Pennsylvania Coalition *of* Public Charter Schools

HOW TO START A CHARTER SCHOOL
Your Guide to the Five Phases

Anyone concerned with educational excellence can start a public charter school in Pennsylvania. Parents, educators and community members may decide to start a charter school for any number of reasons; to address the needs of an under-served population, to create new options that serve students differently, or simply to innovate and find new ways of educating students. Across the country, charter schools are one of the fastest growing educational options. This growth is due to a variety of factors, especially parents' desire for educational options. Maintaining the support of parents, the broader public, and their authorizing bodies requires charter schools to quickly establish a track record of strong academic achievement, while simultaneously operating what is, in essence, a non-profit organization. This initial success is absolutely crucial.

For those in the early stages of planning to start a charter school, I have great news! The Pennsylvania Coalition of Public Charter Schools (PCPCS) is here to help you navigate this challenging process. With the help of industry experts, we have created a step by step guide that provides key insights on each phase of starting a charter school. We provide general information about the start process, assistance with developing your vision and build a team, and a checklist of the components to be included in your business plan. We also walk you through the application and approval process and tell you what to expect on opening day! Included along the way are testimonials from several members of the charter school community who successfully opened a charter school as well as advice from highly knowledgeable charter school experts.

We hope this toolkit will provide the necessary guidance and best practices you will need during the start-up process of your new charter school. Once you've had a chance to review this guide, we invite you to register to attend our annual Charter School Fundamentals Seminar, which takes place every May in Harrisburg. During the seminar, you will be introduced with charter school experts who can answer your questions and share additional important information on how to start a charter school.

While opening a charter school is not an easy process, it is very rewarding to witness the difference that a charter school can make in the lives of students.
For more information please contact me at a.meyers@pacharters.org

Sincerely,

Ana Meyers
Executive Director
Pennsylvania Coalition Of Public Charter Schools
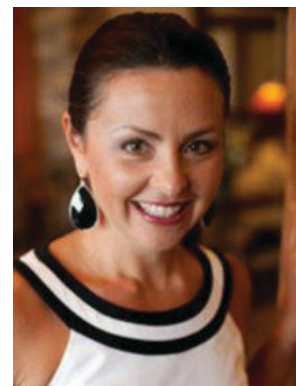
How To Start A Charter School
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Introduction: What is a Charter School?

A Public School of Choice

A charter school is an independent public school of choice. Charter Schools are governed by a governing Board of Trustees and operate under a charter, or contract, with their authorizer. Typically, the district school board in which the charter school is located is the authorizer. Cyber Charter Schools are approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Charter schools may be started by an individual or group of parents, community leaders, teachers, businesses, municipalities, community colleges, or other legal entities organized under the laws of the state. All charter schools must be as public non-profit corporations, and their boards are public governing bodies.

Charter schools are often designed to offer specialized programs, target specialized or underserved populations, or simply to offer a choice to communities. A charter school may offer a specialized curriculum, such as arts, science, or career education; focus on at-risk students, students with disabilities or drop-out prevention; or take an innovative approach to teaching or program design.

While largely free to innovate in program design and delivery, Pennsylvania charter schools operate under certain constraints. The charter school must:

- Be nonsectarian in its policies, practices, and operations.
- Not charge tuition or fees
- Be accountable to its parents, students, employees, and authorizer for its academic and financial performance
- Comply with requirements governing public records and public meetings
- Maintain all financial records that constitute its accounting system in accordance with current law
- Conduct annual financial audits
- Be non-discriminatory in its practice

One of the major challenges facing potential charter schools is an understanding of who their students are likely to be. Some founding groups have the misconceptions that they can test students prior to enrollment, turn away students who they see as not meeting a certain profile, or even charge tuition. None of these are true. Once the founding team has dispelled these beliefs it is critical to support the team in identifying the major characteristics of the students who will most likely apply to the school. In order to convince the authorizer that their program will be effective in meeting the needs of all their students, founding groups must have thorough knowledge of the students who are likely to apply. A school's target population is comprised of the students who are attracted to the school's mission and will make academic growth in the selected educational programs. A charter school may not exclude students who have special needs or behavioral challenges.

The Start-Up Process

Developing and opening a charter school is a significant and long-term commitment. Founders should allow at least two years from vision to reality. Building a strong founding group and ensuring sound research, planning, and implementation will take considerable time and dedication from all involved.

The process should be divided into the following phases. The consideration, actions and requirements involved in each step are described in the next sections.

Five Phases in the Start-Up Process

1 Vision/Team Building

2 Research and Development

3 Application and Approval

4 Preparing to Open

5 Moving Forward

Types of Charter Schools

Brick and Mortar - Brick and mortar charter schools have buildings where students attend regularly to takes classes and focus on teacher-led discussion and teacher knowledge imparted to students through face-to-face interaction at the schools' physical facilities located within the boundaries of the school district that granted the charter.

Cyber Charter- A cyber charter school uses technology to deliver a significant portion of curriculum and instruction to its students through the internet or other electronic means, without a school-established requirement that students be present at a supervised physical facility designated by the school, except on a very limited basis, such as for standardized test. Cyber charter schools receive charters through the Department of Education.

