operational procedures

SELLING YOUR IDEA

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.

5B DRAFTING A HIGH-QUALITY CHARTER SCHOOL PROPOSAL

The Illinois Charter Schools Law requires 15 specific elements in all Illinois charter school applications. In addition, authorizers are required to give preference to proposals that demonstrate a high level of local pupil, parental, community, business, and school personnel support, set rigorous levels of expected pupil achievement, demonstrate feasible plans for attaining those levels of achievement; and are designed to enroll and serve a substantial proportion of at-risk children.

The Illinois Charter Schools Law also specifies that charter applications be written in the form of a contract. In practice, authorizers that solicit charter applications through a RFP, like the Chicago Public Schools, typically do not require this kind of formal contract. Instead, the Chicago Public Schools has developed its own contract template and terms for authorization; the final details are often negotiated following authorization. Outside Chicago, charter school designers should consider developing a brief contract with desired terms that makes reference to the school model described in the full charter application. Designers can include this contract either as a framing piece at the beginning of the application or as an appendix to the application itself. Charter applications that use the format and legal jargon of contracts throughout, however, are generally discouraged. This format can distract from the content and result in an application that is overly compliance-oriented, offering only limited detail about the school's design.

The Other Side

Evaluating a charter proposal and serving as a charter authorizer are serious public responsibilities, and it is appropriate for district officials to embark on the chartering process with care. You may wish to refer your local educational officials to INCS, as we can offer them resources and/or assistance in understanding and carrying out their charter-authorizing responsibilities in a fair, and thoughtful manner.

SELLING YOUR IDEA

How to Approach the Proposal

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 district as a set of completely new ideas. Ask questions before submitting the application, possibly even showing parts to district leaders to get their comments on how to make a better case.

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

The Illinois Charter School Applications

The Illinois Charter School Law directs local school district to approve proposals that:

» Demonstrate a high level of local pupil, parental, community, business and school personnel support

» Set rigorous levels of expected pupil achievement and demonstrate feasible plans for attaining those levels of achievement

» Are intended to enroll and serve a substantial proportion of at-risk children (although the Illinois Charter Schools Law is not intended to limit the establishment of charter schools to those that serve a substantial portion of at-risk children)

More specifically, the Illinois Charter Schools Law requires 15 specific elements in all Illinois charter public-school applications (105 IL CS5/27A-7):

The following requirements are found in section 27A-7 of the Illinois Charter Schools Law:

1. Name of the proposed charter school, which must include the words "Charter School"

» In addition to the name of the school, we recommend using this space to provide a short description of the nonprofit or sponsoring agency that will hold the charter and perhaps an overview of the genesis of the core design team's plan to create a new charter school.

2. Student enrollment criteria and policies

» This requirement includes the age or grade range, areas of focus, minimum and maximum numbers of pupils to be enrolled in the charter school, and any other legal admission criteria, such as attendance boundaries where permitted. The enrollment policy should be clear that enrollment is available to all students without regard to race, creed, color, sex, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, ancestry, disability or need for special education services. If there is a policy allowing siblings of current students to be given priority in admission, that should be stated.

» Explain how the school will successfully attract and recruit a broad range of students throughout the community it serves, including, for example, students with disabilities, English-language learners, gifted students, homeless students and those needing remedial instruction.

» Schools that have a mission of serving a specific population should identify that population (e.g., children of immigrants and refugees) and describe how the school will recruit such students.

» Regardless of whether your school will target a specific population within the district, provide detailed information about the expected student body at the proposed school, showing that the core design team has conducted sufficient

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research into the student population to understand its educational needs and demographics.

» Explain how the school will track Intent to Enroll forms and manage the applicant pool. Include a description of how communication will take place and who will be responsible for this task.

» Outline the application and enrollment procedures, including when enrollment opens, what information the parent/guardian must provide in order for the student to be enrolled or added to the lottery pool, application deadline, and when the lottery will take place, if one is necessary.

» Provide a brief narrative regarding your school's projected enrollment during the course of the initial charter period. If you will not allow new students to enroll after a certain grade, be sure to allow for attrition, both here and in your financial planning.

3. **Description and address of the proposed charter school facility**

» If you know where your facility will be, you must provide the address and a description of the premises, and we strongly recommend that you also submit, from the renter, either a Letter of Intent or a Memorandum of Understanding to rent or sell the facility to your charter school once it is authorized.

» If you have not already leased or acquired this facility, you must identify an additional site that potentially will be available by the time the charter school is to open. If the Letter of Intent or Memorandum of Understanding is specific and is binding on the facility's owner, you probably do not need to identify a second facility, but it would be prudent to do so, from both compliance and practical points of view.

» If you have secured a facility, provide as much detail about it as possible, including location, size, cost per square foot, layout, and any other important information. Show evidence that the site has been secured (Letter of Intent or Memorandum of Understanding), including proof of your fiscal accountability and capacity to meet lease or purchase

requirements. This information will be in the financial section of your application, but restate it briefly here.

» If possible, submit an inspecting architect's report that includes an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) report, with a clear explanation of how the facility will be accessible in accordance with the law in all aspects of school operations, including employment, buildings, programs and activities, communications, and information technology. (Ask whether the district imposes additional constraints, such as a list of approved architects among whom the school must choose).

» Provide a facility-needs assessment, indicating how many classrooms are needed, how many specials rooms (art, music, gym) are needed, minimum size of each classroom, library space needed, number of bathrooms needed, number of offices needed, amount of common space needed, and outdoor space needed. Be able to explain how your facility aligns with the needs assessment.

» If the facility you have identified is not currently ready for your school to move in, show a plan detailing how work that you plan will meet applicable building codes and support the proposed school's educational program. Include a description of the person responsible for project management and his or her qualifications, and a project timeline for renovations.

4. **The mission statement of the charter school, which must be consistent with the declared purposes of the charter schools law**

» This section should simply reflect the school's mission and should include vision statements that describe the reasons for founding the school. Define in broad terms the ideal, long-term impact of the school on the students who will study there and the community in which the school exists. Be concise.

» The declared purposes of the charter schools law can be found in section 27A-2(b). These purposes will include such goals as encouraging learning by establishing schools with rigorous standards, providing expanded choices, and encouraging the use of new teaching methods. Review this list in the Charter Schools Law on the INCS website, and keep it in mind when

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drafting this section of the application. It is not necessary, however, that the proposed school unequivocally meet each of these purposes.

5. Goals, objectives, and pupil performance standards

» Explain with a narrative overview the school's educational program. This should be an executive summary of the program and should be based on the school's mission and vision. The educational philosophy that the charter school will use as its foundation should be apparent, and special programs, schedules, and learning opportunities should be highlighted.

» Outline the school's goals as defined in the school's education plan. Consider eight to twelve broad goals, with the majority focusing on educational performance. Each goal should be a clear, measurable statement of what the school will accomplish with its students after they attend for a specific length of time.

» Provide the list of standards from the education plan. Explain clearly how these standards are aligned to the state's learning standards and to the goals of the school.

6. For conversion schools only: evidence of majority approval by the school's teachers, parents, and (if applicable) local school council

» The Illinois Charter Schools Law allows for existing public schools to convert to charter schools if there is majority approval to do so by the school's teachers, parents and local school council (if applicable). One reason a school might wish to convert to charter status is if it is in "restructuring" status under the federal No Child Left Behind law, which makes conversion to a charter school one of the options for restructuring a failing school.. This guidebook has been written with the assumption that your core design team is creating a new school, not converting an existing school. If, however, that is not the case, be sure to explain how your team determined that a majority of the current school's teachers and parents approve of the conversion to a charter, and show the results of your survey.

7. **A description of the school's educational program, pupil performance standards, curriculum, school year, school days, and hours of operation**

   » Provide a detailed description of the school's curriculum. This is one of the key areas of an application, so be sure to include:

      – Course scope and sequence by subject for each grade level served

      – Course outcomes and a clear alignment with Illinois Learning Standards and with the school's mission, goals, and educational philosophy

      – Evidence that the proposed curriculum is research-based and has been or will be effective for the proposed target population. Do not assume that the reader of the application will be familiar with or supportive of an established curricular program.

