

Princeton Charter School

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August 14, 2026

Dear Princeton Charter School Families,

I hope this letter finds you enjoying the final weeks of summer before the return to school. Remember that this year we will start classes the week before Labor Day with the first day of school on Monday, August 31. This “early start” is essentially the same date as last year's calendar. This year, Labor Day is quite late. This early start is similar to that of Princeton Public Schools, PPS. Many families also have a student enrolled at PPS, so it made sense to align our start of school calendars.

30 years of Charter: We are very excited to celebrate the start of our 30th year of school for Princeton Charter School. This is an amazing milestone, and we are thrilled to celebrate this fall as a community. We look forward to acknowledging some of the key dates in the school's development and significant changes along the way. The school has grown and developed in many different ways while maintaining the commitment to its mission and core values. Growth and change are essential for any institution. We have seen so many organizations fail either to grow and change or to fail by growing too quickly — losing track of their core identity and mission. At Charter, we are very proud of our success and growth, while maintaining the key elements that make us unique and excellent.

Celebration: The Capital and Endowment Fund will be organizing a celebration for families, and staff on October 22, in the evening. We are planning to gather current families and staff, past families and staff, and alumni for a fun evening to celebrate this significant milestone (more information to follow).

Attendance: Last year, I was concerned with the number of absences and late arrivals, marking a real increase for us from past years. Last year we had 22 students in this category. However, we also had 47 students with over 15 absences and a whopping 101 total students with 10 or more absences. We are asking that parents consider the decisions to remove students from school, understanding of course that when students are sick, they need to stay home in accordance with the guidelines in the Parent-Student Handbook.

Charter Unplugged “Reboot” for 2026-27

Last year we announced the “Charter Unplugged” theme and now more than ever we feel it is important for our students to learn without technology, learn to use technology, and to strike the right balance of when and how much technology to use when learning. There is no doubt that social media, cell phones, and screen time are having a serious, negative impact on children. And, while screen time is problematic, it is also clear that learning to effectively use technology responsibly is essential. We will work to guide students in this K-8 span so they understand this balance.

We will also continue our practice as outlined in the Student-Parent Handbook, of no cell phone use during the school day. Students may bring in cell phones for use after school since it is helpful in coordinating times and travel arrangements for afterschool activities. This will satisfy the new law (S-3695/A-4882) prohibiting the use of cell phones in schools that was set into place by Governor Murphy before he left office. This law also prohibits the use of all smart devices including smart watches. We have asked parents to support this effort by not sending students to school with smart devices.

In support of this goal, as announced last year:

- We discourage students getting smartphones until the second half of 8th grade.
- Any cell phone that is brought to school is to be turned off and stored in a locker or cubby for the day. (The school is not responsible for the loss or theft of a student's cellphone.) Students may use phones for communication after normal school hours.
- Use of smartwatches is prohibited at school as well. Smartwatches are also to be stored in a locker or cubby. (The school is not responsible for the loss or theft of a student's smartwatch.)
- In class, the default is that Chromebooks stay closed and away unless the teacher directs students to use them.
- Limits to screen time: *Students **may not** use Chromebooks during homeroom, reading period, breaks, or lunch.*
- Notes are taken on paper.
- Teachers identify work on Schoology that requires screen time. (A conscious effort is made to differentiate between internet time and working in a Google document, e.g. researching on the internet vs. typing a paper.)
- Teachers will consider whether there is value added by using a device for assignments.

Executive Functioning: We will also continue our goal of developing strong executive skills for our students. These include time management skills, a plan for managing all necessary supplies and materials to study and complete assignments, and an understanding of effective organizational strategies. This will help with reducing the weight of back-packs that is the result of the strategy of simply carrying everything around. New this year: We are installing Chromebook chargers in homeroom classrooms for grades 6, 7 and 8. This will allow students to leave devices in school reducing the weight of back packs. And, we are in the process of purchasing additional mathematics textbooks so students will not have to carry these heavy textbooks back and forth to school.

Care of Community: Finally we will continue our efforts to foster a strong ethos of “care of community” at Charter. We want to leverage our unique K-8 structure to provide opportunities for our students to demonstrate leadership and service in support of this goal.

Changes for next year.

New Hires: We have no new hires for this school year!