Regional Charter - Under the regional charter school provisions of the law, a charter school may apply to multiple school districts in order to be closely aligned with the population the school will serve. A charter school that intends to enroll a significant proportion of its students – for example, one-half of the student population – from a second school district could be established as a regional charter school, so that the districts that send the large majority of the school's students share oversight responsibilities.

New Start-Up - Most charter schools opening in Pennsylvania are new start-up schools.

Conversion Charter - Conversion charter schools are traditional public schools that have been converted to charter schools. The school must have operated for at least two years as a traditional public school before conversion. Application to convert to a charter school may be made by a parent, teacher, principal, district school board, or citizen. The application must be supported by a majority of the teachers and a majority of the parents. A majority of the parents must participate in the vote. The charter for a conversion charter school must identify the alternative arrangement that will be made to serve current students who do not choose to attend the school after its conversion.

Get the Lay of the Land

Starting a charter school requires an in-depth understanding of many issues, along with an enormous degree of commitment. Before starting out, you will want to get a sense of what is involved, both short term (during planning and start-up), and longer term (in successfully operating and growing your school in the years ahead).

To understand the issues, responsibilities, and commitment involved, we recommend exploring a variety of resources including those listed below. Once all of the school's founders have a feel for the undertaking, and you then decide to move forward, you will be returning to many of these resources in greater depth.

Research

The following links will give you a good overview of the major issues and process involved.
- If your district has a charter school web page, be sure to review the written school board policies regarding charter schools, their application process, new applicant support, and charter processes.
- The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) Charter Schools Office, http://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/CHARTER%20SCHOOLS/Pages/default.aspx
- National Charter School Resource Center Website, www.charterschoolcenter.org
- National Alliance For Public Charter Schools - https://www.publiccharters.org/

Network

You can learn a great deal from others involved with charter schools.
- Visit a variety of charter schools. Talk with the principal and others active in the development and running of the school.
- Attend charter school board meetings. They are open to the public.
- Attend school board meetings when charter schools are on the agenda.

As founders develop an understanding of the process, you will begin to establish a vision for your charter school.

Form Your Mission

In order to achieve your vision you must first define it. Consider the following questions. When you can answer them, you will be ready to create your mission statement.

Why Do You Want to Start A Charter School?

1. Who will your school serve? Is there an unmet need among this population?
2. What approach will you use in serving your students? Is your approach grounded in research, a particular academic theme, or an educational philosophy?
3. What are the defining characteristics and values that make your school distinctive and/or innovative?
4. How will your school effectively meet the needs of your community? What results will you deliver that will make your school a good choice for parents?

Your Mission Statement

The mission statement is possibly the most important part of your charter school plan. In one or two

sentences, the mission statement must characterize your school's purpose, focus, and goals. A clear mission statement will help you focus your efforts and build your support for you school. It is critical that your charter school mission be aligned with your organization's goals.

There are many resources on the web to help in writing effective mission statements. Also take some time to review the mission statements of successful charter schools, posted on their websites.

Assemble Your Team

At the start, your charter school may be nurtured by a small group of neighbors, teachers, or community members. You may want to include community leaders who can generate revenue and support. However, developing a successful charter school is a complex process which will demand the efforts of a number of experts. Your founding group may need to work with specialists with expertise in a number of areas but not limited to the following list.

- Education law, including federal, state, and local laws and policies
- Curriculum and instruction
- Assessment of student achievement
- Special education
- Systems technology
- Educational leadership
- Human resources
- Public school finance

- Accounting
- Management
- Governance
- Grant Writing
- Real estate
- Civil engineering/architecture
- Community organizing
- Public relations/marketing/fundraising

Continued on next page.

Will a Management Company be Part of Your Team?

Think about whether your school will contract with an educational management organization (EMO). These organizations work under a performance-based contract with the governing board to provide management services to charter schools. There are many such companies to choose from, and they vary widely in their arrangements with the charter school. Some provide only back-office administrative support, while others take a more active role in the operations of the school.

Founding groups should comparison shop. Look at the costs involved, contractual obligations, and contingencies, and the nature of the proposed working structure. Also, check the references and history of the organization, especially the past performance of other schools in their portfolio. Consult with your school district about the models you are considering.

Evaluate Feasibility

Your founding group has developed a mission for your school, and you have identified a strong team to work with you. Now is the time to determine whether you have the expertise, community support, funding, and team commitment to be successful. If you have not already done so:

1. Share your vision with community groups; determine community need and level of support.
2. Identify potential funding sources for support during startup and beyond.
3. Make sure you have a founding group that can devote much time to this endeavor.
4. Plan how your founding group will fund available resources and funding to devote to the start-up process.
5. Set aside resources for a strategic growth plan.

If your preliminary research supports moving forward, and your group is committed, it's time to roll up your sleeves and get to work!

To Remember…

Ideally, members of the founding team of a charter school have the following attributes:
- A track record of success in professional endeavors
- Intimate understanding of their community and demonstration of cultural competency
- Ability to manage people and build relationships
- Professionalism and strong communication skills
- Entrepreneurial drive and flexibility
- Ability to understand personal strengths and weaknesses and willingness to continually learn
- Belief that all students can and will achieve success

Lessons Learned:

From the classroom to the CEO, my purpose has always been to find innovative ways to help children learn. The journey to fulfilling this purpose has resulted in many lessons learned. For those with a vision to make a difference in the life of a child by providing an innovative educational experience, I encourage you to be courageous, be tenacious, be determined, be strong, and be open-minded. Starting a charter school takes a lot of hard work and determination that goes beyond the granting of a charter. Know the law, the regulations, and the requirements. Find good team members with diverse wells of knowledge who are willing to join you on the journey and never give up. Each child deserves the opportunity for an educational experience in which they can grow to their fullest potential.

Dr. Aiko Malynda Maurer is the founder and former CEO/Principal of the HOPE for Hyndman Charter School. Currently, Dr. Maurer is the Chief Executive Officer of the Central PA Digital Learning Foundation where she is leading the organization on a journey to create the Ideal Virtual Learning Experience for every learner.

Collaboration Is The Key To Success

For us "to-do list type" people, a guidebook like this one is the perfect tool to help us map out projects, set timelines, and assign tasks to group members based on their skill sets. While it might be tempting to split up all the work and go your separate ways to accomplish tasks independently, you are going to need to stick together! When it comes to planning and running schools, everything from budgets to calendars to facilities to professional development plans are all interconnected.

For instance, most curricular programs consist of lessons that are planned for specific lengths of time. Strict implementation guidelines are especially true with research-based programs, which means that if you expect to see the positive results you will need to implement the program you choose with fidelity. Planning the proper amount of time in the school day for each class, participating in (and paying for) the professional development the teachers need for program implementation, and purchasing the instructional materials that go along with the curriculum are all aspects that should be considered when selecting the programs that are best for your school.

Five Recommendations Related To Curriculum Selection:

(1) When planning the annual school calendar, make sure to include the prescribed amount of professional development time for the programs you select. **(2)** The schedule for the academic day must take into account how much time is required for each subject based on the curricular program you choose. **(3)** Consider how and where you will store the resources and materials that come with each program. **(4)** Make sure the budget for professional development aligns with the necessary training to implement new programs. **(5)** Determine whether or not you have the facilities to host professional development sessions on your own campus, or if your teachers will need to travel for training.

Committing to regular collaborative meetings with your founding group is one way to help ensure that you keep the lines of communication open, and that all group members are fully informed when making important decisions. As you make your way through this guide, the enormity the tasks before you may seem overwhelming

at times. Remember that you are not alone. You can count on political advocacy and promotion from the PCPCS leadership, expert advice and guidance from the PCPCS business partners, and professional camaraderie and encouragement from the PCPCS member schools. Together we serve Pennsylvania's community of school choice supporters, and we want nothing more than to see you succeed!

Amanda Lake is the owner of Lakeside Leadership Services, an educational leadership and organizational development consulting and coaching company that provides support to schools, small businesses, and non-profit organizations. Before founding Lakeside Leadership Services, Amanda served as a Pennsylvania charter school leader for sixteen years, including twelve years as a charter school administrator. She holds a Master's degree in Educational Leadership and Administration and is a Pennsylvania certified K-12 Principal, Mid-Level Mathematics Teacher, and Elementary Education Teacher. For six years Amanda also facilitated online graduate-level courses in instructional program management and evaluation, as well as human resources leadership and management for aspiring school administrators. Amanda is currently a doctoral student in Regent University's Doctorate of Strategic Leadership (DSL) program. Amanda's academic focus on learning and development enables her to identify practical research-based solutions to her client's challenging problems, while also helping them learn to implement these best practices in their organizations. Amanda is also a Gallup-Certified Strengths Coach.

Create a Business Plan

There is much to be done. The founding group should create a business plan and set up committees to work on each of the areas addressed in the business plan. A detailed business plan will serve several functions.

- It will provide your founding group with the framework you need to effectively develop your school.
- It will pull together the results of your research and design efforts to support the application you will later submit to your authorizer.
- It will provide potential supporters with a clear idea of what you intend to do and how you will accomplish it.

The following two pages provide a handy checklist showing the nine key components of a business plan for a charter school. Be sure to include all components:

1. Executive Summary
2. Mission Statement
3. School Design
4. Market Analysis
5. Management Plan
6. Operations Plan
7. Facility Plan
8. Financial Plan
9. Supporting Documents

Business Plan Checklist

The following two pages provide a checklist for the nine key components of a charter school business plan. Additionally, your team should also review the requirements of the PDE's charter school application, as some of the required sections are more detailed than what is typically found in traditional business plans. Developing your detailed plan will take extensive work, and you should plan to consult closely with your team of experts during this process.

Executive Summary
❑ Write a synopsis highlighting the key elements of the business plan, no more than two pages.

Mission Statement
❑ Copy the statement you wrote in Phase 1

School Design
Describe the school, including plans in the following areas:
❑ Instructional focus- Describe your curriculum and approach, and the ideas upon which they are based. Consider that:
  - Charter schools must participate in the state accountability system including PSSAs (the annual Pennsylvania System of School Assessment), for grades 3-8, and Keystone exams (high school)
  - Curricula must be aligned with the PA Core Standards.

