

Connecticut State Department of Education

MEMORANDUM

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TO: Jeff Sudmyer, Principal
Amistad High School

FROM: Robert Kelly, Charter School Program Manager

DATE: September 23, 2008

SUBJECT: Review of School Fundamentals

Attached is the agenda for our Review of School Fundamentals visit on November 13, 2008. The purpose of this site visit is for State Department of Education (SDE) staff to ensure that the school is functioning in compliance with the law. The review itself is based on nine areas: 1) financial management; 2) administrative management; 3) governance; 4) curriculum; 5) teaching staff; 6) enrollment and attendance; 7) facilities, equipment, books and materials; 8) special education; and 9) student assessment.

I have included a "Review of School Fundamentals Checklist" which you are expected to complete in preparation for this review. This checklist will provide you with the inquiries SDE staff will make during the visit. SDE staff will gather information on these nine topics during the review and use it as a basis for a written report issued within a month of the visit. If deficiencies are identified in the report, the school must submit a Corrective Action Plan to the Charter School Office within 30 calendar days.

I have attached a "List of Documents" that the SDE staff needs to review during the visit. Please prepare, in advance of the visit, access to a room and the list of documents. Given the focus of the review around financial and operational controls, it is important that we have an opportunity to meet with your business manager during the visit.

Please call me with any questions at 860-807-2029. I look forward to our visit.

RK:ea

xc: Charlene Russell-Tucker, Associate Commissioner
Mark Linabury, Bureau Chief
Michael Smith, Special Education Consultant
Gaylord Bourne, Achievement First, Director of Connecticut Operations

Attachments

**Agenda and Protocol for Charter School
Review of School Fundamentals**

**Amistad High School
November 13, 2008**

Time	Activity
9:30-12:00	<p>Introduction, Agenda and Purpose of Visit Guidelines for this visit:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Short review covering questions in the “Review of School Fundamentals” checklist• Efficiency is a priority given the amount of material to cover• State Department of Education staff will issue a report within a month of the visit• A Corrective Action Plan will be required if numerous items are found insufficient <p>Request for “List of Documents” (see attached) Request for “Financial Controls and Oversight Responsibilities” (see attached) Meet with school administrators and business manager</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tour school (see student records, textbooks, supplies, equipment) Review requested items. SDE team prepares for exit interview with school administrators Exit Interview• SDE team asks any remaining questions about reviewed documents• SDE team provides overall results of the review in the nine RSF areas

Charter School Review of School Fundamentals List of Documents

- 1. General Ledger**
- 2. Accounting manual**
- 3. Chart of Accounts**
- 4. Written procedures about handling and depositing daily cash receipts**
- 5. Organization chart (see next page)**
- 6. Sample job descriptions**
- 7. Handbook of school policies and procedures**
- 8. Sample teacher contract**
- 9. Agenda and minutes from recent board meetings**
- 10. Sample verification of staff certification**
- 11. Written curriculum in all needed subject areas**
- 12. Sample special education student file**
- 13. Daily attendance records**
- 14. Daily enrollment records**
- 15. Assessment plan related to student progress**

(Please have items 1-15 readily accessible)

Financial Controls

This survey area seeks to assess whether the school has certain basic financial controls to ensure the reliability of financial information and the safeguarding of assets. The survey team should attempt to confirm that financial transactions are recorded in a manner permitting preparation of financial statements, authorization levels for transactions are established, and assets are properly accounted for and protected.

Charter School – Financial Control Questions	Y	N	N/A	Comments
1. Is the overall responsibility for the condition of financial records clearly defined?				
2. Is responsibility assigned for the daily recording of financial transactions?				
3. Do accounting personnel have the background, education, and experience appropriate for their duties?				
4. Is the school’s general ledger available and up to date?				
5. Does the school use an accounting software program? If so, please name.				
6. Does the school use a payroll service vendor?				
7. Are other accounting functions contracted out? If so, please indicate which functions.				
8. Has a CPA firm been hired for auditing the school’s financial statements				
9. Is there an accounting manual?				
10. Is there a chart of accounts?				
11. Are authorization levels established for expenditures?				
12. Are budgetary accounts maintained?				
13. Is fund accounting used?				
14. Are accounting records maintained on the accrual or modified accrual basis?				
15. Is a procedure in place to handle and deposit daily cash receipts?				
16. Has the school entered into any related party transactions?				

Notes:

Administrative Controls

This survey area seeks to assess whether the school has certain basic administrative controls in place to support the management’s decision-making process toward achieving objectives of the school. The survey team should attempt to confirm that, a defined organizational structure exists, lines of authority and responsibility are relatively well defined, school policies and procedures are written and systematically organized in handbooks, manuals or other publications, personnel have written job descriptions outlining duties and responsibility, employment contracts are utilized for teaching staff, training and performance reviews are school policy, and appropriate reports on performance or other matters are prepared.

Charter School – Administrative Controls	Y	N	N/A	Comments
1. Does a current organization chart exist?				
2. Are lines of authority clearly identified?				
3. Are written job descriptions available for all personnel?				
4. Are school policies and procedures available in a handbook or other documented form?				
5. Are teacher’s required to sign formal written employment agreements?				
6. Are performance reviews conducted by appropriately certified staff?				
7. Has there been a high turnover in management level employees or in teaching staff?				
8. Are regular performance reports prepared by the school director for the Trustees?				

