

## **CHECKLIST FOR PLANNING A CHARTER SCHOOL**

Careful, thoughtful planning is the key to the success of any enterprise. Charter schools are no exception. The payoff, however, will be well worth the effort in creating the vision and educational mission conceived by the organizers. Maintaining optimism and a commitment to involving other people in meaningful ways will be important ingredients to success.

### **PASSING LEGISLATION**

- Talk with friends and acquaintances that have similar concerns about education issues and who believe in the charter school concept.
- Create a grassroots support group.
- Educate a core of state legislators so that they understand the charter school concept and how it will benefit students.
- Find a sponsor for a charter school bill.
- Hold informational meetings in election areas so that constituencies are well informed about charter schools and can communicate their support to their legislators.
- Be prepared and available to testify to the state legislature regarding the benefits of charter schools, and the key components of charter school legislation.
- Prepare accurate and clear information that the public can use to answer questions from the opposition.
- Don't give up.

### **DEVELOPING SUPPORT FOR CREATING A CHARTER SCHOOL**

- Invite groups of people to meet and discuss the concept of creating a charter school.
- Once there is a small core group of interested people, begin the process for defining the concept for your charter school.

## CREATING THE CONCEPT FOR YOUR CHARTER SCHOOL

- Talk with groups of people who have the same education concerns you do. Invite them to a meeting to begin the discussion of what kind of school they want for their children.
- Divide the group of interested people into specific areas of interest to research questions about the kind of school your group has agreed to — such as a back to basics school or a school which emphasizes technology.
- Set deadlines for reporting back to the group with concrete information and ideas that answer the questions. Prepare information for everyone so that all involved are well informed about every aspect of the research.

## CREATING COMMUNITY SUPPORT

- Once the concept has been finalized, the vision clearly articulated, and the mission defined, begin to hold informational meetings to bring other interested people into the process.
- Prepare press releases.
- Meet with community groups interested in grassroots education reform.

## CREATING THE DESIGN FOR THE CHARTER SCHOOL

- Elect a temporary “board” and committee chairs.
- Set guidelines for making decisions and resolving disagreements on issues.
- Include teachers and administrators in the planning process who support your charter school concept.
- Further divide the research task among the interested participants by creating committees with specific responsibilities. Divide the tasks into key areas such as curriculum, textbooks, governance, personnel, etc.
- Divide the assignments into phases, which will help to maintain the integrity of the mission. For example, one committee might be responsible for researching kindergarten through third grade reading curriculum.
- Before they move on to researching and reviewing the instructional materials which they recommend for use to teach this area of curriculum, committee members should come back to the total group and work on agreement in philosophy for teaching reading at the primary level so the search for materials will be consistent with that agreed upon approach.
- Prepare the Charter Application to the School District Board or the State Department of Education [or other sponsor].

- ❑ Work in a positive relationship with board members, the superintendent and other people who will be responsible for deciding the success of your effort.
- ❑ Be well prepared. There is no substitute for having the answers to the questions in advance.
- ❑ Organize support.
- ❑ Create a professional application document. Make sure you have addressed all district and state requirements in advance.

#### **NEGOTIATING THE CHARTER CONTRACT**

- ❑ Present your charter concept in the light of benefiting children and the school district.
- ❑ Be cooperative and understanding of the constraints and fears of the district.
- ❑ Be very clear regarding the areas that are “non-negotiables.” In this way you’ll ensure that your concept is not diluted to the point that you lose it’s distinctiveness.
- ❑ Prepare in advance, with legal counsel, areas that cannot be negotiated due to the law.
- ❑ Think in advance about possible services you may want to “buy back” from the school district, such as support for special education students, payroll services and warehouse ordering use.
- ❑ Don’t give up. Be prepared to appeal, if the local district denies your charter request.

#### **LOCATE A BUILDING**

- ❑ Make it known to the public what the school’s needs are so that every opportunity is given for interested business people or philanthropists to help.
- ❑ Have the team in charge of finding a location investigate whether or not possible locations meet the state law for a school and how much remodeling would be required to bring it up to those requirements.
- ❑ See if the school’s grounds and other facilities will be adequate to see that the school’s mission can be fulfilled.

#### **OPENING THE SCHOOL**

- ❑ Develop checklists for all key areas, such as ordering materials, hiring staff, student admissions, health issues, safety issues, transportation, special education, ordering textbooks, etc.
- ❑ Maintain the committees who helped create the school's plan so there is continuity and buy-in for setting up and operating the school.

#### **GOVERNING THE SCHOOL**

- ❑ Early in the planning phase, design a governance system that defines the organizational structure and provides for redress and recall of governing board members.
- ❑ Create a very clear committee structure that is vitally involved in the planning phase.
- ❑ Be very clear about the roles of the governing board, the administrator and the teachers. By creating a participatory environment from the very beginning, many serious problems can be avoided and the sense of school community strengthened.

*Starting Your Own Charter School: Concept, Legislation and Implementation*, by Linda Page-LeMarie: Checklist, A Parent's Education Guide from Linda Page and Associates, 1996.