- Refer to the Pennsylvania Standard Aligned System (SAS) for information on approved standards, assessments, and recommended educational strategies. https://www.pdesas.org/default.aspx
- ❑ Goals and how they will be achieved.
  - Consider the K-12 Assessment requirements for PA public schools.
  - What are your school's academic performance objectives for raising student achievement, and how will progress be measured?
  - What other goals are key to your school's mission?
- ❑ Governance – Describe how the school will be overseen.
  - What is the planned composition of the governing board?
  - What other advisory groups will be involved?
  - How will decisions be made?
  - Be aware of Conflict of Interest rules related to charter school governance.

Market Analysis

This will require demographic research. Your plan should include the following:
- ❑ Describe your target students.
- ❑ Provide data on numbers or target students in your area.
- ❑ Analyze your competition, considering the strengths and weakness of the other schools in your target area.
- ❑ Summarize marketing methods, which may include community meetings, door-to-door contact, brochures and posters, TV/radio/print ads, mailings and news coverage.
- ❑ Provide survey results and other evidence of community interest, such as letters of intent from parents, or applications.

Management Plan

Describe how the school will be managed. Include the following items:
- ❑ Organizational chart showing lines of authority for the staff and board.
- ❑ Job responsibilities and qualifications for each position. Remember that all teachers must be highly qualified and at least 75 percent must be certified in their field. This includes specialty area teachers. Additionally, 100% of special education teachers must have PA special education certification.
- ❑ Positions, resumes, and completed statement of financial ethics forms for people already serving on the board.
- ❑ Roles and qualifications of any subcontractors.
- ❑ Role and responsibilities of an educational management organization, if selected.
- ❑ Fiscal policies and procedures to safeguard funds and discourage fraud.
- ❑ Staff recruitment plan.
- ❑ Staff training and evaluation policies.

Operations Plan

- ❑ Logistics – Consider the daily schedule, the annual calendar, student transportation, meals, hall traffic between classes, restrooms, gym, library, and playground usage, before and after school activities, and so on.
- ❑ Administration – How will administrative and reporting responsibilities be handled?
- ❑ School Building – How will the facility be managed and maintained?

Continued on next page.

- ❑ Security – Describe your plans for the safety and security of students, staff, and facility.
- ❑ Technology – Describe your plans for the installation, maintenance, security, and management of computers, internet, phones, and other electronics.

Facility Plan

Describe the school building you are seeking or have selected. Include gross square footage, number and placement of restrooms, size and accessibility of classrooms, specialized areas (labs, libraries, etc.) non-academic space (nurse's office, etc.), playground, parking, and bus and parent drop-off areas.

- ❑ Needs assessment – Your needs assessment should include a list of the features you seek in your startup design, student grades and numbers, enrollment projections, your resources and your target geographical area.
- ❑ Include a pro forma budget describing the costs involved in acquisition, and operation.
- ❑ Keep in mind that you may open in a less-than-ideal facility, and move on to the state-of-the-art school of your dreams at a later time. In this case, you should create a short-term facility plan for start-up, and a long-term facility plan for when you are ready to move.
- ❑ Consider working with a specialized charter school developer (See Appendix C)
- ❑ For detailed guidance on facility selection, preparation, and financing (See Appendix C)

Financial Plan

This should be prepared with your business manager or accountant. An accountant or business manager specialized in charter school financing may be able to help with revenue and expense projections. Your financial plan should describe the financial condition and projections of your organization for the planning period, first year, and long-range through the term of the charter (usually five years). Include:

- ❑ Operating budget
- ❑ Capital budget
- ❑ Cash flow spreadsheet
- ❑ Identification of funding sources, including per-pupil funds, private individuals, local businesses and organizations, national foundations and federal grants

Supporting Documents

Include documents referenced in your business plan, such as:

- ❑ Articles of Incorporation
- ❑ Non-profit status
- ❑ By-laws
- ❑ Statement regarding plans to secure insurance coverage
- ❑ Resumes
- ❑ Curriculum summary
- ❑ Founding group list, including resumes, clearances and role of each member.

While your founding group is developing your business plan, you will also be continuing your efforts to grow your community support and identify and recruit the individuals who will eventually serve on your governing board.

Startup planning for a new charter school can be overwhelming, as a result, some components get more attention than others, but all are equally important to the future success of your school at start up and beyond. Don't be afraid to seek the advice of others that have gone through it, it can be beneficial. This section provides guidance for developing a dynamic technology roadmap that correlates with your organization's overall goals and incorporates various areas of technology.