Computer Science: We made the decision to change the approach to Computer Science for the 2026-27 school year. This decision is driven by budget issues, disruption to the academic schedule, loss of break

and study hall time, and added workload to an already packed academic program. While we clearly value Computer Science, we felt that this change simply needed to happen. We will continue to introduce critical digital citizenship skills, use of technology and core applications such as word processing, spreadsheets, presentation software as well as internet searches, and research and sound information management skills. In addition, we are offering afterschool club options and a computer science class as part of the grade 8 arts electives.

Chess: Similarly, we will no longer be offering a full year of Chess in grades K-2. All K-2 students will have a three week, six session introduction to chess in the fall starting after the 3rd week of school. Following this introductory program, families may choose to continue with chess in the afterschool clubs.

Forms and Back-to-School Requirement: All start of school forms, approvals, and contact information updates will be completed in *PowerSchool* this year. [Here is the link to detailed instructions](#) on how to access *PowerSchool* and how to upload and fill in all information required. Please take some time to read through all required forms and permissions and to log onto *PowerSchool*. After School Program registration is also available through *PowerSchool* (under the “enrollment” tab).

We are asking that all forms and permissions be completed by **Friday, August 21, 2026**. As a plug for athletics, we are encouraging students in grades 6-8 to consider registering for soccer and field hockey this year to ensure that we have enough players to field teams. We will be offering Cross Country (which is always very popular) as well this fall. Sports meet on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays. Participating in sports at Charter has been a great experience for our students, a chance to be part of a team, learn, and have fun. Unlike other schools, we do not make cuts on our teams so it is a great opportunity to have a team experience.

All letters and materials sent out via email are on the website for your reference under “Announcements - Back to School 2026.” <https://princetoncharter.org/2026/07/back-to-school-2026-2027/>

Enjoy the rest of the summer.

Sincerely,
Larry Patton
Head of School

General School Updates

Calendar Items: The school provides calendar information in two different formats. First, the calendar of openings and closings for the academic year 2026-27 indicates all holidays, openings, closings, ½ days, parent-teacher conferences, etc. This can be found as a PDF on the school website.

In addition, school events are marked on the school's Google calendar which is located on the website - [Click here](#). By clicking on the Google Calendar link in the lower right hand corner of the calendar, you can upload school events automatically to your own Google calendar. This will allow changes, additions and deletions from the calendar to update live.

Key events in September:

8/26	Wednesday	Grade 5 Orientation - 2:00 PM
8/27	Thursday	Optional New K-4 Parents Q&A w/ Mrs. Dowling 11:00AM - Charter Room
8/31	Monday	The first day of classes
9/4	Friday	No School
9/7	Monday	No School - Labor Day
9/9	Wednesday	5-8 Back to school night - In person
9/10	Thursday	K-4 Back to school night - In person

Student-Parent Handbook: [See link to a PDF](#) of the 2026-27 Student-Parent Handbook. Please take the time to review the Student-Parent Handbook carefully. You are responsible for following all rules and procedures set out in the Student-Parent Handbook. This year we have added guidelines on the use of Artificial Intelligence as well as the rules for cellphones/smartwatches. Note: You will need to acknowledge that you have read the handbook in PowerSchool.

Lunch Service: Once again Maschio's will be providing the lunch service this year. Parents will need to use PaySchools to make lunch and snack purchases. To sign up for PaySchools, [use this link](#) - (also in "Quicklinks" under "lunch" on the [school website](#)). Students will have the option to buy snacks and additional items. They will only be able to do so if there are available balances in Payschools. Parents can limit student purchases, e.g. lunch only in PaySchools. Note: All snacks conform with nutrition guidelines for acceptable foods in schools. Nutritional information is also listed on the Maschio-PrincetonCharter page on the website.

Club and Sports participation fees

In order to defray the high costs of clubs and sports, parents will be asked to pay a participation fee for some clubs, activities, and sports. This is in response to the budgetary climate in which we are operating and to address the sharp increase in costs associated with these activities.

Clubs: For school sponsored clubs, there will be a \$75 club fee. This fee will not apply to service clubs, e.g. student council. Fees for activities run by outside organizations will vary. Further detailed information including dates, times, and fees will be sent out next week.

Sports - This applies only to Grades 6-8: There will be a **\$175** participation fee for each sport.

Music: Jazz, Orchestra, and prep orchestra - There will be a \$250 fee for the year.

Chess: The fee for chess will be \$200 per trimester.

The After School Program (ASP) Registration forms and information on enrolling your child in the after school program (ASP) is available through *PowerSchool*.

Drop-off/Pick up Procedures: It is critical that we establish an efficient routine for drop off and pickup and that we maintain above all a safe parking lot area.