      – An explanation of how the curriculum/educational program will meet the needs of all enrolled students, including populations such as students with disabilities and English language learners

      – How the school will ensure the horizontal alignment of curricula among classrooms and the vertical alignment of curricula across grade levels

   » Define the instructional methodology that will be used to deliver this curriculum to the school's students. Include how teachers will individualize their instruction to meet the needs of students coming into the school with varying educational backgrounds, abilities and learning styles. This section should provide the reader with a clear picture of what a typical day looks like as the school delivers the specified curricula.

   » Provide a detailed description of how the school will incorporate assessment to ensure that students are making progress toward both short- and long-term goals. Describe the kinds of assessment that will be used at the school, such as tests, projects, essays, and portfolios. Explain how these assessments will ensure that the school's curriculum and instructional practices are effective. Describe how the charter

school will use assessment data to improve student academic progress.

» Define in detail any unique curricular aspects of the school's program, such as a service-learning component, character education, outdoor education, multicultural education, and extended day program.

» Provide a description of how the school will ensure the ongoing professional development of its faculty and staff. Include detail on specific methods such as individual professional development plans, staff-wide training, and assessment of progress made toward professional goals. Define how the inaugural staff will be trained and prepared prior to the school's opening and how, in later years, the school will support and assimilate teachers new to the school.

» Include the proposed school calendar, the daily schedule of classes, and academic and non-academic programs. Include an overview that notes how many instructional days are planned and the hours that the school will be open.

» Include the school's discipline plan, which can often be well explained within a section that also outlines the school's proposed culture. How will the school promote a positive academic environment and reinforce student intellectual, social and emotional development? What are the exact consequences for varying levels of discipline problems, from minor infractions to those warranting suspension or expulsion?

» If the school includes a high school, include information on the planned graduation requirements and how these requirements compare to the local school district's requirements.

8. **A description of the school's plan for evaluating pupil performance, the kinds of assessments that will be used to measure pupil progress towards achievement of the school's pupil performance standards, the timeline for achievement of those standards, and the procedures for taking corrective action in the event that pupil performance at the charter school falls below those standards.**

   » This section expands on the explanation of the school's goals and standards in Requirement 5 above, and, depending on how your application is organized, it might make sense to connect the two.

   » Include your accountability plan, which will illustrate how the school envisions measuring student performance to reach the school's goals and standards. Be sure to include clear, measurable statements of what the school will accomplish with its students at a given point in the school's development, as well as what assessment tools will be used to gauge whether the goals and benchmarks have been achieved (e.g., standardized tests, internal assessments, parent surveys, School Accountability Report). If the accountability measures are non-traditional, give the rationale for their selection, particularly with regard to how they conform to the school's educational philosophy.

   » Provide information on how the school will review and report its assessment data and academic success to parents, the broader community and the school district.

   » Describe the process by which school administrators and teachers will review assessments to facilitate data-driven decision-making. Describe how findings from this data review will be used to influence the education program, including instruction, curriculum, and professional development.

   » Although this requirement in the Illinois Charter Schools Law concerns pupil performance accountability, you may want to include operations, fiscal, governance and any other metrics from your accountability plan here as well. If not, be sure to include these measures elsewhere in your proposal to show

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that the school has specific plans to ensure that it will measure and report on its performance in these areas.

9. **Financial information**
    » This provision requires that you submit the following:
        – Evidence that the terms of the charter as proposed are economically sound for both the charter school and the school district
        – A proposed budget for the term of the charter
        – A description of the manner in which an annual audit of the financial and administrative operations of the charter school are to be conducted
        – A plan for the displacement of pupils, teachers, and other employees who will not attend or be employed in the charter school. (This last requirement applies to conversion schools.)
    » Break down the first three requirements. Submit a multi-year budget demonstrating that the terms of the charter will be economically sound for the school. Describe your audit process. And address the financial impact of the charter school on the local school district.
    » Include a budget package that includes the following:
        – incubation budget
        – first-year operational budget
        – five-year (or proposed charter term) operational budget
        – cash-flow budget
    » For all budgets and the budget narratives, show that you understand the reality of revenues and expenses within the school district and the larger geographic market, including accurate information for projected per-pupil revenue, federal grant funds, competitive salaries, benefits, special education costs as required by the authorizer, legal fees, audit costs, facility costs, and every other projected kind of revenue and expenditure.
    » Provide financial policies and procedures that the board and administration will follow to ensure that the school remains fiscally solvent and that appropriate internal controls are

implemented. Specify the reports to be generated and their frequency, and identify the party responsible for generating the report along with his or her qualifications. Describe fiscal review and monetary processes for the school and discuss who will be responsible, including his or her qualifications for this role. If you plan to hire staff to perform these functions, list minimum qualifications you will require.

