
BEFORE THE TENNESSEE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

IN RE:)	
)	
CONNECTIONS PREPARATORY ACADEMY)	State Board of Education Meeting
Charter School Appeal)	October 23, 2015
)	
)	

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATION REPORT
OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Pursuant to Tenn. Code Ann. (T.C.A.) § 49-13-108, sponsors proposing to open new charter schools may appeal the denial of their amended application by a local board of education to the State Board of Education (“State Board”). On August 24, 2015, Connections, Inc. (“Sponsor”), the Sponsor of the proposed Connections Preparatory Academy (“Connections”), appealed the denial of their amended application by Jackson-Madison County Schools (“JMCS”) Board of Education to the State Board.

Based on the following procedural history, findings of fact, and Review Committee Report attached hereto, I believe that the decision to deny the Connections amended application was not “contrary to the best interests of the pupils, school district, or community.”¹ Therefore, I recommend that the State Board affirm the decision of JMCS.

STANDARD OF REVIEW

Pursuant to T.C.A. § 49-13-108 and State Board policy 2.500, State Board staff and an independent charter application review committee (“Review Committee”) conducted a de novo, on the record review of the Connections amended application. In accordance with the Tennessee Department of Education’s charter application scoring rubric, “applications that do not meet or exceed standard in every area will be deemed not ready for approval.”² In addition, the State Board is required to hold a public hearing in the district where the proposed charter school seeks to locate.³

In order to overturn the decision of the local board of education, the State Board must find that the local board’s decision to deny the charter application was contrary to the best interests of the pupils,

¹ T.C.A. § 49-13-108.

² Tennessee Charter School Application – Sample Ratings and Scoring Criteria, pg. 1.

³ T.C.A. § 49-13-108.

school district or community.⁴ Because Connections is proposing to locate in an LEA that contains a school on the current or last preceding priority school list, the State Board has the ability to approve the application, and thereby authorize the school, or to affirm the local board's decision to deny.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

1. On January 21, 2015, the Sponsor submitted a letter of intent to JMCS expressing its intention to file a charter school application for Connections.
2. The Sponsor submitted its initial application for Connections to JMCS on April 2, 2015.
3. JMCS assembled a review team to review and score the Connections application. The review team recommended denial of the Connections initial application.
4. On June 11, 2015, JMCS Board of Education voted to deny the Connections initial application based upon the review team's recommendation.
5. The Sponsor amended and resubmitted its application for Connections to JMCS on July 15, 2015.
6. JMCS' review team reviewed and scored Connections' amended application and again recommended denial.
7. On August 13, 2015, based on the review team's recommendation, JMCS voted to deny the Connections amended application.
8. The Sponsor appealed the denial of Connections' amended application in writing to the State Board on August 23, 2015, including all required documents per State Board policy 2.500.
9. At the time of appeal to the State Board, the Sponsor submitted corrections to the application as allowed under T.C.A. § 49-13-108(a)(4)(C).⁵
10. On August 25, 2015, the State Board sent a letter requesting that JMCS provide information regarding its denial of the Connections amended application.
11. The State Board's Review Committee analyzed and scored the Connections amended application using the Tennessee Department of Education's charter application scoring rubric.
12. The Review Committee conducted a capacity interview with the proposed governing board of Connections along with key members of the leadership team on September 23, 2015 in Nashville.

⁴ Id.

⁵ The Sponsor was notified that certain areas of the application that they intended to correct upon appeal could not be corrected per the statute. As such, the Review Committee only considered those corrections that were permitted by statute.

13. After the capacity interview, the Review Committee determined a final consensus rating of the Connections amended application, which served as the basis for the Review Committee Recommendation Report.
14. On October 6, 2015, the State Board Executive Director and staff held a public hearing in Jackson. At the public hearing, the Executive Director heard presentations from the Sponsor and JMCS and took public comment regarding the Connections application.

FINDINGS OF FACT

- **District Denial of Application.**

The review team assembled by JMCS to review and score the Connections initial and amended applications consisted of the following individuals:

Name	Title
Dr. Vivian Williams	Chief Academic Officer, JMCS
Dr. Bryan Chandler	Leader of Elementary Education, JMCS
Dr. Tina Williams	Supervisor of Pupil Services, JMCS
Dr. Tiffany Green	Chief Human Capital Officer, JMCS
Melanie Holt	Academic Math Coordinator, JMCS
Catherine Korth	Leader of Assessment and Accountability, JMCS
Rachel Lebo	Leader of Professional Development, JMCS
Ruth Carson	Manager of Federal Programs and Grants, JMCS
John Mills	Director of Operations, JMCS
C. Eddie Hays	Title I Consultant, JMCS
Vicky Schwartz	Chief Financial Officer, JMCS
Ellen Robbins	Benefits Coordinator, JMCS
Grant Ward	Supervisor of Transportation, JMCS
Susan Johnson	Supervisor of Food and Nutrition, JMCS
Holly Kellar	Internal Budget Specialist, JMCS

The Connections initial application received a range of ratings across the various sections submitted for review.⁶ Because the initial application did not receive a rating of “Meets or Exceeds Standard” in every area, it was recommended for denial by the JMCS review team.

After the JMCS review team completed its review and scoring of the initial application, its recommendation was presented to the JMCS Board of Education on June 11, 2015. Based on the review team’s recommendation, the JMCS Board of Education voted to deny the initial application of Connections.

Upon resubmission, the amended application received the following ratings: 1 of 20 indicators was scored as “Meets or Exceeds the Standard” and 19 of the 20 indicators were scored as either “Partially

⁶ JMCS did not submit an overall rating for each of the main sections of the application.

Meets Standard” or “Does Not Meet Standard.”⁷ Because the amended application did not receive a rating of “Meets or Exceeds Standard” in every area, it was recommended for denial by the JMCS review team.