Again This Year- No use of the back road. The intersection of cars entering the parking lot from Bunn Drive and cars coming from the gravel road is creating an unsafe situation. Cars must enter from Bunn Drive only. **IMPORTANT:** Cars should only turn in when there is enough space to clear the roadway, i.e. do not block traffic coming down Bunn Drive from the direction of Hilltop. This is extremely dangerous.

Entering the Buildings: Students and parents should follow these simple procedures when entering the buildings.

- All students and visitors will only enter through either of the two main entrances, one for the 5-8 building and one for the K-4 building.
- All parents and visitors must sign in at the office when entering the buildings.
- We have provided a drop-off table for parents to leave items for students in order to reduce the number of visitors entering inside the buildings.

Technology: We will provide all students in grades 6, 7, and 8 with a personal Chromebook. Students, however, will not receive their chromebooks (Grades 6-8) or have access to school chromebooks in the classrooms (grades 2-8) until parents have signed the Computer Use Form on *PowerSchool*. We have a 1:1 Chromebook environment for students in grades 2-5; however, the devices remain in the classrooms.

Students in grades 6-8 will have the option of leaving their chromebooks in their homerooms overnight to reduce the weight of their backpacks. We have charging stations in the grades 6-8 homerooms.

Drop-off and Pick-up for 2026-27

We are committed to the safe operation of student drop-off and pick-up. By following these rules as a collective community, we can maintain an efficient process at dismissal. The Charter School parking lots are very busy, and all members of the community must follow all guidelines to ensure safety.

Read these guidelines carefully.

School Building Entrances

Entrances: Students, visitors, and parents will access the school buildings through the main entrances only for each building. These entrances will be clearly marked (on advice from the Princeton Police Department).

Check in: All visitors and parents must check in at the division office upon entering the buildings.

Driving on Campus Guidelines (13 MPH)

When driving on campus, all vehicles must maintain **an appropriate speed** and safety standards to ensure the well-being of all individuals on campus. (13 miles per hour) Consider that there are 474 students and staff on campus during the day, entering the buildings and walking through the parking lots in the mornings and in the afternoons.

Parents should always follow the direction of the staff who are supervising the space.

Decorum and Communication: We ask that parents communicate in a respectful and calm manner with each other or not at all. If there are any issues in the parking lot, it may be better to bring the issue to a school administrator rather than attempt to communicate with other parents.

Follow the direction of traffic as indicated:

- As mentioned earlier, parents should not use the back (gravel) road from Ewing Street for drop off and pick-up.
- All cars should enter through the upper parking lot on Bunn Drive.
- All cars should exit from the lower exit on Bunn Drive.
- **New**: During drop-off and pick-up, the exit at Bunn is right turn only, i.e. NO left turn onto Bunn Drive.

Drop-off and pick-up

Children should know clearly whether they are getting picked up, taking the bus, staying late for an activity, or walking home. Communicate early with the school before 2:00pm if there is a change in procedure and be clear with your child what the plan is or if there is a change in the plan. If we do not receive a written change in dismissal procedure by 2pm, your child will automatically follow his/her regular dismissal procedure.

Follow the direction of staff members who are on duty for drop-off or pick-up. Students who are not picked up by the end of the dismissal time will go directly to the After School Program.

School Bus: The most efficient way for your child to travel to and from school is on the school bus provided by Princeton Public Schools Transportation Department. We urge you to take advantage of this free service. **Any questions or problems should be directed to Princeton Public Schools Transportation at 609-806-4209.**

NOTE: Students may only ride their assigned bus. A student may not board a different bus to go home with a friend.

We recognize that the buses may arrive very early in the morning, but it is also an option to take the bus home in the afternoon only. Parents may want to consider using buses on the way home as an option.

Two Key Factors: During drop-off and pick-up, we have identified two key factors in order to maintain a safe and efficient operation.

First Key Factor - Keep the roadway clear of any blockage: cars must be able to move through the lanes at all times. To accomplish this:

- Do not “block the box” at the merge at the top of the parking lot.
- Do not leave cars unattended in the bus/fire lanes, no exceptions.
- **Do not double park when waiting for students at pick-up (Pull into a lined space.)**
- Do not make a left turn onto Bunn drive during pick-up and drop off.

Second Key Factor - the speed at which students load into and unload from the vehicle.

