



Tennessee State Board of Education
Charter School Pre-Opening Checklist



Introduction¹

After a charter school application is approved and authorized, there are a significant number of steps to be taken before a school is ready to open its doors to students, families, teachers, and the community. This will serve as a guiding document for charter schools that have been authorized by the Tennessee State Board of Education. Operators are expected to fulfill all of the requirements outlined in the following table to ensure that the charter school opens with the tools in place to succeed as a high quality school.

The Tennessee State Board of Education staff will work with the charter school to complete the pre-opening checklist, but it is the ultimate responsibility of the charter school to ensure it has completed all steps to be ready to open. We understand that opening a school takes a significant amount of time and energy, and the failure to complete one item does not mean that the school will not open. However, items that are in **bold text** are considered foundational items that must be completed for a school to open. If any of the **bolded items** are not completed or if a significant number of other items are not completed by the deadlines set by the Tennessee State Board of Education, the school's opening may be delayed.

The Tennessee State Board of Education staff will conduct a pre-opening visit to verify that the school is ready to open its doors to students. A school may not open until it has received a letter from the State Board of Education stating that it has completed the necessary items on the Pre-Opening Checklist, and the school is ready to open for students, families, and staff.

If a charter school does not complete all of the items on the Pre-Opening Checklist by December 31st of the year it opens, the school's charter will be recommended for immediate revocation.

¹ The Tennessee State Board of Education staff would like to acknowledge and thank the Tennessee Achievement School District, Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools, and the Charter Institute of the State University of New York for their assistance and templates for the pre-opening checklist.



Pre-Opening Checklist

Item	Deliverable	Due Date	Comments	Completed
Governance & Management				
Establish the Governing Body.	Submit list of the current members of the Governing Body including contact information and positions held on the Governing Body. The SBE must be notified of any change to the Governing Body made after the due date within 30 days of the change. ²	June 1		
Establish and approve by-laws.	Submit copy of ratified by-laws and copy of minutes with ratification vote to the SBE within 5 days of meeting.	June 1		
Hire head of school/principal.	Submit name and contact information. The SBE must be notified of any change in school director/principal made after the due date and within 30 days of hire.	June 1		
Hire school leadership.	Submit an updated organizational chart with the names and contact information of key individuals in school leadership or administration positions.	June 1		
Name main contact for compliance and accountability.	Submit name, title, and contact information of compliance and accountability contact.	March 1		
Name main contact for federal programs compliance and accountability.	Submit name, title, and contact information of federal programs contact.	March 1		
Execute a management contract (if applicable).	Submit contract that is signed by management company and Governing Body and minutes from meeting approving the contract.	June 1		

² Any notice of changes to the information provided to the State Board through the pre-opening checklist must comply with the deadlines contained in the Charter Agreement.



Item	Deliverable	Due Date	Comments	Completed
Finance				
Complete budget for upcoming school year and receive approval from the Governing Body.	Submit budget to the SBE and copy of minutes with approval vote included.	June 1		
Develop annual Cash Flow Projection.	Create and submit a cash flow projection for the upcoming fiscal year.	June 1		
Designate individual responsible for finance.	Submit name and contact information of the finance lead to the SBE. Submit Accounts Payable and Receivable information, billing address, payment address, and ACH routing information.	April 1		
Establish fiscal policies and procedures in accordance with generally accepted accounting procedures, appropriate financial controls, payroll systems, and procedures for revenue, expenses, and quarterly financial statements.	Submit fiscal policies and procedures and minutes from Governing Body approval of policies and procedures.	June 1		
	Submit evidence of employment or contract with an accountant, bookkeeper, or other person who will handle financial matters.	July 1		
Establish a payroll system.	Submit contract with a payroll company or evidence of employment of or contract with persons to handle payroll and copy of deduction policy.	July 1		
Obtain federal tax-exempt status for the school's education corporation.	Submit copies of all applications (Form 1023) and filings regarding tax-exempt status to the SBE, including final Internal Revenue Service determination letter.	June 1		



Item	Deliverable	Due Date	Comments	Completed
Retain an independent certified public accountant for auditing requirements.	Submit contract with independent certified public accountant.	July 1		
Personnel/Staffing				
Designate a human resources lead.	Submit name and contact information of human resources lead to the SBE.	March 1		
Sign up for employee benefits.	Opt-in or opt-out of the State of Tennessee’s Health, Dental, and Vision Plans.	March 1		
	Complete and submit required participation paperwork.	April 1		
Select a teacher evaluation system.	In accordance with T.C.A. § 49-1-302, T.C.A. § 49-5-108, and State Board Rule 0520-02-04, the school must select a teacher evaluation system and notify the Tennessee Department of Education of the system.	May 1		
Sign up eligible employees for TCRS.	Enroll eligible employees into the Tennessee Consolidated Retirement System (TCRS) and begin monthly reporting by the first payroll in which an eligible employee is paid.	January 1		
Establish a process for background screening for all employees and collect documentation of background checks, including employees in transportation, food service, custodial, and security.	Request an identification number (OCA) to begin background checks.	January 1		
	Maintain files with fingerprint clearance forms from TBI for each employee identifying the new charter school as the employee’s current employer. Files should be available for inspection at any time.	July 1		

