Liberty Schools
INITIATIVE

FOR FOUNDING GROUPS

Thinking about starting a charter school? 10 questions to answer first.

Every charter school starts with a few people who want something better for their kids. If you're one of them, these ten questions will help you see where you stand. You don't need every answer before you begin. Just knowing the questions puts your group ahead of most.

1 Why does your community need a new school?

Be specific about what families can't find today. A clear answer becomes the heart of your application and every conversation after it.

2 Who is on your founding team?

Look for a small group of committed people with different strengths: finance, law, education, communications, and community connections. Most founding boards start with little or no education experience, and that's fine.

3 Can you show real demand?

Authorizers want evidence that families will enroll. Start collecting names of interested parents now, through informational meetings, sign-up forms, and word of mouth.

4 What kind of school do you want to build?

Classical, Core Knowledge, or something else? Your academic model shapes your curriculum, your staffing, and the families you'll attract.

5 Will you work with an established partner?

Many new schools partner with an experienced education service provider or a network of similar schools for curriculum, training, and support. Others go it alone. Know the tradeoffs.

6 Who will authorize your school?

In most states, that's the local school district, a state charter commission, or both. Learn their process, timeline, and what they look for, and find out how they've treated charter applications before.

7 What does your budget look like?

Charter schools are funded per student, so enrollment drives everything. Start-up costs often arrive before public funding does. Plan for that gap from the beginning.

8 Where will the school be located?

Facilities are often the hardest piece. Think early about where you'd like to be, how many students you need to start, and what options exist: leasing, renovating, building, or a temporary space.

9 Who will lead the school?

Your school leader will shape the culture from day one. Think about the kind of leader your school needs and when you'll need to hire them.

10 How long can your team commit?

Most charter efforts take two years or more from the first meeting to opening day. Make sure your founding team is ready for the long haul.

Ready for the next step?

If these questions sparked more questions, that's a good sign. Kim Gilmartin has helped founding groups work through every one of them, from the first informational meeting to opening day. Thanks to philanthropic support, her guidance costs founding groups nothing.

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