After the JMCS review team completed its review and scoring of the amended application, its recommendation was presented to the JMCS Board of Education on August 13, 2015. Based on the review team’s recommendation, the JMCS Board of Education voted to deny the amended application of Connections.

- **State Board Charter Application Review Committee’s Evaluation of the Application**

Following the denial of Connections amended application and their subsequent appeal to the State Board of Education, State Board staff assembled a diverse Review Committee of experts to evaluate and score the Connections amended application. This Review Committee consisted of the following individuals:⁸

Name	Title
David Hanson	Managing Partner, Hanson Wells Partners
Allyson Hauptman	Lead Faculty, Instructional Practice, Lipscomb University
Kelly Love	Reading Specialist, Akiva Day School
Angela Sanders	General Counsel, State Board of Education
Tess Stovall	Director of Charter Schools, State Board of Education
Holly Tilden	Dean of Instruction/Data and Assessment Coordinator, LEAD Academy High School
Charlie Williams	Director of Finance and Operations, STEM Preparatory Academy

The Review Committee conducted an initial review and scoring of the Connections amended application, a capacity interview with the Sponsor, and a final evaluation and scoring of the amended application resulting in a consensus rating for each major section. The Review Committee’s consensus rating of the Connections amended application was as follows:

Sections	Rating
Academic Plan Design and Capacity	Does Not Meet Standard
Operations Plan and Capacity	Does Not Meet Standard
Financial Plan and Capacity	Does Not Meet Standard

The Review Committee recommended that the application from Connections be denied because the application lacked significant evidence throughout the academic, operational, and financial plan of a realistic, sound, and viable program, which would result in a high quality school option. With regard to academic plan design and capacity, the Review Committee found that the academic plan presented in the application differed significantly from what was presented in the capacity interview, and neither plan aligned with the operations or financial plans. The Review Committee also found the plan for serving special populations to be underdeveloped and lacking critical details required within the scoring criteria.

⁷ Exhibit B, JMCS Review Team Final Rubric; JMCS Public Hearing Presentation; August 6, 2015 Memo from Dr. Vivian Williams to Dr. Verna Ruffin.

⁸ Please see EXHIBIT A for detailed bios of each review committee member.

The operations plan did not provide a clear, strong model for school governance or a realistic plan for start-up. The composition of the proposed governing board was not consistent between the application and the capacity interview. Furthermore, the application lacked critical board governance documents and contained information that conflicted with the proposed bylaws. The start-up plan did not align with the proposed budget and key responsibilities were assigned to positions that were not included within the budget or organizational chart.

Finally, the Review Committee found insufficient evidence to demonstrate a sound and viable financial plan. The projected staffing model included within the budget did not align with the proposed staffing structure in the application, and there were no fundraising estimates or a viable contingency plan. Connections' application did not provide necessary evidence of financial processes and procedures, and the application lacked financial expertise on the governing board and leadership team.

In summary, the Review Committee determined that the academic, operational, and financial plans were incomplete and lacking the needed preparation and detail. The capacity interview with the Sponsor did not provide further clarification that would have resulted in a higher rating. Therefore, the Review Committee recommended that the Connections application be denied.

For additional information regarding the Review Committee's evaluation of the application, please see **EXHIBIT A** for the complete Review Committee Report, which is fully incorporated herein by reference.

- **Public Hearing**

Pursuant to Statute⁹ and State Board policy 2.500, a public hearing chaired by the Executive Director was held in Jackson on October 6, 2015. JMCS' presentation at the public hearing focused on the argument that denial of the Connections amended application was a result of "significant concerns" with the amended application, including that the application "included inconsistent, inaccurate and incomplete information" and that the amended application contained "critical gaps that will negatively impact students, parents and the Jackson-Madison County School System."¹⁰ When asked about the application review process employed by the district, JMCS stated that the same internal review team reviewed both the initial and amended applications, and that while they were in close communication with the Sponsor about the amended application, they did not conduct a capacity interview.

In response, Connections' presentation focused on the amount of time that the Sponsor has spent developing this application since the idea for a charter school was first initiated several years back. The Sponsor discussed the research that has been done to develop the application, as well as the facilities and financial plan for the proposed school. The Sponsor also maintained that this charter school is needed so that low-income students in Jackson can have access to more school choice.

⁹ T.C.A. § 49-13-109.

¹⁰ JMCS Public Hearing Presentation.

A portion of the public hearing was dedicated to taking public comment. A total of two people made verbal comments at the hearing. In addition, public comments were submitted to State Board staff in writing either at the hearing or via e-mail.¹¹

ANALYSIS

State law calls on the State Board to review the decision of the local board of education and determine whether the denial of the proposed charter school was in the “best interests of the pupils, school district, or community.”¹² T.C.A. § 49-13-108 requires the State Board to adopt national standards of authorizing. One such standard is to maintain high standards for approving charter applications. In making my recommendation to the Board, I have considered the Review Committee Report, the arguments made by both the Sponsor and JMCS at the Public Hearing and the public comments received by State Board staff, and conclude as follows:

The Review Committee’s report and recommendations are sound and grounded in information contained in the application and gained at the capacity interview. For the reasons stated in the Review Committee Report, I agree that the Connections amended application did not rise to the level of meeting or exceeding the standards required for approval.

