



2026 PREOPENING GUIDANCE

INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS THE PREOPENING PROCESS?

Preopening is the process the Institute uses to help ensure new schools are prepared to welcome students in a timely, safe manner and in full compliance with all regulations and requirements to open for instruction.

The process requires submission of various critical documentation, as well as an onsite visit by a member of the Institute staff typically a week to ten days before the school's planned opening date. Upon satisfactory completion of Preopening, the Institute issues a "Letter to Commence Instruction," which formally grants permission to open your school for instruction.

Note: The Institute collects all required documentation through Epicenter and Compass, which are our document management and compliance platforms. Please ensure the appropriate personnel have active user accounts in Epicenter and Compass. To request an Epicenter account, please email charter.epicenter@suny.edu. To request Compass access, please email charter.finance@suny.edu.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES TO HELP YOU

The Preopening period is both exciting and challenging. Schools with the smoothest and most successful openings generally remain in close contact with the Institute throughout, ask questions, and share concerns promptly and transparently to get appropriate resources and support. Institute staff are here to serve as a resource and help you, and we welcome any questions no matter how big or small. Email charter.academic@suny.edu anytime with questions.

The Institute also strongly recommends that all founding teams and founding boards review the [Planning Year School Board Focus Questions](#) on our website. This resource lists questions and items that founders and boards should consider month-by-month during Preopening to ensure the school is on track to open successfully.

In addition to the requirements outlined in this document, education corporations will be responsible for other, regular reporting that will continue once the school opens. This includes items like board minutes. Please review and refer to the [Institute's Compliance Calendar](#) to review other requirements that the education corporation will need to submit throughout the year.

TIMELINE AND WHAT TO EXPECT

While each individual new charter school's timeline may vary slightly depending on opening dates, the following chart outlines the general progression and timeline of the Preopening process, starting the December preceding the intended school opening year. The Institute will keep groups informed if any changes to the timeline below for the Modules are made.

Timely progress on required tasks is essential to the successful opening of any new school. When task completion is delayed or not completed according to schedule, it can significantly impede the preopening process and, in some cases, may prevent the school from opening as planned. The Institute emphasizes the importance of adhering to all established timelines to ensure readiness for students and the community on day one.

| Timeframe | Action(s) |
|---------------------------|--|
| December | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preopening Module 1 webinar - Initial Preopening overview meeting with Institute staff members |
| Ongoing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure facilities planning is on track – communicate with the Institute any facilities questions or concerns |
| January | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preopening Module 2 webinar – Finance and Facility Planning with Finance staff members |
| February | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preopening Module 3 webinar – Legal and Compliance Planning with Legal staff members |
| March | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preopening Module 4 – Evaluation and Accountability Planning with Academic staff members |
| April | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Institute check in to assist with continued completion of the first set of PreOpening deliverables |
| May 1, 2026 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> First set of PreOpening deliverables due |
| August 1, 2026 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Second set of PreOpening deliverables due |
| Ongoing throughout August | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Institute conducts Preopening Visit Upon satisfactory completion of all items, Institute issues Letter to Commence Instruction |
| Remainder of School Year | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If Letter to Commence Instruction identifies any outstanding areas, Institute follows up to ensure all items noted are complete After all items are fully complete, Institute issues formal Completion of Preopening letter to school |

LIST OF SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Please use the following checklists to track documents/deliverables due. A detailed description of each document/deliverable follows below. Note that the first set of documents in the first table are due May 1, and a second set of documents in the second table (next page) are due August 1.

Note: Schools should have submitted Student Applications to the Institute on November 1, 2026, for review and approval.

| Item Number | Document/Deliverable | Date Due | Complete? |
|--|---|-------------|--------------------------|
| 1. STAFFING | | | |
| 1a | School Leader Verification | May 1, 2026 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 1b* | Fingerprint Policy | May 1, 2026 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. GOVERNANCE | | | |
| 2a* | Management Contract (if applicable) | May 1, 2026 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2b* | Ratified Bylaws | May 1, 2026 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES | | | |
| 3a | 504 Policy | May 1, 2026 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. SCHOOL OPERATIONS | | | |
| 4a* | Handbooks & Other Policies Please see a full list of policies on pg. 8 | May 1, 2026 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4b* | Transportation | May 1, 2026 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4c* | Food Service | May 1, 2026 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4d.* | Mandated Reporting | May 1, 2026 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. FINANCE | | | |
| 5a* | Payroll | May 1, 2026 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5b* | Initial Statement Process | May 1, 2026 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. WRITTEN ASSURANCES SIGNATURE FORM | | | |
| Submit completed written assurances signature form | | May 1, 2026 | <input type="checkbox"/> |

