



# Middle Way Education

## Checklist: Establishing a Buddhist School for Children

Starting a school is an exhilarating and ambitious undertaking that requires an enormous amount of research and resources and blessings help as well. First check your motivations, why are you opening a school? Who is it for? Is there a need in your area? A critical mass of Buddhist families requesting a Buddhist school? Or will you have to generate that need or work with non-Buddhist families? Are there Buddhist school teachers in your area, or will you have to recruit? Do you have spiritual guides and advisors? What are your legal obligations and restrictions? Do you have money and space?

Below is a check list of considerations. You won't be able to cover everything, and this list itself doesn't cover everything. Some of the magic happens in those gaps. But if you start with too few of these items figured out you can expect it to be a more stressful project that is more vulnerable to failure. Anything is possible and we are here to help in whatever ways we can. We suggest you and your team read through this together and see where your strengths and weaknesses lay and where your opportunities may arise.

### 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<sup>1</sup>

- Private schools
- Public schools
- Preschools and daycare centers

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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>

### 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 composed 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 and expert 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.