While it is clear that the Sponsors are a dedicated group who wish to serve the students in their community, I agree with JMCS that significant concerns remain about the ability of the Sponsor to successfully open and manage a school that will improve academic outcomes for all students. The Sponsor asked that this school be approved in order to give low-income students in Jackson an opportunity to exercise educational choice. I agree that charter schools can offer strong, additional educational options for students in Jackson and throughout the State. However, given the great responsibility of educating students and the taxpayer dollars entrusted to a charter school, the State Board should only authorize those schools that demonstrate a high likelihood of success and meet or exceed the required criteria in all areas. Unfortunately, the application for Connections did not meet this bar.¹³ JMCS shared this same sentiment at the public hearing, stating that the district is, “committed to school choice; however we want the choices to be excellent opportunities for parents and students. The Connections Preparatory Charter School’s application failed to demonstrate clear and convincing evidence of future success and sustainability.”¹⁴

CONCLUSION

For these reasons, and for the reasons stated in the Review Committee Report attached hereto, I do not believe that the decision to deny the amended application for Connections Preparatory Charter School was contrary to the best interests of the students, the school district, or the community. Therefore, I recommend that the State Board of Education affirm the decision of the JMCS Board of Education.

¹¹ Copies of written public comments received by the deadline have been provided to State Board members.

¹² T.C.A. § 49-13-108.

¹³ In addition to substantive omissions, the amended application submitted on appeal to the State Board contained numerous misspellings, grammar and sentence structure errors, and required multiple conversations between the Sponsor and State Board staff in order to organize the application into a coherent and properly paginated document.

¹⁴ JMCS Public Hearing presentation.



Dr. Sara Heyburn, Executive Director
State Board of Education

10/20/2015

Date

EXHIBITS

- **Exhibit A:** State Board of Education Review Committee Report and Reviewer Bios
- **Exhibit B:** JMCS Review Team Final Rubric



EXHIBIT A

Charter Application Review Committee Recommendation Report

October 23, 2015

School Name: Connections Preparatory Academy

Sponsor: Connections, Incorporated

Proposed Location of School: Jackson-Madison County Schools

Evaluation Team:

David Hanson
Allyson Hauptman
Kelly Love
Angela Sanders
Tess Stovall
Holly Tilden
Charlie Williams

This recommendation report is based on a template from the National Association of Charter School Authorizers.



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Introduction

Tennessee Code Annotated (T.C.A) § 49-13-108 allows the public charter school sponsors to appeal the denial of an application by the local board of education to the State Board of Education. In accordance with T.C.A. § 49-13-108, the State Board of Education shall conduct a de novo on the record review of the proposed charter school's application, and the State Board of Education shall adopt national authorizing standards. As laid out in State Board Policy 6.200 – Core Authorizing Principles, the State Board has committed to implementing these authorizing standards which are aligned with the core principles of charter school authorizing and include setting high standards for the approval of charter schools in its portfolio.

The State Board of Education's charter application review process is outlined in T.C.A. § 49-13-108, State Board Policy 2.500 – Charter School Appeals, and State Board Policy 6.300 – Application Review. The State Board assembled a charter application review committee comprised of highly qualified internal and external evaluators with relevant and diverse expertise to evaluate each application. The State Board provided training to all review committee members to ensure consistent standards and fair treatment of all applications.

Overview of the Evaluation Process

The State Board of Education's charter application review committee developed this recommendation report based on three key stages of review:

1. **Evaluation of the Proposal:** The review committee independently reviewed the amended charter application, attachments, and budget submitted by the sponsor. After an independent review, the review committee collectively identified the main strengths, concerns, and weaknesses as well as developed specific questions for the applicant in the three sections of the application: Academic Plan Design and Capacity, Operations Plan and Capacity, and Financial Plan and Capacity.
2. **Capacity Interview:** Based on the independent and collective review of the application, the review committee conducted a 90 minute in-person interview with the sponsor, members of the proposed governing board, and identified school leader (if applicable) to address the concerns, weaknesses, and questions identified in the application and to assess the capacity to execute the application's overall plan.
3. **Consensus Judgment:** At the conclusion of the review of the application and the capacity interview, the committee submitted a final rubric and developed a consensus regarding a rating for each section of the application.

This recommendation report includes the following information:

1. **Summary of the application:** A brief description of the applicant's proposed academic, operation, and financial plans.
2. **Summary of the recommendation:** A brief summary of the overall recommendation for the application.

3. Analysis of each section of the application: An analysis of the three sections of the application and the capacity of the team to execute the plan as described in the application.
- a. **Academic Plan Design and Capacity**: school mission and goals; school development; academic focus and plan; academic performance standards; high school graduation standards (if applicable); assessments; school calendar; special populations and at-risk students; school culture and discipline; marketing, recruitment and enrollment; community involvement and parent engagement; and the capacity to implement the proposed plan.
 - b. **Operations Plan and Capacity**: governance; start-up plan; facilities; personnel/human capital; professional development; insurance; transportation (if applicable); food service; additional operations (if applicable); waivers; and the capacity to implement the proposed plan.
 - c. **Financial Plan and Capacity**: budget narrative; budget; cash flow projections; related assumptions; financial policies and procedures; and the capacity to implement the proposed plan.

The State Board’s charter application review committee utilized the Tennessee Department of Education’s Charter School Application Evaluation Ratings and Sample Scoring Criteria (“the rubric”), which is used by all LEAs when evaluating an application. The rubric states:

[A]n application that merits a recommendation for approval should present a clear, realistic picture of how the school expects to operate; be detailed in how this school will raise student achievement; and inspire confidence in the applicant’s capacity to successfully implement the proposed academic and operational plans. In addition to meeting the criteria that are specific to that section, each part of the proposal should align to the overall mission, budget, and goals of the application.

The evaluators used the following criteria and guidance from the scoring rubric to rate applications:

Rating	Characteristics
Meets or Exceeds the Standard	The response reflects a thorough understanding of key issues. It clearly aligns with the mission and goals of the school. The response includes specific and accurate information that shows thorough preparation.
Partially Meets Standard	The response meets the criteria in some aspects, but lacks sufficient detail and/or requires additional information in one or more areas.
Does Not Meet Standard	The response is significantly incomplete; demonstrates lack of preparation; is unsuited to the mission and vision of the district or raises significant concerns about the viability of the plan or the applicant’s ability to carry it out.

