

STEPS TO START A SCHOOL – Urmila Devi Dasi

Note: when items are numbered, they should generally be done in chronological order; bulleted lists can be done in any order

For each of these, one has to determine who will make the decision (e.g. school board, head teacher (principal), all the teachers, etc.). One also has to determine how the decision will be made (i.e. autonomously, autonomously after a process of consultation, collective consensus, collective vote, etc.)

Strategic planning: This should be done before anything else, and in this order:

1. Establish vision
2. Assess needs or gaps in the current situation
3. Assess facilities and constraints in the situation (nature of the community served, availability of personnel, availability of finances, physical facility, laws, etc.)
4. Link vision to addresses needs/gaps
5. Modify vision so it is workable with facilities and constraints available
6. Set immediate and long-range goals for each area of vision
7. Set priorities
8. Establish system and timeline for assessment benchmarks to determine if the goals are being met and if, when met, the gaps are decreasing

Pedagogy: Develop and articulate, in line with the vision, the:

1. Educational philosophy or view*
2. Desired school culture**
3. Classroom organization (e.g. separated by age or level, multilevel, looping, individualized)
4. Educational approach (e.g. classical, unit/thematic, programmed, mastery, etc.)*
5. Core subjects and extracurricular subjects
 - a. In harmony with vision, philosophy and culture
 - b. As required by law
6. Teaching methods/Instructional strategies*
7. Student discipline/management and character formation method
 - a. In harmony with vision, philosophy, culture, organization, approach, and methods
 - b. In accordance with law
 - c. In accordance with CPO rules and guidelines
8. Methods of student assessment and reporting
 - a. In harmony with vision, philosophy, culture, organization, approach, and methods
 - b. As required by law
9. Research, choose and/or create core educational materials and lesson plans***
10. Methods of teacher/staff training and assessment
 - a. In harmony with vision, philosophy, culture, organization, approach, methods, and educational materials
 - b. As required by law
11. Plan for after school clubs, sports, etc.

People and Organization

- Decide what people/positions are needed
- Describe qualifications and responsibilities that best support vision and pedagogy (One can first generate job descriptions and then attempt to find people to fit, or one can find suitable people and then tailor specific job responsibilities around the strengths of those persons)

- Develop program for child protection
 - Organize local CPT if none exists, or link with existing one
 - Learn local laws for screening staff and reporting problems
 - Learn and plan to implement CPO procedures for staff screening, student education, and reporting
- Decide on organizational structure that best supports vision and pedagogy (e.g. simple, professional bureaucracy, divisional form, adhocracy). This structure should be flexible enough to change as the school matures and personnel change.

Physical facility: Design or purchase physical facilities to support vision and pedagogy, and in line with government regulations and financial resources:

- For access to community served
- For type of classroom organization desired
- For type of core and extracurricular subjects taught (e.g. art room, science lab, music room)
- To facilitate type of spiritual program desired
- To provide for general resources (e.g. library/media center, gymnasium, playground, cafeteria/eating area, offices, nurse's station/sick area, toilets, sinks, drinking water, handicapped access, special education needs, gifted education, storage, parking)
- For easy maintenance and beauty (think of how the facility appears from a drive-by and upon entering and exiting, as well as in all seasons)
- For a smooth and efficient flow of traffic when students are arriving to and departing from school
- To provide for foreseen expansion

Materials and supplies other than those used for core instruction: Research and purchase or create materials and supplies for:

- Library/media center
- Technology use (in classrooms and/or computer lab and for staff): should support and enhance other types of materials used for instruction and administration
- Physical Education
- Religious education /worship, in classrooms or in communal worship area
- Festival observance
- Art, Music, Drama, etc.
- Maintenance
- Health and safety
- Cleanliness
- Food preparation and eating
- Offices

Policies: Design and write rules, policies, and system of enforcement, all available both on-line and hard copy:

- Which will communicate and support vision and program for spiritual instruction
 - parent handbook/prospectus
 - regular newsletter
- Which will support student behavioral management and character formation method (e.g. procedures for discipline, admission to and removal from school)
- Which will provide for protection, safety and health of the children (to include bullying policy)

- Which will consider those with learning or physical disabilities
- Which will consider students who are especially gifted
- Homework policy
- Which will involve parents
- Which will involve general community
- Which will support organizational structure
- Which will assess teachers and staff
- Which will address conflicts and grievances
- Which will address issues of transportation to and from school
 - Earliest times students can arrive and leave, systems for children who arrive or leave late
 - Systems for transportation
 - Responsibility of school, if any, for transportation

Forms: Procuring or creating forms and systems of communication, all available on-line and hard copy:

- Attendance
- Assessment
- Student information
- Staff information
- Enrollment/parent contact
- Emergency procedures
- Discipline

Times: Design schedules, calendar, programs

- Daily hours
- Yearly/term schedule
- Holiday and festival observance (i.e. will school be closed for major Vaisnava festivals or incorporate observance into the school day)
- Special events (e.g. regular student drama or concert performances, open house, fun raisers, etc.)
- Regular or annual field trips and community interaction

*Every educational system has an overall purpose for existence. Many would call this overall view an “educational philosophy.” We should be keenly aware that other systems of education do not share our goals. Some come close, considering cultural and sectarian bias, and some are very far away. However, no matter what the goal of education, there are many ways of organizing academic instruction. There are then many ways of actually presenting knowledge and evaluating the instruction. For clarity we will define our terms:

- Educational philosophy, purpose, or view: the overall reason for education; the definition of the child’s basic needs and identity, relationship with the teachers, and purpose of life. This is the “bias” we refer to when evaluating textbooks and supplies.
- Educational approach: the underlying system for presenting academic subject matter.
- Teaching method or instructional strategies: the manner, on a minute to minute or day to day basis, that the educational approach is put into practice; how knowledge and skills are learned by the student.

** Organizational culture provides (a) a way to interpret symbols and events, and to solve problems, as well as (b) a prioritizing of values within an overall context of meaning (Tichy and Ulrich, 1984/2003, p. 85). Organizational culture is here defined as expectations and ideals; organizational climate is defined as to what degree those expectations are met, or how much there is a correct fit between the organizational culture and the individual values of those who work in that organization. Owens (2004) explains that the climate in a school or district is the result of four key factors, which are: (a) the ecology, or the physical plants and facilities as well as pedagogy used; (b) the organizational structure, including the hierarchy and patterns of communication and decision making; (c) the milieu, or the demographics of the student and staff population, along with leadership skills of the administration; and (d) the culture, or the values, norms, patterns of behavior, and symbols (p. 192).

***Because there are no existing educational materials and lesson plans that are in line with a Gaudiya Vaisnava philosophy of education, it is most desirable to create materials specifically geared to our needs. There is a continuum from using all commercially available materials and creating everything in-house.

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