Charter School Board Interview

A well-structured face-to-face interview helps the sponsor evaluate whether the applicant meets the criteria for approval and the likelihood that it will lead to a high-quality school.

When an interview team leaves the interview, the goal is that they can answer the following questions and demonstrate a sound basis for their conclusions:

1. Is the proposed educational plan sound for the students who will be enrolled in the school?
2. Is the application’s description of the required elements reasonably comprehensive?
3. Are the applicants likely to implement the proposed program (school) successfully?
4. Beyond opening will the applicants likely have the abilities to sustain the proposed program (school) over a number of years?

Time:
The interview is generally 90 minutes in length. The time will go quickly thus it is important for all members of the applicant team to be prepared and ready to participate.

Participants:
As the applicant group you will have substantial discretion to determine both how many and which individuals will best represent the proposed school. The group should reflect the leadership of the charter school effort yet be small enough that each person will contribute substantively. The Board Chair and school leader should always participate but not dominate.

It is often helpful if (prior to the interview) the applicant team determines who will respond to specific types of questions (ex – academic, operational, financial, governance, etc.)

Interview Framework:
The charter school board interview will likely take the following framework:

1. Welcome and recognition of applicants
2. Facilitation of interview team introductions
3. Explanation of timeframe, structure, ground rules
4. Applicant introductions and opening statement – BOARD CHAIR
5. Questions and discussion
6. Review of next steps and opportunity for applicant questions
7. Conclusion
Questions and Answers:

Interviews typically include a combination of standard questions for any applicant group and application specific questions prompted by questions or concerns the application raises. Questions will likely be open-ended meaning the response will require more than just a yes or no.

When asking a question, the interviewer may pose the questions to the group allowing you to determine who on the team is best to respond OR they may ask a specific individual a question.

The interview team members will likely take notes throughout the process so do not be ‘thrown’ or assume they are not paying attention.

The Following are examples of standard questions that interviewers may ask:

1. Who hires and fires the Principal?
2. During the school year, how will the Principal and governing board know if children are meeting the school’s goals for learning?
3. Who will monitor the school’s finances on a regular basis and how?
4. How, and for what purpose, will teachers be evaluated?

The interview team may also ask scenario questions to assess the applicant’s preparation to deal with practical challenges of running a charter school. For example,

1. Your application estimates 8% students with disabilities. What will you do if your population of students with disabilities is actually twice that?
2. In your application, you identify a potential school site that looks promising. What if that building doesn’t end up being available?
3. What will you do if your enrollment, and thus your revenue, is 15% lower than your budget assumes?

There is not a right answer to these questions. Indeed, it would be unrealistic to demand a specific solution. Rather, the responses will help the interview team assess whether the applicants have a sense of how to approach realistic charter school challenges effectively.
Sample Questions:
The following is a list of sample interview questions grouped by application section. The interview team will not be able to ask all of these questions in any one interview and there will be questions very specific to pieces of the application. Reviewing these questions and considering possible responses will help the applicant to thoughtfully prepare.

Introduction
- If approved, what are the biggest challenges you will have between now and opening day?
- Walk me through what a typical day will look like for a student in the [highest year offered in the first year].
- What are the greatest strengths of the school?
- What do you see as the greatest strengths of your application?

Mission and Vision
- What is the school’s mission and vision? How will you measure success?
- During the first year, how will the governing body and the Principal know whether the school is doing well?
- After four years, how will the governing body and the Principal know whether the school is doing well?
- What will be the primary characteristics of the school if it is successful?

Student Population
- What do you expect the student population to look like?

Curriculum and Instruction
- How was the curriculum selected? (if applicable)
- What is the plan for selecting (or developing) the curriculum? (if applicable)
- What types of remediation do you expect students to need?
- What is the plan for working with students who are not meeting expectations?
- Who provides tutoring / enrichment? When will tutoring happen?
- How will you make ability grouping decisions? How often (and how) will those decisions be re-evaluated?
- How do your proposed goals align with the expected levels of school performance set out by the authorizer?
Special Populations

- What is your plan for working with English Language Learner students?
- How will you communicate with students and parents whose first language is not English?
- What is your plan for working with students with disabilities?
- How will you ensure that students with disabilities are still learning even if they are in in-school suspension or are suspended?
- How will you approach the sometimes complex issues that accompany students who have an IEP and multiple diagnoses?

Discipline

- What will you do with students who exhaust all options in your discipline plan?
- How will you make suspension / expulsion decisions?
- How will teachers be trained on the discipline plan?
- What evidence is there that your method of discipline will be effective with your anticipated student population?
- What will you do if there are potential legal consequences for student conduct?

Parent and Community Engagement

- How will you engage the community in your school (and vice versa)?
- What efforts have you made to build relationships in the community to date?

Recruitment and Marketing

- How will you ensure that students from deprived and disadvantaged families have an opportunity to attend your school?
- Why would parents want to enroll their students in your school?
- Why would students want to enroll in your school?

Governance

- What are the governing body’s responsibilities?
- How will you recruit governing body members to fill identified skill gaps?
- How will you (governing body members) evaluate the Principal?
- What opportunities / avenues will there be for parental involvement and input in the school’s governance?
Leadership and Staffing
  • What makes your school’s Principal uniquely qualified to lead your school?
  • What are the primary qualifications you are looking for in the ____________? (Insert the title of a relevant position, such as Director of Curriculum.)
  • What will be the primary responsibilities of the _______________? (Insert the title of a relevant position, such as Director of Curriculum.)
  • What kinds of teachers do you need to implement this program well? What is your plan for recruiting them?

Professional Development
  • What type of professional development will you need to do before starting school?
  • What kind of professional development will you provide on an on-going basis?

Teacher Evaluation
  • How, and for what purpose, will teachers be evaluated?

Facilities
  • What buildings have you explored or identified?
    What are your essential building needs?
    What is your ideal building?
  • What will be the transportation options to / from your desired location?

Startup Costs
  • In the first three years, what parts of the budget depend on grants and other supplemental funding?

Financial Viability
  • What is the plan for achieving financial sustainability?

Financial Capacity
  • Who will be responsible for financial systems and management?
  • If it is a management company, how will the board provide oversight? Have the board and management company discussed specific terms of an agreement?
  • Who will monitor the school’s finances on a regular basis and how?