Summary of the Application

School Name: Connections Preparatory Academy

Sponsor: Connections, Incorporated

Proposed Location of School: Jackson-Madison County Schools

Mission:¹

The mission of Connections Prep is to provide leadership, assistance, oversight and resources so that every child enrolled will have access to an education that meets world-class standards.

Proposed Enrollment:²

Grade Level	Year 1 (2016-17)	Year 2 (2017-18)	Year 3 (2018-19)	Year 4 (2019-20)	Year 5 (2020-21)
K	60	60	60	60	60
1		60	60	60	60
2			60	60	60
3				54	54
4					48
5					
Total	60	120	180	234	282

Brief Description of the Application:

Connections Preparatory Academy is an elementary school proposing to locate in Jackson, Tennessee and serve students in grades Kindergarten through 5th grade. The school plans to focus on five key principles to achieve the school's mission: (1) highly qualified teachers; (2) extended time; (3) a no-excuses school culture; (4) literacy and math as fundamental and essential; and (5) a plan to assess, analyze, and intervene regularly.³

Connections Preparatory Academy will be governed by a seven-member governing board with the school's proposed principal as a non-voting member of the governing board. Connections Preparatory Academy is organized as a Tennessee non-profit entity and will be governed by the bylaws adopted by the governing board and Tennessee state law. In years 1 through 3, the school proposes to locate within a church facility in East Jackson.

Connections Preparatory Academy projects to have \$523,170 in revenue in Year 1 and \$488,225 in expenses in Year 1, resulting in a positive fund balance of \$34,945. In Year 5, the school projects to have \$2,030,126 in revenue and \$1,949,052 in expenses, resulting in a positive fund balance of \$81,074. The school assumes that 75% of the student population will qualify for Free and Reduced Price Lunch and 18% of the student population will be students with disabilities.

¹ Connections Preparatory Academy Amended Application, pg. 1.

² Ibid, pp. 4-5. The proposed grade structure for the school is Kindergarten through 5th grade, and the applicant states that the maximum capacity of students will be 250.

³ Ibid, pp. 1-4.

Summary of the Evaluation

The review committee recommends that the application from Connections Preparatory Academy be denied because the applicant lacked significant evidence throughout the academic, operational, and financial plan of a realistic, sound, and viable program that would result in a high quality school option. With regard to academic plan design and capacity, the review committee found that the academic plan presented in the application differed significantly from what was presented in the capacity interview, and neither plan aligned with the operations or financial plans. The review committee found the plan to serve special populations to be underdeveloped and lacked critical details required within the scoring criteria.

The operations plan did not contain a strong governance plan for the proposed school or a realistic start-up plan. The composition of the proposed governing board did not align between the application and the interview. The application lacked key governing board documents as well as contained conflicting information between the application and the proposed bylaws. The start-up plan did not align with the proposed budget and start-up tasks were assigned to positions that were not included within the budget or organizational chart.

The review committee found a significant lack of evidence to demonstrate a sound and viable financial plan. The projected staffing included within the budget did not align with the proposed staffing structure in the application, and there was a lack of evidence provided for viable contingency plans and fundraising estimates. The applicant did not provide evidence of sufficient financial processes and procedures, and lacked critical financial expertise on its governing board and leadership team. The review committee found that the academic, operational, and financial plans were significantly incomplete and lacking critical preparation and detail. The capacity interview with the applicant did not provide further clarification that would have resulted in a higher rating. Therefore, the review committee recommends that the Connections Preparatory Academy application be denied.

Summary of Section Ratings

In accordance with the Tennessee Department of Education’s charter application scoring rubric, “applications that do not meet or exceed standard in every area will be deemed not ready for approval,”⁴ and strengths in one area of the application do not negate material weaknesses in other areas. Opening and maintaining a successful, high-performing charter school depends on having a complete, coherent plan and identifying highly capable individuals to execute that plan.

Sections	Rating
Academic Plan Design and Capacity	Does Not Meet Standard
Operations Plan and Capacity	Does Not Meet Standard
Financial Plan and Capacity	Does Not Meet Standard

⁴ Tennessee Charter School Application – Sample Ratings and Scoring Criteria, pg. 1.

Analysis of the Academic Plan Design and Capacity

Rating: Does Not Meet Standard

Weaknesses Identified by the Committee:

The Academic Plan Design and Capacity section does not meet the standard because the applicant lacked significant evidence of a viable academic plan that would result in a high quality school for students upon implementation. While the proposed principal and board chair are very passionate individuals with experience within education, the academic plan presented was deficient across multiple areas, and there were material differences between the plan discussed during the capacity interview and the plan presented in the application. The applicant's proposed staffing model was not supported by the financial plan, the plan to serve students with disabilities and English Language Learners was underdeveloped, and the assessment plan lacked depth and clarity. Overall, the Academic Plan Design and Capacity did not meet the standard in the vast majority of the required criteria.

In the application, the academic plan proposes to staff the school with three teachers, an Assessment Administrator and one paraprofessional per grade. However, when the review committee asked the applicant to describe the three-teacher model during the interview, the proposed school leader described a model in which there would be a teacher, a teacher assistant, and a volunteer in each classroom at all times which is significantly different from what was proposed in the application. The financial plan included within the application does not include teacher assistants or paraprofessionals within the budget. Throughout the interview, the proposed school leader described numerous staffing and instructional scenarios in response to the committee's questions. However, these staffing models and instructional plans were based on her experience within a previous school and were not aligned with the academic plan proposed within the application. For example, the proposed school leader described a traditional school day length, but the application clearly referenced an extended school day for the proposed school. Throughout the application and the interview, the review committee did not find evidence of a clear and comprehensive explanation of the school's academic focus, or evidence that the proposed academic plan will be appropriate and effective for growing all students as required by the rubric.