Key considerations when preparing a technology plan/roadmap:

- Ensure your planning goals directly correlate to your School's core mission and goals, as well as other comprehensive plans (required or otherwise).
- Keep in mind that technology delivery is now a mission-critical utility, no different than electricity and water. Don't oversimplify it!
- Embrace a flexible model that enables your technology to be implemented over several years. Don't fall into a "set it and forget it" mentality! This is important especially as you ramp-up enrollment and staff over a couple of years.
- Form a technology committee comprised of diverse stakeholders that will help to develop and monitor the plan.
- Investigate research-based technology strategies and tools that empower and expand student learning.
- Provide continuous professional staff development to ensure educators obtain proficiency in various learning practices.
- Plan an annual initial budget (short-term) while keeping a long-range vision in mind. For example, what do you need to have in your budget to be operational in Year 1 knowing that in Year 2 and Year 3 you will have increased your student population and implemented more robust education options?
- Don't forget to identify external funding sources/ programs like E-Rate and other grants that can help to offset costs.

Funding will always be front of mind for school leaders, no matter what the situation may be. Every dollar counts. Envision your planning strategy as "Short and Long-Term". Before you start having budget discussions here are some creative sources of funding and cost savings.

Utilizing Federal and State Grants or Programs

Many schools, particularly high-need schools, lack the connectivity, resources, and support for teachers to be able to implement digital learning strategies that can lead to improved student outcomes. Federal grants or funding programs may be able to help fund innovative technology-based learning strategies.

E-Rate – Is a federal funding program that has an annual funding CAP of $3.9B. The E-rate program provides up to 90% discounts to eligible schools that apply for funding requests for services such as Internet Access, Network Equipment, and Basic Maintenance. A school's funding level is determined by the student population and income needs. Schools must submit an annual application for funding. For more information: www.usac.org/sl

E-Rate provides funding subsidies that ultimately help a charter to:
• Reach its education technology goals and roadmap
• Build-its WI-FI network and data cabling infrastructure
• Boost its Internet access service level and connect multiple buildings via a Wide Area Network
• Reduce its annual operating budget and help predict technology operating expenditures

Remy Bibaud founded Intelafunds, a niche consulting firm in 2003 and has performed in various roles from inception to sale/merger with AdvanEdge Solutions. She handles business development for the education practice which provides consulting to K12 schools nationwide in telecommunications, information technology, network design/infrastructure, and E-rate services.

Plan to Start Early

It is advisable to start the process of preparing your application early so you have time to present your best possible effort. While not required by law, some districts request that the charter planners submit a letter of intent to apply several months prior to the application deadline. It is recommended for the applicant to consult with the school district to ensure that all district policies and procedures are followed and for support in preparing the application.

Charter school applications are due by the close of business on October 1st (cyber charter schools) or November 15th (brick and mortar charter schools) of the year prior to the planned opening*. However, upon approval, the school may delay opening until the following school year. By law, a school board receives and reviews all charter school applications, holds an initial hearing within 45 days of receiving the application, and within 75 days of the first hearing, must approve or deny the application.

*Please note that the deadline in Philadelphia may change year to year. Please contact the Philadelphia Charter School Office for the current deadline.

Brick and Mortar Charter School Application and Approval Timeline			
Notify school district of intent to apply	**November 15** Completed application due to school board	**Within 45 days of Receiving Application** School district must hold a hearing on the application	**Within 75 days of the first hearing date** School board must announce a decision

Cyber Charter School Application And Approval Timeline				
October 1st Applications are due to the Pennsylvania Department of Education	**End of November Through the Beginning of December** Public hearings are held.	**Within 120 Days of Receipt of Application** Applications are approved or denied.	**120 Days Prior to the Applicants Proposed Start Date** Revised applications are due	**Within 60 Days of Receipt of Revised Application** Revised applications are approved or denied.

Steps to Application and Approval

Activities for this phase may happen in roughly the following order:

1. Review the Pennsylvania state charter school application, and determine whether or not your district requires its own customized application.
2. Determine who will be responsible for each section.
3. Consider working with a grant writer or experienced professional to assist in preparing the application.
4. Notify your school district of intent to apply, and ascertain submission requirements.
5. Prepare your application, seek feedback, and make final revisions. This is a very time consuming portion of the process, plan accordingly.
   a. Incorporate relevant parts of your business plan into the application.
   b. Ensure that each section completely, accurately, and clearly addresses the question. It is possible that

additional information submitted post-deadline will not be accepted.

    c.   Do not over-promise expected outcomes, curricular programs, compensation, etc. Be prepared to offer supporting documentation for each section of the application.

    d.   Build in time for a revision stage. Circulate your draft application to specialists and others in the community and carefully consider their feedback in your revisions.

    e.   Ensure that the format and all submission requirements are followed.

6.   Submit the application by the appropriate deadline.

7.   Authorizer Review

    a.   The school district has 45 days to hold a hearing and then an additional 75 days from the time of the first hearing to make a decision.

    b.   The process will include an interview/presentation component during which the school board will request clarification on aspects of the application.

8.   The authorizer then votes to approve or deny the application. The school board meeting is public, and attendance by applicants is necessary.

If approved, you will move on to Phase 4: Preparing to Open, described in the next section.

Denial

If the school board denies your application, it will provide specific written reasons which are statutorily valid. Upon denial, your group has three choices:

1.   If you believe the authorizer is in error in denying your application, you may appeal to the district or to the state Charter Appeals Board (CAB).

2.   You may reapply to the district the following year, using the feedback from the review process to improve your application.