Item	Deliverable	Due Date	Comments	Completed
Have an adequate number of teachers that matches the staffing plan established in the charter application.	Submit a teacher roster including teaching assignments by grade level or specialty.	July 15		
Ensure all teachers meet certification requirements or meet the minimum requirements for licensure as defined by the State Board of Education pursuant to TCA § 49-13-111(i).	Submit copies of teacher certifications or appropriate proof of compliance with statutory exemptions.	July 1		
Ensure all teachers in core academic areas, as defined by No Child Left Behind, are highly qualified in accordance with NCLB.	Submit proof of certification or academic credentials (transcripts), relevant tests (e.g. PRAXIS), and subject matter competency for each teacher.	July 15		
Maintain and submit personnel records in accordance with State compliance reporting.	Identify Human Resource Information System to collect and maintain employee information required under Personnel Information Reporting System (PIRS).	July 1		
Establish and approve an employee handbook and distribute handbook to all staff.	Submit approved copy of employee handbook and minutes with Governing Body approval vote.	June 1		
	Provide documentation that the employee handbook has been distributed to all staff.	July 15		

Item	Deliverable	Due Date	Comments	Completed
Serving Special Populations				
Hire and designate leads for special education, student discipline, testing coordinator, SIS/Data Manager, Homeless Services, and ESL Services.	Submit list of names and contact information of leads and all required verified endorsements/certifications.	July 15		
Determine anticipated number of special education students and anticipated services requested.	Submit written documentation of anticipated students and anticipated needs to SBE.	June 1		
Adopt and implement a Child Find plan in accordance with IDEA.	Submit written documentation of a plan.	June 1		
Adopt and implement a plan for Response to Instruction & Intervention (RTI ²).	Submit written documentation of a plan that is in accordance with Tennessee Department of Education guidelines available at http://www.state.tn.us/education/instruction/rti2.shtml .	August 1		
Adopt and implement a plan to deliver required services to students with disabilities.	Submit written documentation that the school has hired appropriate staff or contracted with other vendors for special education teacher(s), speech and language therapists, and occupational and physical therapists, or other services or equipment, if required by student IEPs.	July 1		
Adopt and implement a plan for identifying and assessing English proficiency for students	Create and submit a Home Language Survey to use with all enrolled students.	May 1		
	Submit plan for identifying, assessing, and serving EL students in accordance with federal and state law.	July 1		



Item	Deliverable	Due Date	Comments	Completed
classified as Non-English Language Background (NELB) through a Home Language Survey.	Submit roster of Active, Opted Out, and Refused EL Students.	August 1		
	Submit schedule for EL students demonstrating that the school is meeting the required service hours.	August 1		
	Submit proof of 1 teacher to 40 EL students as required by SBE policy.	August 1		
School Operations				
Complete E-Rate Filing.	If necessary, complete E-Rate filing via the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC).	March 1		
Complete initial requirements for federal funding compliance.	Create and submit School Improvement Plan, family engagement plan, school/parent/student compacts, Code of Conduct, and parent conference request forms to the SBE.	July 1		
If transportation will be provided, select transportation service provider. Service must meet specifications outlined in the Charter Contract.	Submit contract and insurance information of transportation provider and provide school contact for handling transportation.	June 1		
	Submit copy of transportation plan including plan to notify parents and students of transportation routes.	June 15		
Establish school calendar for year, start and end times, and class schedules, and circulate this information to staff, parents, and students.	Submit calendar, start and end times, class schedules, and documentation of parental notification.	June 1		

Item	Deliverable	Due Date	Comments	Completed
Establish processes for food service.	Determine lead for food services and submit name and contact information.	July 1		
	Register with the State Department of Education to operate a National School Lunch and Breakfast Program.	May 1		
	If contracting with a third-party vendor, submit written documentation of contract.	July 1		
	Submit plan to process free and reduced lunch applications and required reporting to State of Tennessee.	July 1		
	Submit documentation that the school has the necessary equipment to either prepare food on site or accept food service delivery and properly store food and beverage until it is consumed. Inspection will be completed at Pre-Opening Visit.	July 1		
Hire or contract with a nursing services provider and create a plan and procedures for the administration of prescription and non-prescription medications to students and for provision of required health services.	Submit documentation of the school's relationship with a registered nurse and/or physician.	July 15		
	Submit policies for medication administration.	July 15		
	Submit written plan for providing required health services.	July 15		
Separate student health records from academic records and lock records in storage in the office of the school nurse.	Submit written assurances from the school that the records are in locked storage, and locked storage is present at time of Pre-Opening Visit.	August 1		