The application's plan for serving students with disabilities and English Language Learners was underdeveloped and lacked critical details. Therefore, the review committee did not find evidence of a viable plan to serve these students. The application lacks a description of a plan to monitor the services of students in need or plans to exit students that attain sufficient progress. There is no description of a plan to comply with state or federal obligations with regard to students with disabilities or English Language Learners, and there is no description of a plan to hire highly qualified personnel to serve students with disabilities and English Language Learners. When the review committee asked the applicant about the plan to serve English Language Learners during the interview, the proposed school leader stated that assistants would be brought in to help these students, and they would group all of the ELL students in one classroom in order to provide pull-out services when necessary. The applicant did not discuss any specific instructional programs, practices or strategies to educate English Language Learner students, either in the application or in the interview. The descriptions provided did not sufficiently meet the required criteria of a viable plan.

The proposed academic plan states that the school would hire part-time and non-certified staff for elective courses such as visual arts, music/dance/theatre, and physical education. When the review committee asked about the plans for recruiting individuals to fill these roles during the interview, the

applicant stated that they will recruit family members or other retired teachers to fill in these roles for the school, and non-certified positions would teach classes after school. The information provided in the interview significantly contrasts what was proposed in the application regarding these courses. The review committee did not find sufficient evidence that either staffing plan was realistic, sustainable or effective for growing all students and closing achievement gaps. Additionally, the applicant stated that a family member of the leadership team who is a minister would teach a basic Bible class to the students during the school day, but there was no additional evidence provided that the class would be non-religious in nature or why it was appropriate for elementary school students.

Within the application, the proposed assessment plan for the school included the use of the TerraNova assessment, TCAP, interim assessments, and the STEP literacy assessment. During the interview with the applicant, the review committee asked the applicant to describe the assessment plan for the school. The applicant stated the school would be utilizing DIBELS as the baseline for students as well as researching online programming options for assessments. The leadership team did not articulate a detailed assessment selection or provide evidence to collect, analyze, and use data to inform and support general instruction as well as for students with disabilities and English Language Learners. The assessments described in the interview did not align with the assessment selection laid out in the application, and neither described plan met the required criteria for an assessment plan. Therefore, the review committee did not find evidence of a viable and coherent assessment plan for the school.

Overall, the review committee found a lack of coherence, clarity, and detail within the Academic Plan Design and Capacity section. Topics were covered across numerous sections, some sections lacked significant depth and detail, and it was difficult for reviewers to read, analyze, and score because of the lack of cohesion throughout the academic plan. The academic plan contained numerous grammatical and spelling errors, which did not provide evidence of the capacity to execute the academic plan as presented.

Analysis of the Operations Plan and Capacity

Rating: Does Not Meet Standard

Weaknesses Identified by the Committee:

The Operations Plan and Capacity section does not meet the standard because the application lacks critical details in the proposed governance, start-up, facilities, and staffing of the school. Overall, the application and subsequent capacity interview did not provide the review committee with clear, coherent, and thorough evidence of a viable operational plan for implementation of the academic plan presented within the application. The governance structure lacked critical detail and alignment within the application, and the leadership team provided conflicting and confusing information during the capacity interview regarding the proposed governance of the school. The start-up plan within the application lacked depth and viability with tasks assigned to positions that were not budgeted for in the start-up year. The facilities plan did not provide sufficient evidence that renovations would be completed with the available funding and that the space was adequate for the proposed student population. The projected staffing plan differed significantly from what was described in other parts of the application, including the financial plan.

The governance structure presented in the application does not meet the standard because it lacked critical detail concerning how the governing board will interact with each other as well as with the proposed school. The identified structure does not provide sufficient evidence of effective governance and meaningful oversight of school performance. For example, several required criteria were not included within the application including a grievance plan for handling parent complaints and a plan for ensuring parents have access to the governing board. Additionally, the governing board membership lacked critical financial and legal expertise. In the capacity interview, the composition and makeup of the governing board differed significantly from the application and changed throughout the interview. A number of the governing board members identified in the application were no longer a part of the governing board, but the applicant did not provide a clear and coherent explanation of who had come onto and off of the governing board. The changing nature of the governing board composition did not provide evidence of a strong understanding of the roles and responsibilities of a governing board as required in the application.

Within the application, there were several inconsistencies between the governing board documents provided as attachments and the governance section. For example, the application stated that the Articles of Incorporation were in progress, but in another part of the application, it stated that the sponsor group had been incorporated since 2010. The governing board bylaws state that the board terms would be three years, but the application states that the board terms would be two years. The description of board member elections and the terminology of officer titles differ between the application and the bylaws. The governance structure of the proposed school appeared to be very fluid, and the review committee did not find sufficient evidence of the capacity to implement an effective governance structure.

The start-up plan presented in the application is very detailed including timelines, description of projects, and managers of each task, which would meet the criteria of the rubric to have a detailed start-up plan with tasks and timelines. However, the applicant used another application's start-up plan, and it is not clear how the sponsor tailored the start-up plan to meet the needs of the proposed school as the name of the other school is mentioned within the plan. The start-up plan lacks evidence of being compelling and viable because it assigns tasks to positions that are not budgeted to be hired in the start-up year and positions that are not included within the proposed staffing or organizational chart. When

the start-up plan was discussed in the interview, the leadership team stated that the proposed school leader, the governing board chair, and another proposed governing board member, all retired individuals, would be responsible for the implementation of the start-up plan, but this information differed from what was presented in the application.

