

## Questions school districts and state education authorities should ask about online charter schools

As school districts and state education authorities struggle with how best to reopen schools, one option may be to affiliate with a privately operated online or virtual charter school. Here are questions designed to help education leaders make these difficult decisions as they evaluate online charter schools.

### Questions about self-sufficiency:

- Are we able to create adequate online resources ourselves, especially considering the impromptu run from Spring 2020?
- Would it be better to develop these tools internally, potentially for integration into a well-balanced long term curriculum?

### Questions about teachers:

- What percentage of the teachers are certified?
- What percentage of the teachers are certified in the specific subject matter that they will be teaching?
- How is teacher compensation determined?
- How are teachers evaluated?
- How many students is each teacher responsible for?
- Where did the base script or lesson plan for each lesson come from?

### Questions about students:

- Does this school equitably serve all students in the state?
  - How does its share of English Learners, low-income students, homeless students, foster youth, unaccompanied minors, and other high-needs populations compare with that of the district or state as a whole?
  - What is its share of students with special needs—and what is the share of each of the 14 specific types of need identified by IDEA—compared with the district or state as a whole?

### Questions about financials:

- What is the lowest level of per-pupil funding that a school in this chain receives in other areas of the state? Other places in the U.S.? If the school aims to be paid at a higher rate in this district/state, what is the justification for that? Why should it be paid the same per pupil given its differing expenses and cost structures?
- What percentage of the spending by this school or its parent CMO goes to marketing or advertising? What percentage to profit?
- What are the salaries of the school's top highest-paid positions and the five top highest-paid positions of any parent CMO it is affiliated with?
- If this school contracts with a related CMO or other vendors for curricular products, technology, teaching, teacher training, hiring and HR, or any other instructional or

administrative function, what's the detailed breakdown of what dollar amount or percentage of per-pupil funding will be spent on each specific line item?

**Questions about transparency:**

- Is there an elected school board?
- Are board meetings open to the public?
- Are financial documents such as the school budget available to the public?
- Does this school report data to the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights?

**Questions about charter school chains:**

- Have schools from this chain in other parts of the country lost their charters or been otherwise sanctioned due to poor academic performance, financial impropriety, or other reasons?
- Have schools from this chain in other parts of the country closed during the year?
- What is the attendance rate, dropout rate, graduation rate, and test scores of all schools operated by this CMO in this and nearby states?

**Questions about digital products:**

- What instructional and curricular products does the school use? Is there any independent, statistically significant evidence for the effectiveness of these products? Which other districts have used these products?
- Does the school use a competitive bidding process to select instructional and curricular products, looking for the best product at the lowest price? Does the school use a team of teachers to periodically review instructional and curricular products and select the ones they think are best for the student body? Or is the school required to use the products owned by a parent CMO, even if teachers and/or principle believe that other products are better?
- What is the history of the chain and vendors regarding safety and use of student, educator, and district data? Are all products and vendors in compliance with federal and state data privacy laws? What guarantees will be written into the contract between the school and the district regarding ownership and use of data?
- If this school uses public per-pupil dollars to purchase curricular products, tablets, or other technology, are these items public property—such that if the school closes down they could be used by a different school—or the private property of the school operators?