Item	Deliverable	Due Date	Comments	Completed
Establish process for collecting immunization records or proper exemption forms.	Submit documentation of record process and written assurance that students who do not have such records will be barred from school, in accordance with T.C.A. § 49-6-5001.	July 15		
Establish enrollment procedures and receive approval from the Governing Body. Procedures should include admission, enrollment, and waitlist policies.	Submit approved enrollment procedures including timelines, student applications, and lottery procedures.	March 1		
	In accordance with T.C.A. § 49-13-113 (e)(1), submit to the TDOE a certification by an independent accounting firm or by a law firm of the lottery process used for enrollment purposes OR request that the TDOE review and approve the lottery process prior to the lottery taking place.	April 1		
	Submit summary of school enrollment statistics, including number of currently enrolled students and number of students on the waiting list.	July 15		
	Submit roster of currently enrolled students and teacher student rosters.	July 30		
Request and/or receive student records, and lock in storage accordingly.	Submit written assurances from school that records have been requested and/or received, are or will be in locked storage, and locked storage is present at the time of inspection.	July 30		
Develop required policies relating to student discipline (including special education students), complaints/grievances, FERPA, ORA, and Open Meetings Law. Make appropriate policies	Submit copy of Student and Family Handbook containing the specified policies, including FERPA access.	June 15		
	Submit written assurance that the Student and Family Handbook (containing policies) have been distributed.	August 15		
	Submit copy of FERPA procedures for storage/handling of student files in school and make copies available during Pre-Opening Visit.	July 1		

Item	Deliverable	Due Date	Comments	Completed
available to students and their families in the Student and Family Handbook.	Submit copy of discipline policy including policies for regular and special education students.	June 15		
Obtain the appropriate insurance and have the certificate of insurance on file.	Submit certificate of insurance that meets the minimum levels as required by TCA § 49-13-107 and the Charter Agreement.	July 1		
Develop written safety plans for life safety procedures such as fire drills and emergency evacuation, including school safety plans in accordance with Project SAVE. These plans are in the student and employee handbooks, and the school hires appropriate security personnel.	Submit copy of SAVE plan and Emergency Operations Plan and proof that the plans have been submitted to the State Department of Education for approval.	August 1		
	Submit written assurance that the school will meet with required groups (parents, teachers, etc.) and final plan and revise as directed by State Department of Education.	August 1		
Student Data				
Secure a student information system (SIS) (if the SBE does not adopt a district-wide student information system).	Identify SIS manager within the school and notify the SBE staff of name and contact information.	February 14		
	Identify and contract with SIS provider. SIS provider must be able to comply with EIS reporting requirements. Submit vendor contract and contact information to SBE staff.	April 1		
Ensure Education Information System (EIS) has all of the required	Submit State School Approval Form.	March 1		
	Submit school calendar to SBE.	May 15		

Item	Deliverable	Due Date	Comments	Completed
information from the school.	Submit a request for all personnel who will need EIS usernames.	June 15		
	Submit school calendar to EIS.	June 15		
	Submit all required student and teacher information to EIS.	July 31		
	Submit all remaining EIS extracts as required. Reference EIS Reporting Calendar.	Aug-Sept		
Facilities				
Secure a facility for the school and complete necessary renovations.	Submit final lease or purchase agreement and minutes with Governing Body approval.	April 1		
	Submit renovation calendar and written assurances that facility will be ready for instruction at the beginning of the school year.	May 1		
Ensure that the classroom space, restrooms, and special purpose space meet the requirements of the program and the number of students enrolled.	Submit written assurance. Inspection will be completed at Pre-Opening Visit.	July 15		
Distribute necessary instructional materials and supplies to classrooms at every grade level.	Submit documentation that age-appropriate classroom furniture has been procured.	July 1		
	Equip classrooms for the arrival of students. Inspection will be completed at Pre-Opening Visit.			
Space is safe and secure; entrance and egress from the school's space is adequately controlled.	Inspection will be completed at Pre-Opening Visit.			

Item	Deliverable	Due Date	Comments	Completed
Obtain a Certificate of Occupancy and any other required permits from local building department before Pre-Opening Visit.	Submit Certificate of Occupancy and any other required permits.	July 1		
Make certain each room has emergency exit plans and maps that will not be covered by any materials.	Inspection will be completed at Pre-Opening Visit.			
Ensure that there is adequate signage for the school and that the school building is appropriately numbered for emergency response purposes.	Inspection will be completed at Pre-Opening Visit.			
Ensure that fire extinguishers have been recently inspected.	Inspection will be completed at Pre-Opening Visit.			
Complete Fire Marshall inspections on any major renovation work done to facility to ensure approval for occupancy as an educational space.	Submit documentation of Fire Marshall inspection.	July 1		
Execute contract with a custodial service vendor.	Submit contract with custodial vendor.	June 1		