» Describe the process that the school will follow to employ a Certified Public Accountant to conduct an annual, independent financial and operational audit. Explain how the school will disseminate the results from the audit to the school district and the appropriate state agencies.

» It is imperative that you understand the fiscal impact of your charter on the district. Districts outside Chicago have rejected charter applications based on "negative fiscal impact." That is to say, the district believes it will lose too much revenue to the charter operator, adversely impacting the traditional district schools.

– Research the district's financial situation and consider how your school will affect the district's finances.

– If possible, incorporate into your arguments recent local and national research on the financial impact of charters.

– Note that *some* financial impact is unavoidable under the charter school funding scheme, but point out that the district will adjust its staffing and expenditures to reflect the reduced number of students it serves. But don't assume that all expenses are variable.

– If you are starting with one or two grades and building over a period of years, note that the gradual reduction of students in regular district schools will give the district time to phase in changes they need to make Illlinois courts have found that the establishment of a charter school should not imperil the entire district. If the district will have to borrow funds to support the charter, that is a significant negative impact.

10. A description of the governance and operation of the charter school, including the nature and extent of parental, professional educator, and community involvement in the governance and operation of the charter school

» List the members of the core design team filing this proposal, including outside assistance as used. Provide evidence showing why this team has the collective capacity to have created successfully all aspects of this proposal.

» Include a summary of the school's by-laws, a copy of which should be included as an appendix.

– How board members are elected or appointed
– Who can serve on the board (we do not recommend that school employees be voting members of the board)
– When elections or appointments take place
– The length of board terms and whether there are term limits
– How many directors serve on the board (most by-laws include a range, e.g., 9–15 members). State that range as well as the number currently serving.
– Board officers and their roles
– How often the board will meet.

» Provide information on the way in which the current board was selected.

» Describe the primary responsibilities of both the board and the administration. Explain how the board of directors will receive information necessary to monitor the progress of the school and perform its governance duties.

» Supply a list of the school's primary governance and operational policies that the board has either already adopted or will adopt prior to the school's opening. This should include a conflict-of-interest policy and additional methods needed to ensure the sound governance and operation of the school.

» Provide a comprehensive organizational chart showing lines of authority among school leadership staff (*i.e.*, principal/ instructional leader, operations leaders, curriculum

coordinator, business manager, other key leaders) and specific operational responsibilities of key school personnel.

» Identify the Principal or School Leader candidate, if known. If unknown, describe the timeline and your plans for recruiting, hiring and allowing for the development of the principal or school leader.

» Include resumes and relevant information for any key members of the school, including members of the board, the school leader and other important school administrators. The emphasis should be on showing that the school will be in the hands of experienced, dedicated professionals.

» Explain how operations services (such as payroll, food service, etc.) will be delivered to the proposed school, including a specific time-frame and plan, relative cost structure, and the party ultimately responsible for service delivery. Provide the timeline and schedule for the activities your team will follow to ensure a successful school opening, if your application is approved.

» If contracting with a Charter Management Organization (CMO), Education Management Organization (EMO), or parent organization, describe the types of services to be provided by said partner, provide a draft contract, and include all related fees in your budget. Provide data for each CMO/EMO partner organization, addressing in each case its successful management of non-academic matters. Describe measures to monitor, evaluate, and enforce the performance of CMOs and EMOs under contract for non-academic support.

» Include a copy of the Articles of Incorporation for the entity proposing to hold the charter for the school and proof of 501(c)(3) status, if applicable. If you have applied for 501(c)(3) status but have not yet been approved, provide proof of having submitted your application.

11. Explanation of the relationship between the school and its employees

» Provide a description of the staffing model (i.e., number of students per classroom, teachers and aides per classroom, ratio of adults to students) for your proposed school. Include all academic and non-academic personnel and the number and type of positions.