The applicant has budgeted \$15,000 in start-up expenses inclusive of hiring personnel, recruitment and marketing costs, and renovations to the facility. The applicant is relying exclusively on private fundraising to fund any start-up expenses. When the review committee asked about the contingency plans if the school needs additional start-up capital, the applicant stated they would rely on additional fundraising within the community. In totality, the review committee did not find sufficient evidence to demonstrate a sound start-up budget to ensure the implementation of the proposed start-up plan.

Additionally, the facility plan for the applicant was neither viable nor reasonable, and conflicting information was provided within the application and the interview. During the interview, the applicant stated that it intends to locate within the basement of a church that used to be a daycare facility for the first year of the school's operation. Yet, the facility would only be suitable for the first three years for the school because of the size of the facility. However, this information conflicts with the facilities information contained within the budget narrative that states the church location is a permanent facility with no need for additional long-term options. The applicant stated that the property owner would cover the cost of all renovations within the church facility; however, the letter of support from the pastor of the church does not include any discussion of renovations. The extent of the renovations needed were unclear in the application and throughout the interview. Without additional assurances from the property owner regarding the facility, the review committee did not find evidence that the facility plan was reasonable or sound.

The review committee did not find evidence of robust staffing projections that aligned with the education program presented within the application and the financial plan. The staffing projections contain four employees in the start-up year and nine employees in Year 1. Yet, the budget included within the application has zero employees in the start-up year and five employees in Year 1. When this inconsistency was raised in the capacity interview by the review committee, the applicant stated that the financial plan outlined was the most conservative estimate based on the estimated per pupil funding levels for the school, and if the school received additional funding, they would be able to hire additional personnel. The lack of consistency in the staffing models and the academic plan, operations plan, and financial plan did not provide sufficient evidence to the review team that the sponsors had a realistic and viable plan that is conducive to the school's success.

Analysis of the Financial Plan and Capacity

Rating: Does Not Meet Standard

Weaknesses Identified by the Committee:

The Financial Plan and Capacity section does not meet the standard because the budget model presented does not align with the staffing plan presented within the application, does not include sound contingency plans, lacks realistic fundraising estimates, and does not include detailed financial policies or procedures. As detailed in the academic and operations sections, the budget presented within the application does not align with the staffing necessary to implement the academic plan described in the application or the academic plan described within the interview. The budget has zero personnel in the start-up year and five staff members in Year 1, but this staffing does not align with what was presented in the projected staffing chart or the academic plan. Therefore, the review committee did not find evidence of complete, realistic, and viable start-up and five year operating budgets.

The review committee found that the financial plan presented lacked sound contingency plans and fundraising estimates. In its current form, the budget does not include the staffing needed to implement the academic plan as described in the application or the interview. Therefore, the budget currently funds the least number of staffing possible to operate the school. However, when the review committee asked about the sponsor's contingency plans within the interview, the applicant stated that they would look to cut staff and fringe items such as technology and instruments. Additionally, the financial plan relies significantly on private fundraising to fund the least amount of staff possible to run the school. The applicant stated in the interview that they would rely on additional private fundraising or grants as a part of their contingency plans. However, the application only contains documentation regarding \$25,000 of the estimated \$100,000 of pledged fundraising support. When the review committee asked about the pledged fundraising support for the school, the applicant responded that they had a lot of interest from the business community, but these individuals did not want to come forward and pledge their support prior to the approval of the school. Since the budget relies significantly on the school meeting these fundraising estimates in order to have a positive ending fund balance in year one, additional evidence of committed support is necessary to meet the required criteria for a sound contingency plan.

The budget narrative lacked evidence of detailed financial procedures and a policy for handling accounting, payroll, and procurement within the school. The narrative includes the hiring of an hourly bookkeeper, but when the review committee asked the leadership team to identify the person who would oversee the day-to-day finances of the school, the sponsor stated that board chair would handle the finances. It is unclear how the governing board would ensure proper oversight of the school's financials if the governing board chair was in charge of the day-to-day financials during the start-up phase. During the interview, the applicant provided the name of another individual who would be a financial consultant, but this person's resume or credentials were not included within the application. As a result, the review committee did not find sufficient evidence of a viable and sustainable plan to ensure proper financial procedures and oversight within the application.

Evaluation Team

David Hanson is Managing Partner of Hanson Wells Partners (HWP), a contrarian value investing partnership. Prior to founding HWP, Mr. Hanson was a Vice President at Deutsche Bank, responsible for providing investment banking advisory services to both public and private companies in the financial services industry. Mr. Hanson attended Wake Forest University and an executive program at Columbia Business School. Active in community and charitable efforts, Mr. Hanson serves on the Board of Valor Collegiate Academy, and supports KIPP Nashville, the Second Harvest Food Bank of Middle Tennessee, the Nashville Entrepreneur Center, the Phoenix Club of Nashville, Wake Forest University, and Wake On Wall Street, among others.

Dr. Allyson Hauptman is the Lead Faculty for Instructional Practice at Lipscomb. She has a Ph.D. in Teaching, Learning, and Teacher Education from the University of Nebraska, and has taught first and fifth grades as well as Special Education. She also has experience as a literacy and math coach. Her research interests include reading and writing motivation and best practices in literacy instruction.

Kelly Love is a reading specialist who received her B.S. from University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) in 2001. She has a wide range of teaching experience that includes traditional, charter and private schools. She was a model teacher in the El Paso schools where she trained teachers in Reader's Workshop and Writer's Workshop as part of a district mandate. In 2007, she moved to the Nashville area and worked as a language arts teacher at LEAD Academy. She eventually became the reading specialist/coach to LEAD's middle school team. Mrs. Love is currently in her sixth year as an educator at Akiva School of Nashville.

