February 2017

Middle Way Education

Checklist: Establishing a Buddhist School for Children

### Research Education and Dharma Influences

* Read the writings of great masters in Dharma and education to gain a thorough understanding of principles and techniques we wish to promote.
* Visit and or interview Progressive/Buddhist schools and programs.

Meet with school heads, other administrators, and teachers.

Observe students in their classes.

### Set Up Admin Team

* Strategic Planning
* Advisors (dharma and education professionals)
* Professional development
* Accounting

### Develop a strategic plan for

* Organizational structure
* Accounting/fundraising
* Curriculum development
* Brick and mortar
* Professional development

### Define your vision for the school

* Create a mission statement and key principles
* Determine the *what* and *how*: Learning and Methodology
* Decide which education levels to serve—initially and in the long-term.
* Decide if school will accommodate special populations, such as low-income families or children with special needs.
* Consider which areas of special areas of interest, such as organic farming, and potential auxiliary programs (after-school activities; summer camp) will be included

### Investigate locations

* What kinds of schools and programs already exist in the area?
* Is there a need for a Buddhist school at the level you are planning?
* How many Buddhists live in the area and what Buddhist centers are there?
* Is the community interested in Buddhist/alternative education and likely to support it?
* Are suitable properties available (ideally with access to outdoor space)?

## Check state and local regulations including licensing, health, safety, fire, and space requirements for[[1]](#footnote--1)

* Private schools
* Public schools
* Preschools and day care centers

### Select a site

* Consider: size, land features, buildings, materials, layout.
* Check local zoning regulations.
* Determine accessibility—major roads, traffic patterns, parking.
* Consider potential for expansion.

### Determine the composition and needs of the community

* Income levels
* Ethnic and cultural backgrounds
* Ages – infant & toddler, early childhood, elementary, and/or secondary
* Length of school day – half-day, full-day, extended day, combination

### Consult an attorney to select the appropriate legal structure

### Non-profit school

* Operated by a board comprised of community members, parents, and/or non-parent supporters.
* Needs to be incorporated, typically with the help of an attorney.
* Requires a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt determination letter from the Internal Revenue Service.
* Need to have a credentialed director of education.

### For-profit school

* Operated by a sole proprietor, partnership, limited liability company, or corporation.
* Need to have a credentialed director of education.

### Obtain legal advice concerning

* State and local requirements
* Education and curriculum requirements from government
* Lease agreements; mortgage or other financing needs
* Writing and establishing a constitution and by-laws
* Establishing a board of directors (if needed)
* Creating handbooks for staff, families, and board
* Drafting staff and student contracts
* Staff benefits, e.g., health insurance, sick/personal days, retirement accounts

### Consider finances (in consultation with an accountant)

### Initial outlay

* Facilities (purchased or rented)
* Renovations (may require an architect, zoning attorney, contractor)
* Age-appropriate furnishings
* Learning materials
* Outdoor facilities
* Office equipment
* Software-based financial tracking system

### Operating budget

* Rent or mortgage
* Maintenance
* Depreciation
* Interest on loans
* Consumable materials
* Taxes: federal, state, and city income taxes if for-profit; appropriate payroll taxes
* Salaries: teachers, assistants, administrative, secretarial, custodial
* Insurance: health; workers compensation; school directors and officers; commercial liability
* Fees: licensing; AMS and other professional memberships
* Professional development; teacher education
* Contingency fund
* Scholarships; financial aid

### Income sources

* School tuition
* Summer camp tuition
* Application fees
* Extended care and/or after-school activities
* Fundraising initiatives, e.g. annual fund, capital campaign, silent auction

## Hire qualified teaching staff

* Write clear job descriptions
* Find out what rules apply for foreign teachers
* Advertise within sangha and greater sangha for people who meet written job descriptions
* Include credentialed lead teachers
* Be sure they meet national and state and local requirements
* Sign a written contract for duties, salary, benefits, etc.
* Look for people who serve the needs of auxiliary programs, e.g., physical education, music, art

## Connect with the community

* Get to know teachers and administrators at other local schools.
* Participate in public education events.
* Volunteer to serve on community advisory boards.
* Private schools can join the local chamber of commerce in the US
* Explore a relationship with other teacher education programs regarding continuing education for staff.

## Recruit students

* Hold open houses, classroom observation visits, workshops, etc.
* Give presentations at feeder schools, community centers, libraries, etc.
* Spread the word through personal contacts.
* Advertise via local newspapers, radio, Internet, phone directories, doctors’ offices, community bulletin boards.
* Create a Web site and brochures that present a unified message.
* Optimize search engine listings.
* Become a member of AMS and other local and national organizations.
* Be accessible by e-mail, telephone, text. Respond promptly to inquiries and interview requests.

## Establish registration procedures

* Accept students on a formally stated, objective basis.
* Create age- and gender-balanced classes to the extent possible.
* In a tuition-based setting, require a signed payment schedule and non-refundable deposit with registration.
* Plan orientation for new families and students.

## Educate parents

* Organize parent study groups; offer parent education classes.
* Schedule parent-teacher conferences.
* Provide a parent library.
* Communicate regularly via newsletters, e-mails, daily progress notes from teachers.

## Revise a strategic plan covering

* Financial security
* Curriculum development and improvement
* Ongoing professional development
* Accreditation
* Expansion to other locations
* Upkeep of the school facility, furnishings, and materials
* Set up orientation courses on our philosophy and set up Middle Way teacher credential education programs.

1. A PDF of the U.S. Department of Education’s “State Regulation of Private Schools” is available online. http://www.ed.gov/admins/comm/choice/regprivschl/index.html

   An article, “How Preschool and Child Care Work: A State-by-State Guide,” is available on the Noodle.com website. https://www.noodle.com/articles/how-preschool-and-child-care-work-state-guide#states [↑](#footnote-ref--1)