What are some of the questions a parent should ask when seeking a charter school?

This list of questions is from “Choosing a School for Your Child,” a publication of the United States Department of Education Office of Innovation and Improvement. There are many additional questions in the publication to guide parents on a school visit, etc. To obtain a free copy of this publication, either order online at http://edpubs.ed.gov/ or download the document at http://www.ed.gov/parents/schools/find/choose/choosing.pdf

Curriculum
- Does the school have a strong program of core academic subjects such as English, history, mathematics, science, arts, and foreign languages?
- What courses does the school offer in addition to the core subjects?
- What evidence is there that the school is effectively teaching students to read?
- Does the school have a special focus or theme for the curriculum?
- Does the school offer challenging courses such as Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and high school honors courses?
- Does the school provide enrichment opportunities for all students? For gifted students?
- Does the school have extracurricular activities that support what is taught?
- Is there an effective English language acquisition program for children who need it?
- If your child has special learning needs, does the school have a curriculum and the necessary supports to appropriately accommodate those needs?

Approach to Learning
- Does the school have a particular approach to teaching and learning (e.g., group projects, individual performance, frequent testing)?
- If yes, do you think your child will enjoy and learn from this approach?
- Does the school do all it can to make sure each child learns? Does it provide opportunities for children to get extra help when they need it?
- Is the school staff able to communicate in the language that your child understands?
- Are children with limited English language skills, learning disabilities, or other special needs learning and performing well on tests?
- What is the homework policy? Does it match your expectations for how much homework your child should do?
- Do you want your child to go to a single sex (all-boy or all-girl) school, or a coeducational school?
- How large are the classes?

Academic Performance
- How do the school’s test scores compare to those of other schools? (Check the school’s report card.)
- In the past few years, have test scores risen or declined? How does the school explain the rise or decline?
- How well have children similar to yours performed on these tests?
- How do students moving on to the next level of schooling perform in their new schools?
- How many students leave the school before completing the last grade?
- What special achievements or recognition has the school received?

Behavior Policy
- What does the school do to help develop character and citizenship?
- What is the discipline policy? How does the school handle students who misbehave?
- Are teachers fair in their responses to students? Does the school have a program and supports to prevent and address behavior problems?
- Are students allowed to leave school by themselves?
- What measures has the school taken to ensure safety? What security measures are in place? What is the policy on school absences? How does the school encourage daily attendance?
- Do school personnel call parents when students are absent?
Does the school have a drug and alcohol abuse prevention program?
Does the school have a dress code?
Do students wear uniforms?

Safety
Is the school safe?
How does the school prevent and handle problems with drugs, alcohol, and tobacco?
How does the school prevent and handle violence, bullying, harassment, and other forms of abusive behavior?
What measures does the school take to ensure safety? What security measures are in place?
What is the school’s relationship with the local police?
Is there a police officer on duty during school hours and for extracurricular activities?
What information is available on serious crime in the school?
What information is available on students bringing weapons to school?
Does the school have an emergency plan for local and national emergencies?
What does the school do to ensure that parents and all school administrators know the emergency plan? Are there drills?
How does the school notify parents about emergency closings? How does the school communicate with parents in other languages?

Special Offerings
What extracurricular activities does the school offer after school or on weekends?
Do all students have the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities?
What interscholastic activities are available to students?
What intramural activities are available to students?
What activities receive the most attention and resources?
Are there school and student publications?
Does the school sponsor field trips? Are they available to all students?
Are publications for parents available in other languages?

Facilities and Services
Is there a well-stocked library where students can check out books and do research? Are reading materials available in other languages?
Is there interlibrary loan?
Is time provided in the day for students to go to the library?
Do students have access to computers and to the Internet in the classroom and library?
Is use of the Internet monitored?
Is there an auditorium or a large room for school assemblies?
Is a school nurse on duty daily?
Is there a cafeteria, and does the school offer a nutritionally well-balanced lunch program? Breakfast program?
Is supervised before- and afterschool care offered?
Are there tutoring programs?
Are counseling services available to students?
Is the school accessible to children with mobility limitations?

Admissions Procedures for Public Schools of Choice
Is there an application process?
What is the application deadline?
Is anything else required in the application (test scores, interview, recommendations, etc.)?
Do admissions requirements include a portfolio, an audition or statement of interest?
Are there any other admissions requirements?
Are admissions requirements published in languages other than English?
Parent and Community Involvement
- How does the school encourage parental involvement?
- What are the ways parents can get involved?
- Are parents encouraged to volunteer?
- Does the school have an active parent-teacher organization?
- Does the school hold meetings and events at times when parents can attend?
- How well attended are back-to-school nights by parents?
- Are families expected to be involved with homework?
- How frequently does the school communicate with parents?
- Are community leaders involved with the school?
- Does the school partner with local businesses and organizations?
- Are parents involved in the development of school policies?

Reputation
- How is the school regarded in the community?
- How is the school viewed by other parents?
- Is the school respected by other schools, particularly those that receive its students (when they move to the next level)?