Angela Sanders serves as the General Counsel for the Tennessee State Board of Education. In this role, she advises board members and staff on all legal matters relating to public K-12 education in Tennessee. Ms. Sanders works closely with the Director of Charter Schools to manage the charter school appeals and authorization process. She also prepares board-approved rules and regulations for review by the Attorney General and filing with the Secretary of State and provides interpretation of Board policies and rules to internal and external stakeholders. Prior to joining State Board staff, Ms. Sanders was an Associate Attorney in the Nashville office of Lewis, Thomason, King, Krieg & Waldrop, P.C., working primarily in the Education Law and Business Law practice groups. In this role, Ms. Sanders advised and represented education clients in a variety of legal matters and litigation including employment issues related to licensed and classified employees, employee and student discipline, employee and student rights, special education and disability accommodations, civil rights matters, tort liability and first amendment issues. Ms. Sanders graduated Magna Cum Laude from Saint Louis University School of Law and received her Bachelor's Degree in Communication from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Summa Cum Laude.

Tess Stovall serves as the Director of Charter School Accountability and Policy for the Tennessee State Board of Education. In this role, she manages the charter school application process and authorization duties of the State Board. Prior to joining the staff of the board, she served as the Transformation Facilitator at Cameron Middle School, the first district-led conversion of a traditional public school to a



charter school in Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools. While in Washington, DC, Tess worked for Congressman Jim Cooper (TN-05) and a centrist think tank, Third Way, on economic and education policy. She is a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of The George Washington University earning a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Political Science and Sociology and a graduate of the London School of Economics with a Master of Science Degree in Political Sociology. Tess is a member of the National Association of Charter School Authorizers' 2015 Leaders Program.

Holly Tilden currently serves in a dual role as the Dean of Instruction and Data and Assessment Coordinator for LEAD Academy High School in Nashville, TN. After graduating from Georgetown University in 2008, she began her career in education as a middle school math teacher and started teaching high school math at LEAD Academy in 2011. With six years in the classroom, a record of producing strong academic results for students, and experience leading both grade level and content area teams, Holly transitioned to a full-time leadership role in 2014. She now oversees the high school academic team, ensuring that both teachers and students have the resources they need to achieve excellent student outcomes.

Charlie J. Williams is a Nashville native and a 1991 graduate of Montgomery Bell Academy. Currently, he serves as Founding Director of Finance and Operations for STEM Preparatory Academy. Prior to joining STEM Prep, he served as Deputy Director for the Mayor's Office of Economic and Community Development in Nashville. His responsibilities in the Mayor's Office included managing corporate relocation and expansion projects, administering middle Tennessee's Foreign Trade Zone, and coordinating the city's electric vehicle infrastructure strategy. Previously, Charlie was a business lender and credit analyst with First Tennessee Bank, where he led the bank's expansion into Nashville's inner city neighborhoods. Charlie began his career as an entrepreneur, negotiating forward supply contracts for his company and importing raw coffee from the Chiapas region of Mexico. He graduated summa cum laude with a bachelor's degree from the University of Tennessee and holds a master's of business administration from the University of Oklahoma, where he was a Rath Scholar. Charlie has served on the board of directors for Fannie Battle Day Home for Children, the Margaret Maddox YMCA, the Neighborhoods Resource Center, the East Area Business Council, and the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce. He is also a past member of the Metropolitan Nashville Board of Zoning Appeals.

EXHIBIT B



TENNESSEE CHARTER SCHOOL APPLICATION EVALUATION RATINGS AND SAMPLE SCORING CRITERIA

Ratings and Criteria

State law requires the Tennessee Department of Education to provide "a standard application format," T.C.A. 49-13-116, and "sample scoring criteria addressing the elements of the charter school application specified in the Tennessee Public Charter Schools Act of 2002," SBE Rule 0520-14-01-.01(2).

Evaluators will use the following criteria to rate applications. Within each section, specific criteria define the expectations for a well thought out response that "Meets the Standard." Evaluators will rate the responses by applying the following guidance:

Rating	Characteristics
Meets or Exceeds the Standard	The response reflects a thorough understanding of key issues. It clearly aligns with the mission and goals of the school. The response includes specific and accurate information that shows thorough preparation
Partially Meets Standard	The response meets the criteria in some aspects, but lacks sufficient detail and/or requires additional information in one or more areas.
Does Not Meet Standard	The response is significantly incomplete; demonstrates lack of preparation; is unsuited to the mission and vision of the district or otherwise raises significant concerns about the viability of the plan or the applicant's ability to carry it out

An application that merits a recommendation for approval should present a clear, realistic picture of how the school expects to operate; be detailed in how this school will raise student achievement; and inspire confidence in the applicant's capacity to successfully implement the proposed academic and operational plans. In addition to meeting the criteria that are specific to that section, each part of the proposal should align with the overall mission, budget, and goals of the application.

Recommendations for approval or denial will be based on the written application (narrative and attachments), independent due diligence, and, if offered by the authorizer, applicant interviews.

Applications that do not meet or exceed standard in every area will be deemed not ready for approval. Tennessee law states, "The approval by the chartering authority of a public charter school application shall be in the form of a written agreement signed by the sponsor and the chartering authority, which shall be binding upon the governing body of the public charter school. The charter agreement . . . shall be in writing and contain all components of the application." T.C.A. § 49-13-110(a). Thus, an initial or amended charter application, to be approved, must be ready to be incorporated into a charter agreement.

INSTRUCTIONS TO REVIEWERS

Reviewers should use objective language and complete sentences in their comments on the strengths and weaknesses of each section of the application. Please also remember that all documents, including your individual review, may at some time be available to the public. Additional pages should be used as necessary. For example,

Strengths of the academic plan

"The plan aligns with the overall mission and vision because . . ."

"The chosen curriculum is research based and proven effective with the targeted population of students because . . ."