Notes:

Governance

This survey area seeks to assess the role of the school’s governance team in decision-making. The survey team should attempt to confirm that the governance body exists in accordance with the charter provisions, that the members are those noted in the charter application, that new members were appointed in accordance with the charter provisions and bylaws, that new member resumes and personnel data are available for SDE information purposes, and that regular meetings with recorded minutes, along with other information, appears to reflect the appropriate level of decision-making over school activities.

Charter School – Governance Questions	Y	N	N/A	Comments
1. Are current members of the Board of Trustees filed with the State Department of Education?				
2. Has there been a significant turnover of Trustees from those listed in the application?				
3. Are all new members appointed in accordance with charter provisions and bylaws?				
4. Are agendas prepared and maintained?				
5. Are Board meetings held on a regular basis and documented by written minutes?				
6. Do minutes evidence Board approvals for management hires?				
7. Do minutes evidence Board approvals of major expenditures? What amount is delegated for administrative approval?				
8. Do Board members regularly receive and review financial information?				
9. Are Board members paid employees, vendors, or contractors of the school?				
10. Overall, does it appear that the Board exercises effective oversight over school management?				

Notes:

Teaching Staff

This survey is designed to ensure that your teachers are properly certified to give instruction in the subject areas in which they are assigned, that personnel have contracts which define their working conditions and salaries, that there is a plan of professional development, and that you are complying with BEST requirements.

Charter School – Teaching Staff	Y	N	N/A	Comments
1. Is all professional staff certified to give instruction in the subject areas to which they are assigned?				
2. Have you posted vacancies with the State Department of Labor?				
3. Do you have a professional development plan for your faculty?				
4. Do you have time set-aside during the school year for professional development? If so, how much time and on what topics?				
5. Do you have time set-aside during the summer for professional development? If so, how much time and on what topics?				
6. Do you have a mentoring program (e.g. BEST for new teachers) in place for new or relatively inexperienced faculty?				

Notes:

Curriculum

This survey seeks to ascertain that all curriculum as required by Section 10-16b of the Connecticut General Statutes is planned, on-going, and systematic. It should be written and all teachers should be trained to use it effectively. Textbooks should be coordinated and designed to obtain the objectives sought by the curriculum. Where your charter articulates a learning innovation, specific pedagogy, or encompassing philosophy, your curriculum should reflect this. (S = satisfactory, U=unsatisfactory)

Charter School – Curriculum	S	U	N/A	Comments
1. Do you have a written curriculum organized sequentially for the following subjects? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● the arts ● career education ● consumer education ● health and safety ● language arts ● mathematics ● physical education ● science ● social studies ● world language(s) (for high school only) ● vocational education (for high school only) 				
2. Do you have a process including timeline to review and revise the curriculum?				
3. Is your curriculum aligned with the latest Connecticut Curricular Frameworks?				
4. Is each subject of your curriculum aligned with the mission of your school?				
5. Have your teachers been trained to teach your adopted curricula in all areas?				

Notes:

Students Requiring Special Education

This section is designed to ensure that students are properly identified as in need of special education, that special education services are provided to student requiring them, and that there is a referral process to consider new candidates for eligibility. (S = satisfactory, U = unsatisfactory)

Charter School – Special Education	S	U	N/A	Comments
1. How do you identify which students require special education from student records?				
2. How do you ensure students who require services receive them?				
3. Do you consider the relationship with the districts in which the students reside to be effective/productive in providing for or delivering services?				
4. What is your process for referring students for consideration for special education eligibility?				
5. Have you received student records for all students attending your school?				
6. What is your process for obtaining student records?				
7. How many students identified as requiring special education are enrolled at your school?				

Notes:

Enrollment and Attendance Data

This survey is intended to ensure that enrollment data is accurately maintained for purposes of record retention requirements and grant eligibility, to ensure that attendance records for all students are maintained on a daily basis, and that truancy and attendance policies are in place.

Charter School – Enrollment and Attendance Data	Y	N	N/A	Comments
1. Do you have daily attendance records?				
2. Do you have daily enrollment records?				
3. Have a significant number of students left the school since its opening this fall?				
4. Do you maintain records in accordance with the records retention schedule published by the Public Records Administrator?				
5. Do you have a truancy policy as required by Section 10-198a of the Connecticut General Statute which includes notification to parents if students are absent?				
6. Do you have written attendance policies?				

Notes:

Facilities, Equipment, Books and Materials

This section is designed to ensure the adequacy of your physical plant and supply of textbooks and other educational materials.

Charter School – Facilities, Equipment, Books and Materials	Y	N	N/A	Comments
1. Is your charter prominently displayed?				
2. Do you have an adequate supply of textbooks and other educational materials for your student?				
3. Is there an equipment inventory listing?				
4. Is any equipment leased?				
5. Is personal use of school vehicles permitted?				
6. Have major renovations been made to the school building?				

Notes:

Student Assessment

This section is designed to show your school’s method of assessing its students to ensure that they are achieving academically and making educational progress.

Charter School – Student Assessment	Y	N	N/A	Comments
1. In addition to the CMT and/or CAPT, do you administer additional standardized tests to your students? If so, please describe the test, its publisher, the students tested, and its purpose.				
2. Do you have a test coordinator?				
3. Is there a written assessment plan? If so, please attach.				
4. Is there a process to familiarize staff and parents with reasonable test interpretation practices?				

Notes: