

How to Prepare for Your Charter School Authorizer Interview

(Updated October 2011)

Before You Arrive

1. Decide who will attend. As many board members as possible should attend, as well as the proposed school leader if they have been identified. Consultants or representatives from management organizations may attend, but only 1-2 and they should seek to answer as few questions as possible (generally at the request of the board chair only).
2. Re-read your application. Identify potential weak spots and prepare to address them.
3. Have a prep meeting prior to the interview, preferably with a facilitator. (Charter School Tools can help you identify one in your market.)
4. Know your roles – the board chair should direct questions to the appropriate responder. Someone should be designated to make an opening statement. Someone should be designated the lead respondent to questions about the academic program, governance, the budget and financial plan, the facility plan, and the start-up plan.
5. Check online for examples of other applications and formal feedback provided to prior applicants.
6. Prepare for some of the following questions.

General/Curriculum

1. What does it mean to be a charter school? What does it mean to be authorized by us?
2. Have you ever been inside a high-performing charter school? What made it successful?
3. Why will this school be successful?
4. Describe a typical day for a student in your school.
5. How will you reach parents and make them partners in their child's education?
6. How will the school get information out to the public?
7. What is your target student population?
8. How will the school serve ELL students (English Language Learners)?
9. How will the board know if it is fulfilling its mission?
10. How will it measure accountability for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) or other special program?
11. Who is developing your curriculum?
12. Take us through a sample (STEM) activity?
13. What will be available for teachers in September (i.e., curriculum)?
14. What process will be used to evaluate, review, and revise curriculum?
15. How will student success plans be developed and used?
16. How will students be assessed?
17. Describe your literacy program.
18. How do assessments fit into your literacy program?
19. Describe your ELL program. How will it be coordinated? Who is responsible for it? Specific strategies and techniques?
20. How will you attract and retain teachers?
21. How and when would SPED (Special Education) students receive IEPs (Individual Education Plans) required from properly certified SPED teachers?
22. How will the board know if the administrators are doing their job? What specific benchmarks will the board use to review and judge school success?
23. How quickly will the board know if the administrators are successful and how quickly will the board make a change if necessary?
24. How will the board know that the school is either on or off track? What evidence would you look for?

Facilities

1. Do you have a facility? Do you have an alternate?
2. How does the school go from no building to a building that will serve as a school?
3. What does it look like in terms of size and the children's needs?
4. Do you have a lease or are you planning to build or buy?

5. Can you afford to pay for this lease, or building?
6. What happens if there is an enrollment shortfall?

Students/Staffing

1. What are the non-negotiables you look for in selecting school leaders and staff?
2. What are the formative assessments that you will use and who will be responsible for overseeing that this information is available, reviewed, discussed and used for any needed educational interventions?
3. What if the students are not meeting the expected proficiency levels? What would you do?
4. Who will be responsible to develop curriculum?
5. What will the school look like in 5 years?
6. What procedures are in place for the hiring of new staff/teachers?
7. What will you look for in your teachers?
8. What are the expectations?
9. Could the board fire any individual who is not performing? How would you look to do this? Is there a process you would look to follow?
10. How would you handle teacher burnout? Are you asking too much of your teachers?
11. How will teachers be evaluated? To what extent will student achievement be a factor?
12. How will you help struggling teachers?

Need

1. Why do you think that a charter school is needed in your city? We already have one! We provide all of the things that you promise to deliver so why do you think that you can do a better job?
2. You don't know the community. How do you know what we want or need?
3. Why should we pay to transport your children?

Community/Host District

1. Assuming that you are familiar with the current economic crisis in our city how can you possibly look to take money from our schools?
2. How will this board engage the community? Keep them involved in the process?
3. What do you want from the district?
4. Will you be unionized? Participate in the pension plan? Then how do you expect to hire and retain good teachers?
5. How will you attract students? The last charter school couldn't do it. People love their neighborhood schools. This creates more work for our district employees.
6. You will take only the best students, leaving us with the most needy. You don't have to keep the lowest performing and worst behaved.
7. What happens if you run out of money?
8. What happens to kids after (5th or 8th) grade?
9. Why should we authorize you? How can we be sure you will outperform traditional public schools?

Board Commitment

1. What is the role of the board?
2. Is this board prepared to give the necessary time and expertise necessary to support the school, children and community?
3. Is this board prepared to support the school financially by building additional funding resources? What happens if there is an interruption in payment from the district? What happens if there is not start-up funding? Have you planned for these possibilities? What is your backup?

Management Organizations

1. How was the management organization selected? Have you talked to their other clients?
2. Has the management organization provided a clear explanation of the management fee, what services it covers, and what it will be over the course of the charter term? Is the management fee in line with industry standards?
3. What are the provisions for terminating the management organization? What would you do if you terminated them? Are your assets, facility, curriculum, students, and teachers yours?