3.   You may determine the opening a charter school is not practical for you at this time and discontinue your effort.

Lessons Learned:

Use your resources. Use them wisely. Use them often. And, expand your resources. Starting a charter school in Pennsylvania is a challenging endeavor. Working with a group of individuals and organizations vested in providing public school choice is the only path to success. There are far too many obstacles to overcome in PA for anyone to think they can go down this path alone.

Who are your resources? Your fellow school founders, neighbors, community members, community, state, and national organizations that promote public school choice, charter school-friendly businesses, local and state-level politicians, a charter school attorney, a charter school accountant, and a charter school-knowledgeable real estate developer or broker.

Not sure where to find some of these resources? Check out the Sponsors page of the PCPCS website and learn more about charter-friendly and charter-knowledgeable business partners.

Beth Jones is currently the CFO at Insight PA Cyber Charter School. Beth is one of the Founders of Collegium Charter School (est. 1999) and worked there as a school leader until 2017. Beth is currently using her resources wisely in her efforts, along with a group of community members, to bring a charter school to Coatesville. Beth serves as the Secretary of the PA Coalition of Public Charter Schools and as a West Whiteland Township Supervisor. Beth holds an MBA, M.Ed., PA Principal Certification, and is SPHR certified.

Most charter schools that make application for a charter in a district will initially receive a denial of their application. If you believe the authorizer erred and want to continue the process, you have two (2) choices. The first choice is to review the objections raised by the district, revise your charter, and resubmit the charter to the district for consideration. You may engage in this process immediately upon receiving notification that the application was denied. The district would then have an obligation under the Charter School Law to review and decide in at the first public school board meeting occurring at least forty-five (45) days after receiving the resubmitted application.

After the initial application denial or after denial of your resubmission, you may elect to appeal the decision of the local board of school directors to the Charter School Appeals Board ("CAB") in Harrisburg. The Charter School Law requires an applicant seeking review from the CAB to obtain signatures from 1,000 people or 2% of the school district's population, whichever is fewer. The appealing charter school must obtain these signatures from residents of the district although the individuals signing the petition are not required to have children able to enroll in the school. The signature gathering must be overseen by a resident of the district who is at least 18 years of age.

After gathering the required number of signatures, the applicant must then obtain approval from the Court of Common Pleas certifying that the signatures obtained meet the statutory requirement. This process requires a hearing before the Court of Common Pleas and may require testimony from the individuals who oversaw the gathering or those who gathered the signatures.

Once the court has approved the signatures the applicant can take an appeal to the CAB and ask that they review your application for a charter. The process before CAB involves a review "de novo" of the entire application and record. This means the CAB reviews the application anew and without any deference given to the local school district decision. The CAB may require briefing of issues raised by the district in objection to your application. A hearing

officer is usually appointed by CAB to oversee the process and the appeal could take as much as four (4) to six (6) months.

At this stage of the process, help from counsel and guidance on the proper method of obtaining of signatures is critical because if the signatures are not properly procured, the district can have them stricken and prevent you from getting reviewed by the CAB which means the application process returns to the initial application stage.

Brian H. Leinhauser is a founding Partner of The MacMain Law Group, LLC. Brian has assisted charter schools in applications for new charters, hearings before local Boards of school directors, appeals to the Commonwealth Charter School Appeal Board, and defending non-renewal and revocation proceedings. Brian also provides all education institutions with advice on legal issues that face them including regulatory compliance, real estate, litigation, employment, special education, and governance.
He represents private and public education institutions from K-12 public schools to universities and colleges in all phases of their existence.
Professional Associations & Recognition
Professsional Associations & Recognitions: Pennsylvania Bar Association, American Bar Association, Defense Research Institute, Civil Rights and Governmental Liability Group, Labor and Employment Defense Group, Pennsylvania Super Lawyer – named Super Lawyer 2017 and previously named Rising Star 5 times in the field of Employment Law

Phase 4: Preparing to Open

Formalize Your Plans

With your application approved, you and your team will have just a few months to prepare to welcome staff and students. During this time, you should continue building strong working relationships with your partners, community, and new personnel.

Here are the six things you need to do to formalize your plans:

1. **Form and train your governing board.** The governing board may include some or all of the founding team members, or its makeup may be entirely different. The function of the governing board is ongoing oversight and policy-making. It is advisable to seek governing board members who have expertise in accounting, management, and education, as well as community and parent members. Best practices suggest a minimum of five to nine members. Pennsylvania's Act 55 of 2017 requires the governing board to receive PDE approved training to make sure that all board members understand their roles and responsibilities.

2. **Get legal advice and establish a formal organization.** If you have not already done so, you will need to file for many or all of the following: articles of incorporation, nonprofit or 501(c)3 status, sales tax exemption, federal employer identification number, and an AUN number from the Department of Education. In addition, the governing board will need to adopt the by-laws and policies and formalize the administrative structure.

3. **Develop formal board-approved operating agreements** with service providers in areas such as food service, transportation, legal, and so on. Remember that meals for students receiving free or reduced price breakfast or lunch must meet federal guidelines.

4. **Secure start-up and ongoing funding.** Locate resources that may be of help in this area, including private donations, bank loans, and grant money.

