

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is a Charter School?

Charter schools are public schools, free of charge to all students, with enrollment determined by a lottery. Charter schools give parents more choice in public education, and give educators flexibility for innovation to meet students' needs. Charter schools are also held to a higher standard of accountability than traditional district schools¹.

Charter schools in Massachusetts have been created by a variety of people. Some have been opened by educators with innovative ideas; some, like Rising Tide, have been opened by community members seeking a choice in the options for public education. Each charter school has a unique mission, approved by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education and the state Board of Education.

There are two types of Charter Schools: Horace Mann and Commonwealth. Horace Mann Charter Schools must have approval from the local school committee and the teachers' union; Commonwealth Charter Schools operate independently from local districts under the supervision of a Board of Trustees and report directly to the state. Rising Tide Charter Public School is a Commonwealth Charter School.

What is Rising Tide Charter Public School?

Rising Tide Charter Public School (Rising Tide) is a middle and high school with approximately 385 students in grades 5-9. This year's 9th grade students will be a part of our first graduating class in 2015. Rising Tide is open to residents of Plymouth, as well as other towns in the state, including Kingston, Carver, Middleborough, Wareham, Duxbury, Plympton, Pembroke, Marshfield, Bourne and Sandwich. Enrollment priority is given to siblings of current students, then to Plymouth residents because the school is located in Plymouth.

How are Charter Public Schools Funded?

Public education spending in Massachusetts follows the child. The funding that is allocated to charter public schools is based upon the amount of money spent per child by the sending public district. Since sending public districts no longer educate students who attend charter public schools, they no longer receive the funding; however, in an effort to give sending districts time to adjust their budgets for the loss of enrollment, the state reimburses a sending public district for 100% of the money allocated to a charter public school for the first year, and 25% for the next five years.

What is the background of Rising Tide Charter Public School?

Rising Tide first opened in 1998 with 162 students in grades 5-7. The school expanded in September of 1999 to 216 students in grades 5-8. By September of 2004 the school had expanded to 250 students and in September of 2006 the school grew to its current middle school capacity of approximately 320 students in grades 5-8. This year we have begun the expansion into the high school grades with our first 9th grade class.

Rising Tide's founders were a group of Plymouth community members who sought to build a small, community-based middle school. They wanted to create a school focused on high

¹Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research, "Charter Public School Policy Fact Sheet, No. 60, April 2006," <http://www.pioneerinstitute.org>

academic achievement and project- and skills-based learning. Over the past thirteen years, the faculty at Rising Tide has continued with the original vision and developed an inquiry- and skills-based approach. The founders felt such a school would provide parents with a choice in a fast-growing region with over-crowded schools. Rising Tide has thrived as students and parents enthusiastically support the school's small class size, strong and dedicated teaching staff, and individualized attention for all students.

How do I enroll my child at Rising Tide Charter Public School?

School admission is based upon a blind lottery each March for the following school year. Spaces available in each grade level are filled according to the order of the lottery drawing; once available spaces are filled, remaining student names will be placed on a waiting list in the order in which they are drawn.

As a public school, Rising Tide is open to all students who reside in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. In admitting students, Rising Tide does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, creed, sex, ethnicity, sexual orientation, mental or physical disability, age, ancestry, athletic performance, special need, proficiency in the English language or in a foreign language, or academic achievement. Siblings of current students and residents of Plymouth are given preference for admission in the lottery process. Please see our Enrollment Policies and Procedures for more detailed information.

Is transportation available?

Bus transportation is available to Plymouth residents.

What extra-curricular activities are available?

In the middle school Discover Period we offer academic support, enrichment activities, and community building events. Enrichment activities have included Drama, Student Newspaper, Documentary, Ecology, Visual Arts, Bridge Building and many sports activities. Students also participate in community building events with their Advisories and grade levels. Students have an opportunity be a part of a weekly games club or join the Junior Classical League. In the upper school, students can join the Student Congress and the Junior Classical league. Upper school students can also develop club activities.

What is Exposition?

The Rising Tide Exposition provides middle school students a project-based learning experience. During the Exposition, students have the opportunity to explore a topic, ask questions, make findings, solve problems, and create projects in groups comprised of students from all four grade levels. Students have the opportunity to choose from topics connected to Plymouth and the Southeastern Massachusetts region that are of particular interest to them. The investigations culminate in a school-wide exposition in which students share their findings or products with the school community.

Are there sports teams at Rising Tide?

We have boys' and girls' soccer teams and basketball teams that compete against other local schools. Many other sports, such as flag football, softball, soccer, running, and volleyball are offered as enrichment activities during the Discover Period.

