



COMMON QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Part I GENERAL CHARTER SCHOOL QUESTIONS

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.

2. What is the relationship between the charter school and the school district?

The legislature has declared that charter schools are part of the Public School System and the exclusive control of the officers of the public schools. Such officers could be members of an existing school governing board, a county board of education, or the State Board of Education. When a charter petition is granted by one or more of these agencies, the school may no longer be subject to the daily operational supervision of the agencies; nevertheless, the charter granting agency retains the power to revoke the charter at any time for specified reasons. This power implies a responsibility by the charter granting agency to oversee and monitor the charter school in at least those areas specified as grounds for revocation.

A charter school operates outside of the existing district structure except to the extent that the charter document includes that structure. For example, a charter school might opt to contract with the district for services such as insurance, special education, maintenance, payroll, etc.

3. For how long may the charter be granted?

The charter may be granted for no more than five years. The charter may then be renewed for an unspecified number of additional five-year periods.

4. What is the residency requirement for a charter school?

A student must be a resident of the State of California. A charter school may not restrict its enrollment on the basis of the residency of the pupil's parents. This also means that students wishing to attend a charter school do not have to request an interdistrict transfer.

5. Are teachers required to 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.

6. Does a charter school have to teach the state's core curriculum?

Rather than requiring a curriculum, the law requires accountability for student learning across all major subject areas. Specifically, a charter school must meet the statewide performance standards and administer the state exams required under the Education Code as part of its assessment systems. (Section 60602.5. – refers to the new statewide assessment program that is currently under development.)

7. What funding does a charter school receive?

Once a charter school is operational, it is entitled to funding similar to that of other public schools. For example, it will receive monthly funding based on the Average Daily Attendance (ADA). The majority of these funds are unrestricted and may be used for any school purpose (e.g. textbooks, buildings, salaries, administration, etc.). Charter schools may also receive funding from the state lottery and are eligible for Special Education funding, but these types of funds do have spending conditions associated with them. Funds needed prior to the school's opening ("start-up funds") must be raised by the school's organizers. There are a variety of sources: private and corporate grants and donations, state and federal grants and state loans.

8. What about special needs children?

As a public school, charter schools must serve all children who require special education services. If a student is thought or known to be in need of special education services, the school has a responsibility to assess needs, and develop and implement an individualized education program (IEP).

9. How much tuition can charter schools charge?

A charter school is a public school. It is open to all students and cannot charge tuition.

10. What flexibility is available to charter schools? Are they exempt from Federal regulations and requirements?

Charter schools are exempt from statewide laws governing school districts. Federal laws and regulations still apply. Charter schools are not exempt from the provisions of the Constitution of the State of California. Finally, there is no exemption from laws that apply specifically to individuals.

11. Don't charter schools take money away from the district or public education system?

Since a charter school is a public school the state and federal funds available for a student's education follow the student to the charter school. If students are drawn from the granting district's schools, then the district's ADA count is affected. However, the net effect on money available to the public schools is neutral. Students drawn to charter schools from private schools, or schools in other districts, bring public funds to charter schools that were unavailable to the charter school's granting district.

12. What about facilities?

A charter school can operate in a wide variety of facilities options: leased commercial space, build-to-suit school on purchased or donated land, portable buildings, or a joint-use space shared with a church or in a community building. While charter schools are subject to local zoning ordinances and building codes which may include, but are not limited to, seismic and fire safety, handicap access, etc., they are not required to comply with the most stringent regulations that regular public schools are.

13. Are teachers required by law to be affiliated with the local Teacher's Union?

No, they are not.

14. Must charter schools develop a School Accountability Report Card?

Yes. However, the specific content and format of such a report card, as specified in state and district, do not apply to charter schools. Charter schools are, therefore, free to develop a report card which reflects their local accountability needs.

15. Does a charter school need to be accredited?

There is no requirement that a charter school be accredited. If a school and its community determined that this was an important issue, a charter school could apply for accreditation from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC).

Part II

QUESTIONS SPECIFIC TO CHARTER SCHOOL OF MORGAN HILL

1. 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.

2. 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.