



1. What is a “charter school” and what is the purpose of it?

A charter school is a public school that is organized by a group of teachers, community members, parents, or others and sponsored by an existing public school board or a county office of education. Charter schools are open to all students and do not charge tuition. Funding is provided through state and local revenues. They operate more independently than traditional public schools do, and are held accountable for both their student academic performance and fiscal practice. The specific goals and operating procedures for the charter school are spelled out in the charter document – the legal agreement between the charter granting board and the organizers. The Morgan Hill Unified School District’s Board of Trustees unanimously approved our charter in January 2001.

2. Why this new school?

Providing the option of a small, family and community oriented K-8 school to complement the existing comprehensive public school system expands the educational choices available to students and families in this community.

3. What is the focus of the school?

The Charter School of Morgan Hill’s mission statement emphasizes three critical components: strong family involvement, community interaction and project-based learning. The use of technology will support the school in its vision.

4. Who will the students be?

The students at the Charter School of Morgan Hill will reflect the diversity of the South Valley area, including high performing students, English language learners, and special education students. There are no formal admissions requirements, but it is expected that enrolling families will be familiar with and support the mission and vision of the school. If the number of applicants for a particular grade level exceeds the capacity of the school, enrollment for that grade will be determined by a public random lottery as outlined in the charter document.

5. What is “project-based learning”?

Project-based learning is learning through real life experiences. The activities or projects may be the way in which students acquire skills or knowledge initially, or it may be how they learn to apply a variety of concepts that they already know. It is also about tying together separate skills in meaningful ways, across the curricular areas. Instruction can be tailored to the needs of the students and, because projects are open-ended, students have the opportunity to explore problems at a variety of depths or levels.

6. How will the family participation component work?

The school and families will work together to develop an individualized plan for each family describing: 1) how the family will support the student; 2) how the family will support the school; and 3) how the school will support the student and family. The plan will be flexible so that families can participate in a variety of traditional and non-traditional ways.

7. Will the school schedule be the same as other schools?

School hours will be as follows: 8:15 am - 2:50 for grades 1-3 and 8:15 am to 3:00 PM for 4th through 6th grade students. The exact kindergarten schedule has not been established, but the morning class will begin at 8:15. In addition, children must be 5 years old by September 1 of the current year to enroll in kindergarten. We plan to observe the same school holidays as MHUSD. An opening and closing date for the school year has not yet been determined.

8. Why is September 1 the date by which a student must have turned five years old to enter kindergarten, when the usual cut off date for the state is in December?

September 1 was chosen for some very specific reasons, including the following: 1. California is in the minority of states with its late cut off date; the majority have a September 1 cut off; 2. We repeatedly hear educators say that

children do better the farther they are past their fifth birthday when entering kindergarten. The MHUSD kindergarten teachers support an early cut off date and have recently signed a petition asking for a September 1 cut off date; 3. Our school days will be longer than the district's and that much more draining on younger children; 4. The demands and expectations of kindergarten have increased dramatically with many previously first grade requirements now placed on the K students and teachers; and 5. Children learn concepts when they are developmentally ready to learn. Early exposure alone does not mean that they will learn faster or better if they are not emotionally, socially, physically or cognitively ready to do so.

9. What about class and school size?

Our plan for the first year is to have two classes each for kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades, with a maximum of 20 students in each class. We'd like to have one class each in grades 4-6, with approximately 25 students in each class. We will be flexible as far as the breakdown of classes depending on enrollment. The plan is to expand the school size over the next few years to two classes per grade, K-8, with an anticipated maximum school size of 410.

10. What type of enrichment activities will be offered?

All students will have regular enrichment activities, in areas such as extended science, languages, life skills, physical education, music, and other fine arts. These activities are important not only in developing well-rounded children, but also in strengthening their learning in the main content areas (reading, writing, math, social studies, science, etc.) Additionally, all students will have access to computers and other technology, to support them in their education.

11. How will students interact with their community?

Students will interact with the public both in the community and in work settings. They will do projects with business, government, and community organizations. Community and business people will interact with students at the school, and partnerships will be developed with local businesses and agencies. Through community interaction, students will feel a part of the larger community, see the relevance of their academic learning to everyday life, and understand their responsibilities as citizens.

12. Where will the school be located?

Initially, the school will be located in a temporary site, during which time the processes of potential site studies, re-zoning, purchase, design, permitting and construction will proceed on a permanent school site. We are currently pursuing two temporary sites, one in a shopping center in Morgan Hill, and one adjacent to a church in San Martin.

13. Will teachers be credentialed?

Core subject teachers are required to hold a Commission on Teacher Credentialing certificate, permit, or other document equivalent to that which a teacher in other public schools would be required to hold.

14. How much input will parents have regarding curriculum and activities? Will parents have more control than they currently do?

As a family participation school, parents will have many opportunities for input and suggestions. The ultimate decisions regarding curriculum will be made by the school staff/administration, who will have a commitment to the school's education plan based on the school's mission statement/vision and as outlined in the charter document.

15. How will the students be tested?

In addition to the required state assessment examinations, teachers will have many options for student assessment. Examples include running records, presentations, projects, portfolios, and video taping over time to show student progress.

16. If everything is done as projects, does that mean there won't be an emphasis on strong academics?

The purpose of project-based learning is to teach and then reinforce a variety of academic concepts by applying them to experiences that are meaningful, long-lasting and effective. All students will be expected to perform at their highest level and to excel in the content areas outlined in the state curriculum standards.