- Children should be ready to enter and exit the car quickly on the sidewalk side. Please determine in advance that the location of your child safety seats makes this possible.
- Do not keep backpacks in the trunk as this causes a delay and a traffic back-up.
- Please stop your car only long enough to drop the student off. (Do not wait for your child to walk into the building.)
 - Communicate any messages to your child before dropping off.
- If you need to get out of the car, the car must be parked in a lined parking space.
- Do not leave your car unattended if you are not parked in a lined parking space.

Drop-off

Congestion occurs when too many cars arrive in the parking lot at the last minute, i.e. 7:59 AM. Parents end up rushing, driving too quickly, and students start their day in a stressful mode. It is important to drop students off early enough to allow time to get to their homeroom, visit their lockers, etc. Drop-off is very calm and smooth from 7:40-7:50 which is a nice time to target. After 7:55 AM it can become backed up and busy.

K-4 stay left : At drop-off (or pick-up) for a K-4 student, enter the opening at the northmost point of the school and stay to the left. Use the left lane to pass cars dropping off for grades 5-8. Look to carefully cross over to the right at or just before the middle portion of the walk that runs along the front of the school, i.e., the portion just before the main K-4 front doors. All K-4 students will be dropped off in this middle section.

Do not block the left lane when pulling over to the right. If needed, pull forward and wait to pull in rather than block the left lane for exiting 5-8 cars.

5-8 stay right: At drop-off (or pick-up) for a 5-8 student, enter the opening at the northernmost point of the parking lot and stay in the right two lanes, i.e. keep the left lane clear for K-4 parents. Proceed to the drop-area at the path to the main entrance of the 5-8 building. (Parents can drive down in the middle lane to keep the entrance clear.) Students must exit the car on the sidewalk side.

LOCATIONS

Students are to be dropped at the curb at any point reasonably close either before or beyond the 5-8 entrance path. We will set out cones indicating the point at which cars can unload students.

Students should be ready to disembark immediately and as quickly as possible. This is not the time to put on coats, stow books and toys, or finish eating. Backpacks should be in the car cabin (not in the trunk) as getting them from the trunk in the back of the car is time consuming and dangerous.

Students should not exit or enter their vehicles on Bunn Drive, or at the upper end of the parking-lot. It is tempting to disembark while waiting at the top of the parking lot, but invariably, the cars in front move forward while students are disembarking and it causes a back up onto Bunn Drive; wait until the car is in the drop-off area.

Students should not get out of the driver side of the vehicle as cars may be passing at close proximity.

Drop-off timing

Grades K-2:	7:35-7:45AM
Grade 3-4	7:45-7:55AM
Grade 5-8	7:45-7:55AM

Late Arrival: Parents must escort students to the office after 8:00 AM in order to sign in as late. Parents must park in a space when escorting children into the building.

Pick-up

In order to facilitate a speedy and efficient process during pick-up, please follow these guidelines:

NO STANDING: Cars may not double park and wait for students to arrive for pick up. (You will be asked to move/circle around and re-enter the carline if your child is not available at time of pick up.) Cars that arrive early create the backup problem for the entire school.

This is singularly the biggest cause of delays in the parking lot - cars that arrive before students are out.

Pick up older child first. If you have a K-4 student and a 5-8 student, arrive at the 5-8 time. Your younger child will be supervised until you arrive. This avoids waiting in the K-4 pick-up area, blocking a lane, until the 5-8 student is dismissed. It is also helpful for the 5-8 students to walk down to the K-4 area - one stop.

Park if early: If cars arrive early for pick-up, which is defined as “any time before the students are available or dismissed for pick-up,” parents must park in a lined space, or pull around and return once students have been dismissed, i.e. no waiting for students to come out of the building.

Do not block the left lane: The left lane must always be open, i.e. you may never wait in the left lane for students or to merge.

Do not block the upper intersection: The entrance intersection at the top of the parking lots must always be kept clear for cars to pull in. All cars blocking this area must move down in the middle lane or left lane to keep the intersection clear. There is no standing in this area.

Pull all the way down: Students should not load into cars at the upper end of the parking lot. This leads to back up and congestion.

Load quickly: As mentioned above, students should enter cars quickly, do not load backpacks into the trunk, etc.

Pick-up Timing:

Grades K-2	3:05-3:15
Grades 3-4	3:10-3:20
Grades 5-8	3:15-3:30

Buses usually begin arriving for pick-up at Charter at 3:30PM according to the end of their previous route.

Late Pick-up: Students who are not picked up by the end of the dismissal time will be sent to the After School Program.