*Multi-school education corporations already under SUNY authorization are not required to submit these documents and instead shall provide assurances via the written assurances signature form regarding specific requests.

| Item Number | Document/Deliverable | Date Due | Complete? |
|--------------------------------------|--|----------------|--------------------------|
| 1. STAFFING | | | |
| 1c | Fingerprint Clearance Records | August 3, 2026 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 1d | Teacher Cert. & Experience Roster/ Staff Directory | August 3, 2026 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 1e | Teacher Certification Records | August 3, 2026 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES | | | |
| 3b | Serving Students with Disabilities | August 3, 2026 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. SCHOOL OPERATIONS | | | |
| 4e | Enrollment | August 3, 2026 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4f | School Nurse | August 3, 2026 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4g | SAVE Plan/Safety | August 3, 2026 | <input type="checkbox"/> |

SUNY-AUTHORIZED MULTI-SCHOOL EDUCATION CORPORATION REPLICATORS

For current SUNY-authorized schools opening a new charter under the same education corporation, the Institute has many of the required documents already on record. As such, in lieu of new submissions, the education corporation must submit a set of Assurances for many of the May 1st deliverables, which can be found on the Written Assurances Signature Form. For the August 3rd deliverables, replicating SUNY education corporations must submit all items listed. The Institute will work with the education corporation to conduct the site visit to the new school in August, ahead of the intended school start date.

DESCRIPTION AND EXPLANATION OF REQUIRED SUBMISSIONS

Please review the following descriptions. Email charter.newapp@suny.edu if you have any questions. Please note, the sections are divided by due date, so the first set of descriptions refer to the May 1 deadline, and the second set of descriptions refers to the August 3 deadline.

May 1, 2026 Deliverables Description

1. STAFFING

a. School Leader Verification (due May 1st)

Please add the school leader's name, email address, phone number, and title directly in Epicenter, and then submit this verification to confirm that this information has been added to Epicenter. [This video](#) contains detailed instructions on how to add/update contacts in Epicenter.

What to Submit:

Add school leader contact information to Epicenter then complete Epicenter verification.

a. Fingerprint Policy (due May 1st)

Please add the school's fingerprint policy that covers all personnel (including cafeteria, maintenance, office, transportation staff, etc.) regardless of whether they are employed directly by the education corporation or are an independent contractor(s). The policy should implement a fingerprint/MorphoTrust - IDEMIA identification consistent with New York State Education Department ("NYSED") regulations and the charter agreement. For more information, please see NYSED's [Office of Educator Integrity](#) guidance and the Institute's [Guide to Fingerprinting Policies and Procedures](#) on our website. **Please note the charter agreement requires at least two staff members verify the clearance of each new employee/ contractor hired by the education corporation prior to official start of employment.**

Note: Multi-school education corporations already under SUNY authorization are not required to submit these documents and instead shall provide assurances via the written assurances signature form regarding these requests.

What to Submit:

Microsoft Word® file or Adobe® Acrobat file named: **1b – Fingerprint Policy**

2. GOVERNANCE

a. Management Contract (due May 1st)

Provide a copy of the fully executed management contract.

Note: Multi-school education corporations already under SUNY authorization are not required to submit this document unless the contract has been amended or altered for the new school.

What to Submit:

Microsoft Word® file or Adobe® Acrobat file named: **2a – Management Contract**

b. Bylaws (due May 1st)

Provide a copy of the ratified bylaws or a board resolution approving the bylaws on file (if the board has not amended the bylaws submitted with the charter application).

Note: Multi-school education corporations already under SUNY authorization are not required to submit this requirement.

What to Submit:

Microsoft Word® file or Adobe® Acrobat file named: **2b – Bylaws**

3. STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

a. 504 Policy (due May 1st)

Provide a copy of the 504 Policy that includes:

- Identification, evaluation, and reevaluation procedures;
- Placement procedures;
- Formation of a 504 team;
- Designation of a responsible employee to coordinate 504 efforts; and,
- A system of procedural safeguards for parents including notice, records review, hearing, appeal, and prompt and equitable complaint resolution in compliance with federal regulations (34 C.F.R. § 104 *et seq.*).

Note: Multi-school education corporations already under SUNY authorization are not required to submit this requirement.