» Include a clear explanation of how the school plans to classify its employees. If all of the school's employees will be "at-will" employees, say so.

» Outline who will be responsible for employment decisions, including recruiting, hiring, performance evaluation, retention, and discharge.

» Include job descriptions for all key employees, including teachers and administrators. These job descriptions are especially important and will help the reader better understand the school, particularly if non-traditional or unique roles or jobs are planned.

» Describe the school's employment policies, such as practices, benefits, leave policies, grievance policy, conflict of interest policy, classroom practices, and evaluation practices. Consider including the personnel policy manual in its entirety as an appendix.

» Describe your Design Team's strategy and timeline for recruiting, hiring and developing the proposed school's teaching staff. Define strategies that the school will implement to support the faculty and build a positive staff culture in order to maintain high retention rates. You may also refer here to the professional development section of the educational plan description.

» If your employees will be unionized, include a description of the bargaining unit and the status of negotiations with the employees' representatives.

12. An agreement between the parties regarding their respective legal liability and applicable insurance coverage

» This provision asks you to describe how liability will be allocated between the charter school and the district. Since most liability can be covered by insurance, this is, practically, a requirement that each party agrees to carry particular types and amounts of insurance.

» Explain what types of insurance the school plans to carry to protect itself and its students. See the section on insurance for more information.

13. A description of how the charter school plans to meet the transportation needs of its pupils and a plan for addressing the transportation needs of low-income and at-risk pupils

» Include your specific transportation plan, including an explanation of how it will meet student needs.

» This issue can be problematic for many charter developers. A charter school may be discriminating against children whose parents cannot transport them if the school does not provide busing. Alternatives are to set up parent carpools or provide bus tokens for high school students. It is important to provide evidence that you have a transportation plan and that you have fully considered the question.

14. Proposed effective date and term of the charter

» Identify the date your team is planning to open the school for its first year and the length of the charter requested. The initial term of the charter must be between five and ten years. You may want to reiterate here which grades your school will serve upon opening, and, if your school will follow a "roll-out" plan, how many will be added and when until the school is at full capacity.

15. Additional information reasonably required by ISBE

» Contact the ISBE charter school staff during the charter school development process to see if there are any specific additional

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data that they will require and to inquire which areas of charter applications typically require further information during the certification process. Areas ISBE has addressed in the past include a detailed educational plan and a special education program that meets all state and federal requirements.

In addition to these fifteen requirements, keep in mind that authorizers are required to give preference to proposals that demonstrate a high level of local pupil, parental, community, business, and school personnel support, set rigorous levels of expected pupil achievement, demonstrate feasible plans for attaining those levels of achievement; and are designed to enroll and serve a substantial proportion of at-risk children. With the exception of the community-support requirement, each of those factors is addressed in the requirements. We recommend that you affirmatively address the issue of community support.

» Describe the community the proposed school seeks to serve and demonstrate any connections that have been established with the community.

» Give specific details about how the founding committee has reached out to its target population, how many students and families have expressed interest in the school, and what other community support exists.

» Document the number of meetings you have attended and the number of people in attendance.

» Ask for letters of support from community leaders, community organizations, and local businesses.

» Ask parents to sign petitions or statements of intent to apply to the school.

» Submit these documents with your proposal. Include any vision for community involvement in the proposed school and the role of key community partnerships, including how the school leadership team will implement this vision.

» When the local school board holds its public meeting on the charter application, ask your supporters to be present, and ask one or two representatives of each constituency—parents, community leaders, business leaders--to speak in favor of the proposal.

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. Here are some basic suggestions for writing:

» 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, etc.

» Write in a respectful tone that reflects the founding committee's desire to work with the authorizer in providing an educational choice for students. 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 the authorizing agency, 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. A certain amount of hyperbole is inevitable, but 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. Don't try to write it all in a weekend, 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.

Resources

Chicago's request for proposals process was developed to provide strong planning assistance to charter school developers and is based directly on the requirements in the Illinois Charter Schools Law. Although application requirements and conditions in your district may vary somewhat, the Chicago application may be a helpful planning tool. http://cps.edu/NEWSCHOOLS/Pages/Process.aspx