

## 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)?