What to Submit:

Microsoft Word® file or Adobe® Acrobat file named: **3a – 504 Policy**

4. SCHOOL OPERATIONS

a. Handbooks and Other Policies (due May 1st)

Provide student handbooks or separate policy documents that include policies relating to:

- Discipline;
- Formal and informal complaints;
- The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (“FERPA”);
- Health Services;
- NY Freedom of Information Law (“FOIL”); and,
- NY Open Meetings Law.

For the school’s health policy, include the procedures for storage and administration of prescription and non-prescription medications to students, and for the provision of required health services. The policy should also address the accessibility, storage, and maintenance of student health records to be maintained separately from the student education records.

Guidance on each topic is available on the Institute’s website at:

www.newyorkcharters.org/compliance/.

Note: Multi-school education corporations already under SUNY authorization are not required to submit these documents and instead shall provide assurances via the written assurances signature form regarding these requests.

What to Submit:

Microsoft Word® file(s) or Adobe® Acrobat file(s) named: **4a – Handbooks and Other Policies**

b. Transportation (due May 1st)

Provide evidence in form of correspondence with the district transportation office or an agreement with a supplemental provider that demonstrates appropriate provisions have been made for student transportation. If applicable, provide a copy of the school’s agreement with the provider of supplemental transportation services.

Note: Multi-school education corporations already under SUNY authorization are not required to submit these documents and instead shall provide assurances via the written assurances signature form regarding these requests.

What to Submit:

Microsoft Word® file or Adobe® Acrobat file named: **4b – Transportation**

c. Food Service (due May 1st)

Provide evidence that appropriate provisions have been made for food service in the form of a copy of the school’s agreement with the food service provider, if applicable. Provide copies of fingerprint/scan supported background checks for employees of the food service provider, if applicable, with 1e – Fingerprint Clearance Records.

Note: Multi-school education corporations already under SUNY authorization are not required to submit these documents and instead shall provide assurances via the written assurances signature form regarding these requests.

What to Submit:

Microsoft Word® file or Adobe® Acrobat file named: **4c – Food Service**

d. Mandated Reporting (due May 1st)

Provide evidence that the school has developed required policies related to Mandated Reporter Child Abuse policies. Please see the [Guide to Child Abuse Reporting](#) for additional information.

Note: Multi-school education corporations already under SUNY authorization are not required to submit these documents and instead shall provide assurances via the written assurances signature form regarding these requests.

What to Submit:

Microsoft Word® file or Adobe® Acrobat file named: **4d– Mandated Reporting**

5. FINANCE

a. Payroll (due May 1st)

Provide evidence that the school has established a payroll system and, if offered, properly allows employees to consent to a 12-month payroll. Note that schools may submit one copy of the contract if it covers all schools. Also, the school may submit one copy of the deduction policy, and if it was covered by the Initial Statement or related assurance, a copy is not required.

Provide a copy of a contract with a payroll company or documentation of employment of or contract with persons to handle payroll.

Note: Multi-school education corporations already under SUNY authorization are not required to submit these materials and can provide written assurance via the Written Assurances Signature Form.

What to Submit:

Microsoft Word® file or Adobe® Acrobat file named: **5a – Payroll**

b. Initial Statement Process (due May 1st)

Provide in the form of a letter or report from an independent accounting firm licensed in New York State confirmation that the Initial Statement Process in the Charter Agreement is complete including all follow-up steps. If not complete, provide a report by the independent accountant of the status of the process including the status of the independent accountant's report including any required follow-up and the timeframe therefore in accordance with the Charter Agreement.

If the school is an additional school of an education corporation already operating one or more schools, the education corporation's treasurer, or an employee specifically authorized by the board, may certify that similar financial controls to the ones in the other schools of the education corporation have been instituted for the school.

Note: Multi-school education corporations already under SUNY authorization are not required to submit these materials and can provide written assurance via the Written Assurances Signature Form.

What to Submit:

Submit a Microsoft Word® file or Adobe® Acrobat file named: 5b – Initial Statement Process

6. WRITTEN ASSURANCES

Please provide all the following written assurances via the [Written Assurances Signature Form](#). The Institute only accepts valid digital or physically signed scanned signatures. A digital signature is an encrypted, electronic form of signature that verifies the authenticity of a document and the identity of the signer, meeting security and compliance standards. Applicants must sign using a valid digital or scanned handwritten signature; typed signatures are not acceptable. The assurances are as follows:

Governance

The education corporation provides a media notice regarding each board meeting in accordance with the Open Meetings Law, and that the education corporation posts information regarding board meetings on its website and meets in accordance with the Open Meetings Law. More information is available in the Institute’s Guide to Opening Meetings Law on our [Legal Compliance website](#).

