



To Open a Public Charter School in Maine

As required by LD 1553

A. The “Founders”

1. Identify a need for a new public education option.
2. Investigate the extent of the need and the demand for meeting that need.
3. Create a not-for-profit organization to be eligible for grants.
4. Recruit and develop a Board of Directors with the expertise to open and operate a quality public charter school.

B. The “Founding Board of Directors” develops a “Public Charter School Plan”, including:

1. **Mission and Vision**
2. **Targeted Student Population and Targeted Community;**
3. **Need and Community Support**, including a report on discussions concerning recruitment, operations, and possibilities for collaboration with the SAU where the charter school will be located;
4. **Governance Plan**, including:
 - a. **Bylaws;**
 - b. **Organization Chart**, including lines of authority and reporting between the governing board, staff and any related bodies such as advisory bodies or parent and teacher councils, and any external organizations;
 - c. **Roles and Responsibilities** of the governing board, the school's leadership and management team and any other entities shown on the organization chart;
 - d. **Background information** on proposed board members and the school's leadership if identified.
5. **Organization Plan**, including:
 - a. **General location** and geographic area to be served;
 - b. **Enrollment** per grade - minimum and maximum planned per year for the charter term;
 - d. **Calendar** and daily schedule;
 - e. **Recruitment** and enrollment plans and timelines, including lottery procedures;
 - f. **Partnerships** and/or contractual relationships central to the school's operations or mission;
 - g. **Transportation, food service** and other significant operational or ancillary services;
 - h. **Facilities** plan, including backup or contingency plans if appropriate;
 - i. **Startup** plan, identifying tasks, timelines and responsible individuals;
 - j. **Closure** plan, if necessary, outlining process and timelines for transitioning students and student records to new schools and for disposing of school funds, property and assets.
6. **Financial Plan**, including:
 - a. **Policies**, financial controls, and audit requirements;
 - b. **Budgets** for start-up and the first 3-years, with clearly stated assumptions;
 - c. **Cash-flow** projections for start-up and the first-year, with clearly stated assumptions;
 - d. **Fund-raising** contributions anticipated, if claimed in the application;
 - e. **Insurance** coverage.
7. **Student Policy**, including:
 - a. **Identifying and serving** students with the wide range of learning needs and styles typically found in the area;
 - b. **Compliance** with applicable laws, rules and regulations;
 - c. **Discipline** plans and policies, including those for special education students.
8. **Academic Program**, including:
 - a. **Alignment with state standards;**
 - b. **Instructional design**, including the type of learning environment (such as classroom-based or independent study), class size and structure, curriculum overview, teaching methods and research basis;
 - c. **Assessments**, internal and external to report student progress according to the “performance framework”;
 - d. **Co-curricular or extra-curricular** programs and how they will be funded and delivered.
9. **Staff Policy**, including:
 - a. **Staffing plan** for the term of the charter and a staffing chart for the school's first year;
 - b. **Recruiting and development** plan for school leadership and staff;
 - c. **Employment policies** for leadership and staff, including performance evaluation;
 - d. **Parent involvement** opportunities and expectations.

C. Application for a Public School Charter

The “Founding Board of Directors” uses its plan to submit a “**Charter School Application**” in response to a “Request for Proposals” by an “Authorizer” - an “SAU” or the “State Charter School Commission”.

The application should demonstrate the applicant's capacities to execute the proposed vision and plans, to provide the authorizer with a clear basis for assessing the applicant's plans and capacities.

For a public school or public school program that wishes to convert to a public charter school, the “Founding Board of Directors” may apply to the local school board of the SAU to become a conversion public charter school. For a startup public charter school, the “Founding Board of Directors” will be a new group. If that group has been affiliated with a previous private school or education program, it must form a separate, not-for-profit organization in Maine to be eligible for state and federal grants.

1. **Application Evaluation** - The authorizer evaluates each application using procedures, practices, criteria and standards consistent with nationally recognized principles and standards for authorizing high-quality public charter schools. The process requires reviewers who collectively possess academic expertise and operational experience with charter schools, and also requires personal interviews with applicants and a public hearing.
2. **Application Decision**
 - a. Charters are granted only to applicants that demonstrate competence in each element of the authorizer's published approval criteria and are likely to open and operate a successful public charter school.
 - b. Decisions are based on merit and documented evidence collected through the application review process, using transparent policies and practices, and avoiding conflicts of interest or any appearance of a conflict.
 - c. Decisions are to be made within 90 days of an application, in a meeting open to the public.
 - d. Decisions may grant approval or conditional approval, request resubmission or reject the application, and must include written reasons for the decisions.
3. **Charter Contract** - When an application is approved, a charter contract must be signed at least 60 days prior to the opening date of the charter school. The charter contract includes:
 - a. **Administrative provisions** that articulate the administrative relationship between the authorizer and the public charter school, including each party's rights and duties.
 - b. **Performance provisions**, based on the “performance framework” developed by the authorizer, that describe the academic and operational performance expectations and measures by which the public charter school will be judged, including applicable federal and state accountability requirements;

Performance indicators must include:
 - 1) Student academic proficiency and academic growth;
 - 2) Achievement gaps in both proficiency and growth between major student subgroups;
 - 3) Attendance;
 - 4) Recurrent enrollment from year to year;
 - 5) Postsecondary readiness if a high school;
 - 6) Financial performance and sustainability;
 - 7) Governing board performance and stewardship;
 - 8) Parent and community engagement.
 - c. **Charter Term** - An initial charter is granted for a term of 5 operating years. An approved public charter school may delay its opening for one school year in order to plan and prepare for the school's opening. A charter may be renewed for successive 5-year terms, although an authorizer may grant a renewal for a term up to 15 years based on performance, demonstrated capacities and particular circumstances.

D. **Charter Implementation** – Once a charter application is approved, and while the performance contract is being negotiated, the Charter School Leadership can begin or continue work to:

1. Secure a facility;
2. Obtain insurance and permits;
3. Recruit and hire staff;
4. Develop the curriculum;
5. Publicize their school and recruit students;
6. Arrange all other aspects of the school.

E. **The Charter School Opens!** (Summer 2012 at the earliest - see the handout “**Process & Timing Estimates**”)