5. **Finalize facility plans.** Secure your facility and develop a work schedule to cover renovations, new construction, permits, required inspections, certificate of occupancy, insurance, technology installation and furniture delivery.

6. **Prepare for opening day.** Develop an action plan and timeline for all that must take place prior to the first day of school, to include, but not limited to:
   a. Develop a plan to recruit, hire, and retain quality administrators, faculty, and staff.
   b. Plan orientation and professional development.
   c. Confirm the proposed school calendar (academic and administrative) and secure board approval.
   d. Create systems for accounting, staff benefits, payroll, banking, purchasing, transportation, food services, legal services, health services, technology, student records management, security and emergency management.
   e. Establish enrollment and lottery procedures (See Appendix D).
   f. Conduct recruitment activities designed to reach your target students.
   g. Write employee handbook and student code of conduct.
   h. Purchase supplies, equipment, and instructional materials.
   i. Prepare the offices, classrooms, and other areas.
   j. Finalize curriculum and scheduling.

The Governing Board

The charter school governing board is the entity legally responsible for the operation and continuing oversight of the school. The governing board authorizes payments, hires, enters into contracts, approves applications for grants and other funding, and is held responsible for compliance with charter school law, PA School Code, The Sunshine Act, and other requirements.

Board members should possess the skills, knowledge, integrity, and commitment to carry out their roles and responsibilities honestly and effectively. A Board nominating committee should interview prospective board members and check their references. Board of Trustees members are unpaid and in addition to providing the 3 Pennsylvania background checks, they should also submit a statement of financial ethics form and adhere to Conflict of Interest restrictions.

Lessons Learned:

Mission remains the essential element for the success of any school. It should permeate the entire process of an educational organization's goal setting, delivery, and evaluation for their program.

The mission should not be merely an expressed rhetorical goal, but instead be measurable one. More than aspirational, it becomes a commitment to the community you have chosen to serve.

The school's mission should imply a method of providing education. It should hold the provider accountable not only to academic results, but also to a code of conduct and a standard of quality in its delivery. Finally, a mission should be subject to frequent inspection and review to ascertain if the measurable results achieved continue to be aligned with the initial organizational aspirations.

The mission of a school should capture both the theoretical underpinnings and practical operations of a successful school. It speaks to the very essence of a school's existence.
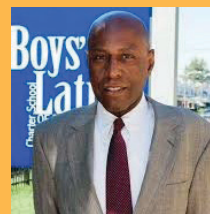
David P. Hardy is the Co-Founder and retired CEO of Boys' Latin of Philadelphia charter school. Boys' Latin, which opened in 2007 in West Philadelphia, is Pennsylvania's first and only single-gender charter school. Its enrollment is 98% African-American and 74% economically disadvantaged. In its first four graduating classes, Boys' Latin has sent 85% of graduates to post-secondary education-80% of which attended four-year colleges and sending more African-American males to college than any high school in Pennsylvania. The school has been featured in the Wall Street Journal and on NBC with Megyn Kelly.

Founding a charter school is not for the faint of heart! Nor should it be, since there are few things as important as the education of children. To successfully navigate the adversarial (and often contentious) application and start-up process, charter school founders must form and maintain a clear, consistent, and effective approach to communication – particularly when speaking to prospective families and the broader community. Here are three researched-based points, identified by the noted public opinion expert Frank Luntz, that should be helpful in forming and communicating your vision and message.

- **Keep it real.** By a wide margin, parents and families want public education to deliver true preparation for real life, including the skills and experience to accomplish real-world achievements while still in school.

- **Stay positive**. Communicate the ideas and solutions that you support, rather than dwelling on the problems and mistakes of others.

- **Advocate for children**. The idea that every child deserves an excellent education that prepares them for a secure, successful future and a better quality of life is one that people from all backgrounds strongly embrace.

Charter school founders who take seriously the responsibility to provide better education options that prepare all children for a future of achievement, and who communicate this commitment in everything they say and do, will themselves find the success they seek.

Stephen Catanzarite is a founder and the Managing Director of Lincoln Park Performing Arts Center in Midland, Pennsylvania. At Lincoln Park, he was a key leader in the development of the Lincoln Park Performing Arts Charter School, and served as the school's first Dean of Arts. He is the founder and former CEO of Baden Academy Charter School, which integrates and infuses the creative and performing arts across the curriculum, and currently serves as board president. A graduate of Carnegie Mellon University, Stephen is a member of the board of directors of the Pennsylvania Coalition of Public Charter Schools. Stephen holds a Master of Science in Education from Franciscan University, with an emphasis in online learning.

Working Toward Charter Renewal from Day One

Once your new school has opened its doors, and your first students have settled in, a round of congratulations is certainly in order. However, as exciting, complicated, and challenging as the journey has been, the work is far from over. In fact, now the real work of operating and growing a successful, quality charter school begins.

Charter schools are accountable to their students and their community to provide a high quality education in the manner described in their application and their charter. It is the responsibility of the charter school CEO, board, and authorizer to monitor the charter school and to verify that the academic and fiscal practices of the charter are appropriate and in compliance with the law and their charter.