Serving Students with Disabilities

- The education corporation has hired an appropriately certified students with disabilities coordinator for programs serving students with disabilities in accordance with Exhibit C of the Charter Agreement, *Assurances Regarding Students with Disabilities*.
- The school is able to serve these students and has contacted the CSE within 10 days to provide services to students with disabilities.
- Copies of student Individualized Education Program will be distributed to applicable classroom teachers and are stored in lockable storage containers or password protected electronic storage systems.

Operations

- The school will implement a school calendar and class schedules that provides a minimum of 180 instructional days and 900 (K-6) or 990 (7-12) instructional hours, as per Commissioner’s Regulation § 175.5.
- The school has distributed handbooks, policies, calendars, and class schedules to students and parents, or will distribute them within 10 days of the first day of classes.
 1. This includes policies relating to:
 - Discipline;
 - Complaints;
 - The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (“FERPA”);
 - Health Policy;
 - NY Freedom of Information Law (“FOIL”); and,
 - NY Open Meetings Law.

- The school has requested or received each student’s prior school records.
- Each student has proper immunization and health records on file, and students who have not been immunized or exempted will be barred from school after 14 days. (Note that state law no longer permits religious exemptions. More information is available at [NYSED’s website](#)).
- The board has developed and adopted both a comprehensive district-wide school safety plan and a building-level emergency response plan (“SAVE Plans”) in accordance with Education Law section 2801-a. With respect to the district-wide school safety plan, the board:
 - has/will convene make a copy of the draft plan available for public comment at least 30 days prior to adoption by the board;
 - hold a hearing to meet with required groups (parents and teachers) prior to adoption of the plan;
 - adopt a final SAVE plan; and,
 - send the final SAVE plan to NYSED, and revise the plan as directed by NYSED.
 - With respect to the building-level emergency response plan, the school has filed it with the appropriate local law enforcement agency and with the N.Y. State Police within 30 days of its adoption by the board.
- The school has adopted policies and procedures for annual school safety training for staff and students including annual staff training on the emergency response plan in accordance with Education Law § 2801(2)(h).
- The school has provided written materials to mandated reporters explaining the requirement and that the school has conducted or will conduct annual training.
- The school has made appropriate provisions for student transportation.
- The school has made appropriate provisions for student food service.
- The school has an established fingerprint policy that covers all personnel (including cafeteria, maintenance, office, transportation staff, etc.) regardless of whether they are employed directly by the education corporation.

Finance

- An accounting system with internal controls and fiscal policies is in place for the school, and those policies are the same as other schools with the Education Corporation, as applicable.
- The school has established a payroll system and, if offered, properly allows employees to consent to a 12-month payroll.
- The Initial Statement process in the Charter Agreement is complete including all follow-up steps.

What to Submit:

Submit an Adobe® Acrobat file named: **6 – Written Assurances Signature Form**

August 3, 2026 Deliverables Description

1. STAFFING

c. Fingerprint Clearance Records (due August 3rd)

All school employees (and in some cases non-employees) including, but not limited to, teachers, administrative staff members, and non-instructional staff members (e.g., custodians, food service workers, security personnel, transportation providers, etc.) must have a criminal history background check conducted by the NYSED Office of School Personnel Review and Accountability (“OSPRA”) pursuant to the school’s Fingerprint Policy. The Institute cannot accept third party background checks. [Please see NYSED’s guidance](#) and the [Institute guidance](#) for more information.

For NYSED to conduct the background check, the school must send employees to a third-party vendor (MorphoTrust/IDEMIA) for fingerprinting with the results sent to NYSED. This requires the school to register with TEACH through OSPRA in advance.

Contact information for OSPRA [is available here](#). All schools must provide the Institute scanned copies of the fingerprint-supported background check certificates provided by NYSED for your school or printouts from the TEACH System for each employee or other person listed on the Staff Directory.

In the case of a person who has been hand scanned but is not yet cleared for employment by NYSED, the school must provide the Institute with documentary evidence that the school has followed the statutory procedures for an emergency conditional appointment, which includes ALL the following documentation:

- Proof of fingerprinting or prior NYSED or NYCDOE clearance;
- Proof of Emergency Conditional or Conditional Appointment including a signed statement regarding criminal record;
- An approved resolution from the education corporation board of trustees to extend such clearance to the employee(s), and if more than 20 business days have elapsed, an approved extension; AND,
- A supervision policy for such employee(s) approved by the board of trustees.

NOTE: For security purposes, please be sure to redact all parts of employees’ social security numbers and dates of birth prior to submission.