Is musical instruction available at Rising Tide?

General music class is offered to 5th, 6th and 8th grade students. We also have a very successful Band program, and different Band groups rehearse together based upon experience. Students can sign up for instrumental lessons as a part of the Band program. We have several Band concerts each year. Music courses are also offered as high school electives.

Do students study Latin at Rising Tide?

Yes, students study Latin as a foreign language. In 6th grade, students are introduced to the language and Roman culture in The Classical World course. In 7th and 8th grades, the classes become more rigorous in order to prepare students for Latin 2 if they continue with the language in high school. Learning a language other than English is extremely valuable; Latin also offers a strong foundation for learning in any Romance language.

Each year, 8th graders have an opportunity to travel to Rome with the school during February vacation week to experience a stronger connection with ancient Rome and the Latin language.

Are other languages offered?

In the upper school, students have an option to study Spanish or Latin.

Do students have a lot of homework?

Rising Tide faculty and staff view homework as essential to the learning process and to high academic achievement. Individual work helps students to build on the skills and knowledge they gain in the classroom, and provides opportunities for students to gain deeper understanding through practice, reflection and synthesis; in addition, homework assists students in developing organizational skills and the ability to follow directions. Homework is an important part of student assessment and is required for high learning standards.

Students should expect to have homework assignments in several courses each night; all students are expected to regularly complete assignments. Depending upon the grade level, homework should take approximately 45 minutes to two hours each night.

In the middle school and upper school, students are scheduled for Academic Support time each week, during which they will have an opportunity to get support from teachers to review skills and concepts. If a student is consistently taking more than the expected amount of time per night to complete homework, the student should speak to his or her Advisor.

What is an Advisor?

A child's Advisor is the teacher at the school who will most likely know the child the best. In middle school, students meet in Advisory groups each morning and afternoon, and will occasionally work with the group in grade-level community activities. In the upper school, students meet with advisors a few times a week. The Advisor works with each student to develop student skills and interpersonal skills, and is a person to whom a student can go to with any concerns. Within the school, a child's Advisor communicates with other teachers and is made aware of the child's successes and challenges; the Advisor is an advocate for the child. The Advisor is also the primary contact at the school for parents. Parents should

contact the child's Advisor with any concerns, and parents meet with the child's Advisor twice a year for Student-Advisor-Parent conferences.

Does Rising Tide provide Special Education services?

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and related regulations provide eligible special education students with access to services in order to make progress in the general education program of the school. Massachusetts has incorporated the IDEA standards within its General Laws.

Rising Tide Charter Public School provides special education services in accordance with the Massachusetts regulations and federal law. We implement an inclusion program that ensures students the right to a free and appropriate education within the least restrictive environment.

What is the social climate like at Rising Tide?

The Rising Tide Charter Public School community is a close and caring group of students, advisors, teachers, staff, and parents. We value our relationships with each other and strive to develop an atmosphere of trust, respect for differences, support, and understanding. We expect that students will behave responsibly and with consideration for the feelings of other students, teachers, and staff. We are proud that Rising Tide is a safe space in which students can grow and learn.

Do teachers at Rising Tide need to be certified?

Yes, teachers at Rising Tide are required to be Highly Qualified, according to *No Child Left Behind*, and licensed by the state in the subject area in which they teach.

How is the curriculum at Rising Tide different than other public schools?

Rising Tide is a small school with innovative educators, and teachers work together to identify learning needs and design learning activities. Research shows us that secondary school is the time to build skills for life-long learning, and the school has the flexibility to develop curriculum that addresses the challenges that children face.

Teachers design and implement the curriculum, guided by our School-Wide Objectives and aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Teachers communicate and demonstrate high expectations for all students, and encourage good study habits and a solid work ethic. Because our class sizes are small, teachers are able to meet the individual needs of all students.

Charter Schools must adhere to the same state educational standards, laws & regulations, and tests as other public schools in Massachusetts. Unique to Charter Schools, Rising Tide must submit an Accountability Plan and a publicly released Annual Report to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education; these documents are not required of traditional public schools in the state.

Do Rising Tide students perform well on MCAS tests?

Yes. Students at Rising Tide perform well on MCAS tests in comparison with students across the state; however, we are most concerned with engaging students in activities that encourage critical thinking and help them build skills for life-long learning.

Does Rising Tide have a high school?

Yes. We have started our upper school program with our first 9th grade class this year. Our 9th grade students will be in our first graduating class in 2015, as we expand one grade level at a time. Our upper school is located just up the street, at 57B Armstrong Road.