Here are three tips to help you stay on course for charter renewal starting when your school opens:
- Study your charter. What goals, actions, and processes have you agreed to? Develop and follow a plan to ensure timely and appropriate performance in each area.
- Form an Accountability Committee. Make sure the members represent the entire school community. The principal, a teacher, a board member, a parent, and a student will all contribute greatly to the committee, guiding the use of policy and data in decisions.
- Work closely with your authorizer. The authorizer knows and can help you understand district processes and policies as they apply to charter school monitoring. Consult regularly with your authorizer, be responsive to authorizer requests, keep the lines of communication open, and resolve issues promptly.

Understand Pennsylvania Rules for Quality and Accountability

Below are standards for charter school quality and accountability that will be taken into account at charter renewal time. This list is not exhaustive and will vary by authorizing district. By keeping on top of these from the beginning, you will be in the best possible position to be granted a renewal of your charter.

Academic Quality and Accountability
- The school implements research-based curriculum and instruction methods, aligned with the mission of the school, that facilitate achievement for all students.
- Charter schools that fail to meet the requirements for student performance stated in the charter may be subject to district intervention, termination, or non-renewal.

Continued on next page.

Lessons Learned:

Opening a charter school in a suburban district, particularly one that performs adequately, can be a challenge. The chartering process can take years and can prove to be about more than just education. Keep this in mind: Opening a charter school can sometimes be about politics, control, and funding. As you approach each challenge, it is important to stay positive, choose your words carefully, and take the high road often.

Wendy began her early professional years with Johnson and Johnson as a software engineer. After leaving J&J and receiving her master's degree from the University of Pennsylvania, she consulted with Fortune 50 companies on issues related to overall business effectiveness, with a focus on improving an organization's culture and analyzing its business processes.

Financial Quality and Accountability
- The school fulfills its fiduciary responsibilities for public money and maintains transparent fiscal practices and records according to non-profit, federal, state, and local regulatory and reporting requirements. Fiscal decisions are made to promote the school's mission and advance achievement of all students.
- Charter schools are required to submit annual reports to PDE and retain the services of an independent auditor to annually conduct an audit. These reports are then reviewed by the charter school authorizer. The charter school must develop a corrective action plan if the authorizer identifies a deteriorating financial condition.
- Charter schools that violate law, fail to meet financial standards, or fail to adhere to the terms of their charter, face possible termination or non-renewal.

Governance Quality and Accountability
- The school provides government and leadership that promote student performance and school effectiveness.
- Charter schools that compromise the health, safety, or welfare of the student may be immediately terminated.

Operational Quality and Accountability
- The school operates effectively and efficiently through the appropriate use of resources. The school engages in a process of continuous self-improvement in order to increase the effectiveness of its educational program and ability to meet its mission and charter objectives.
- Charter schools that fail to do this face possible termination or non-renewal.

Lessons Learned:

Keep students at the center of everything in your school! Creating a successful school presents a wide array of challenges that may sometimes seem removed from the material realities of teaching and learning. Stay focused: students, their well-being, and their growth and success must be the driving force at the heart of every choice you make. Don't let the red tape, politics, or trendy ideas of the day get in the way of delivering the highest-quality instruction, curriculum, and teachers to your students. Rather, make it your first priority that everyone is learning every day—you, your fellow leaders, your faculty and your kids—and let that guide your decisions.

Kelly Davenport, Ed.D. is the founder and CEO of the Freire Schools Collaborative, a regional non-profit organization that leads and supports a network of high-performing public schools in underserved neighborhoods in Philadelphia and Wilmington, Delaware.

Act 55 of 2017, School Director and Trustee Training Programs – Pennsylvania Department of Education
https://www.education.pa.gov/Schools/Governance/Act55/Pages/default.aspx

Building Hope
http://buildinghope.org/

Certification – Pennsylvania Department of Education
https://www.education.pa.gov/Educators/Certification/Pages/default.aspx

Charter School Capital
https://charterschoolcapital.org/

ED's Charter School Program – US Department of Education
https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oii/csp/index.html

EdReports.org
https://www.edreports.org/

Future Ready PA Index – Pennsylvania Department of Education
https://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/ESSA/FutureReady/Pages/default.aspx

National Alliance for Public Charter Schools
https://www.publiccharters.org/

Pennsylvania Charter Schools – Pennsylvania Department of Education
https://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/Charter%20Schools/Pages/default.aspx

Pennsylvania Charter Schools – Basic Education Circular (BEC)
https://www.education.pa.gov/Documents/Codes%20and%20Regulations/Basic%20Education%20Circulars/Purdons%20Statutes/Charter%20Schools.pdf

Pennsylvania Coalition of Public Charter Schools
http://pacharters.org/

Pennsylvania Cyber Charter Schools – Basic Education Circular (BEC)
https://www.education.pa.gov/Documents/Codes%20and%20Regulations/Basic%20Education%20Circulars/Purdons%20Statutes/Cyber%20Charter%20Schools.pdf

Standards Aligned System (SAS) – Pennsylvania Department of Education
https://www.pdesas.org/default.aspx

What Works Clearing House – Institute of Education Sciences
https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/