What to Submit:

Please submit a single, merged Microsoft Word® file or Adobe® Acrobat file containing all staff fingerprint clearance records named: **1c – Fingerprint Clearance Records**.

d. **Teacher Certification & Experience Roster/Staff Directory (due August 3rd)**

Complete and submit the [Teacher Certification and Staff List](#).

What to Submit:

Excel® file named: **1d – Teacher Certification Roster/Staff Directory**

e. **Teacher Certification Records (due August 3rd)**

Lead teachers must either be New York State certified or meet the requirements outlined in Education Law § 2854(3) (a-1), which stipulates that a charter school may employ non-certified teachers up to 30% of the teaching staff or five teachers (whichever is less), **plus** an additional five teachers, **plus** an additional five teachers of math, science, computer science, technology, or career/technical education (up to a maximum total of 15).

Non-certified teachers must meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Have at least three years of classroom teaching experience at the elementary or secondary level;
- Be a tenured or tenured-track college professor;
- Have two years' satisfactory experience through Teach for America (TFA); or,
- Have exceptional business, professional, artistic, athletic, or military experience.

For the Institute to determine teacher qualifications, all schools must provide the following for each lead teacher identified in the teacher roster:

- For certified teachers, scanned copies of TEACH certification records or NYSED teaching certificates; or,
- For non-certified teachers, appropriate proof of compliance with the requirements of the criteria listed above (e.g., a resume showing teaching or TFA experience).

NOTE: For information security purposes, please be sure to redact all parts of teachers' social security numbers and dates of birth prior to submission.

What to Submit:

Please submit a single, merged Microsoft Word® file or Adobe® Acrobat file named: **1e – Teacher Certification Records** containing all teacher certification records.

3. STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

b. **Serving Students with Disabilities (due August 3rd)**

Provide a summary of admitted students with disabilities and description of how the school will serve them including:

- A roster of admitted students with disabilities and a summary of the students' settings and related services as provided on the students' IEPs; and,
- Written documentation that the school has contacted the district Committee on Special Education seeking records of each incoming student known to have a disability.

What to Submit:

Microsoft Word® file or Adobe® Acrobat file named: **3b – Serving Students with Disabilities**

4. SCHOOL OPERATIONS

e. Enrollment (due August 3rd)

Provide a current summary of school enrollment including the number of currently enrolled students and number of students on the waiting list.

What to Submit:

Microsoft Word® or Excel® file(s) or Adobe® Acrobat file(s) named: **4e – Enrollment**

f. School Nurse (due August 3rd)

Provide documentation the school has secured a registered nurse (“RN”), a licensed practical nurse (“LPN”) supervised by a RN, and/or a physician. This may be documentation from the district or a separate employment agreement.

What to Submit:

Microsoft Word® file or Adobe® Acrobat file named: **4f – School Nurse**

g. SAVE Plan/Safety (due August 3rd)

Provide a copy of the draft district-level (not building level) SAVE Plan. The Institute will review the building level plan when it does the site visit before opening.

For more information regarding the required elements of SAVE plans please visit [the SAVE plan page of the NYSED website](#).

What to Submit:

Microsoft Word® file(s) or Adobe® Acrobat file(s) named: **4g – SAVE Plan/Safety**

PART II: PREOPENING FACILITY INFORMATION

FACILITIES REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

In addition to the PreOpening requirements outlined here, each PreOpening school must submit all other required submissions during the Preopening period, including Facilities submissions.

The Institute, as of December 2025, is updating its Facility Guidance. Each PreOpening School will need to submit a Facilities Questionnaire due late February. The Institute will be in touch as soon as it finalizes these guidance materials.

Until new guidance is ready, please review the current guidelines and requirements. The requirements change slightly based on where the school is located and type of facility, so please review the [2024 Guide to Facilities Reporting](#) (pages 5-8) for the complete guidance.

Having a facility early is an important aspect to opening a new school. The education corporation should stay in close contact with the Institute in regard to facility acquisition especially when challenges arise.

Please review the [2024 Guide to Facilities Reporting](#) (pages 5-8) thoroughly. Schools must secure a facilities agreement and temporary certificate of occupancy or certificate of occupancy from either the New York State Education Department (schools outside NYC) or NYC Department of Buildings (schools in NYC).

The Institute will be in touch with each education corporation when it finalizes the 2026 Facilities Reporting Guidance.

PHYSICAL PLANT CHECKLIST

During the Institute's PreOpening site visit, the Institute checks the completion of the [physical plant check](#) items. The Institute typically conducts the PreOpening site visit within 10 business days of the school's first day of instruction. The Institute also conducts physical plant checks during the renewal process.