Weaknesses of the academic plan

"The curriculum and daily schedule do not align with the mission and vision because . . ."

"The discipline plan does not include provisions for students with disabilities."

Strengths of the operations plan

"The governing body is diverse and will be able to support the school effectively."

"The plan to recruit school leaders and teachers is robust and aligns with the mission of the school."

Weaknesses of the operations plan

"The governing board is composed of only two people who do not have sufficient credentials to support school leadership."

"The staffing projections do not align with the number of students or the stated mission of the school."

Strengths of the financial plan

"The financial plan is sound and the assumptions are consistent with the mission and vision of the proposed school."

"The budget assumptions include contingencies for high-dollar special needs students and funds are allocated in the budget document for such contingencies."

Weaknesses of the financial plan

"The budget assumptions include a line of credit from XYZ bank, but there is no proof such an agreement exists, and no plan to repay the line of credit when it is accessed."

"The proposed school assumes two buses in the first year, but there is no accompanying line item in the budget that allocates funds for purchasing buses nor is there any indication of salary and training for bus drivers."

SECTION 1 ACADEMIC PLAN DESIGN AND CAPACITY

SCHOOL MISSION AND GOALS		
Characteristics of a strong response: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The mission statement defines the purpose of the proposed charter school. ▪ The mission statement is clear, concise, compelling and measurable. ▪ The vision provides a coherent description of what the school will look like when it is achieving its mission. ▪ Goals are aligned to both the mission and vision and critical to the school's success. 		
Application Review		
<input type="checkbox"/> Meets or Exceeds Standard	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially Meets Standard	<input type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet Standard
Strengths		Page
Concerns/ Questions		Page
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The mission and the vision are still unmeasurable. Furthermore, they do not present a clear concise example of how the school will achieve their goals. • Even though the plan indicates it will hire all HQ teachers, there is not a coherent plan that describes how it will fulfill this obligation. The application only states that they will recruit through all professional avenues. 		2
Interview (if applicable)		
Strengths		
Concerns/Questions		

SECTION 1 ACADEMIC PLAN DESIGN AND CAPACITY

SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT		
Characteristics of a strong response: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A clear, comprehensive explanation of how the design of the school was developed. ▪ A summary of key design team participants, including specific roles and responsibilities. ▪ If an existing organization, a clear summary of how teachers, staff, administrators, parents, community stakeholders and students participated in the design of the school. 		
Application Review		
<input type="checkbox"/> Meets or Exceeds Standard	<input type="checkbox"/> Partially Meets Standard	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet Standard
Strengths		Page
Concerns/ Questions		Page
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no clear comprehensive explanation of how the school design was developed. • Specific roles and responsibilities are not addressed. • The plans states that ministers, educators, business owners, attorneys, and community members will all be active. However, the plan does not specify who these individuals are. Even though a general description is given of duties, specific roles and responsibilities are not listed for individuals. 		5-7
Interview (if applicable)		
Strengths		
Concerns/Questions		

SECTION 1 ACADEMIC PLAN DESIGN AND CAPACITY

ACADEMIC FOCUS AND PLAN		
<p>Characteristics of a strong response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A clear and comprehensive explanation of the school’s academic focus that is aligned with the school’s mission and vision. ▪ A framework for a rigorous research based academic plan that reflects the needs of the targeted student population and is aligned with the school’s stated mission and vision. ▪ A robust and quality curriculum overview, supported by research, with a plan for implementation that includes all grades the school will eventually include. ▪ Evidence the curriculum design is aligned with the Tennessee State Standards. ▪ Evidence the proposed academic plan will be appropriate and effective for growing all students while at the same time closing achievement gaps. ▪ Instructional program offers a continuum of services to students with disabilities English language learners and accelerated or gifted students. ▪ A description of effective methods for providing differentiated instruction to meet the needs of all students, including a strong plan for Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI²) that aligns with Tennessee guidelines. 		
Application Review		
<input type="checkbox"/> Meets or Exceeds Standard	<input type="checkbox"/> Partially Meets Standard	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet Standard
Strengths		Page
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed charter school includes a thorough Charter Education design. • The school stated that it would use the Response to Instruction and Intervention Model. 		28-34
Concerns/ Questions		Page
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed charter school amendment eliminated all standards for the 4 core content areas and stated that they would be replaced with TNCore Standards. • The state does not currently have TNCore Standards. • The reference of movement to Common Core is not in all 4 core content areas. The sample 2nd grade Math expectations rely on an algorithm method which is not aligned with current strategies to improve. 		16-26
Interview (if applicable)		
Strengths		
Concerns/Questions		

SECTION 1 ACADEMIC PLAN DESIGN AND CAPACITY

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE STANDARDS		
<p>Characteristics of a strong response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Academic achievement goals are rigorous, measurable and realistic and set high standards and high expectations for student learning. ▪ Academic goals contribute to the stated mission and vision of the school. ▪ Clear and compelling process for setting, monitoring and / or revising academic achievement goals. ▪ Evidence of clear, rigorous promotion/retention and exit policies and standards. ▪ Appropriate, well-defined corrective action plan if school falls below state and/or district academic achievement expectations. ▪ A clear description of the school's approach to help remediate students' academic underperformance based on assessment and other data, and evidence the chosen approach will result in improved academic achievement. 		
Application Review		
<input type="checkbox"/> Meets or Exceeds Standard	<input type="checkbox"/> Partially Meets Standard	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet Standard
Strengths		Page
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literacy and Mathematics are a planned focus. • Progress Monitoring and data-based decisions are a part of the extended day schedule. 		4
Concerns/ Questions		Page
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The academic performance standards for all 4 core content areas are not aligned to the Tennessee State Standards. • In the revisions, the charter school eliminated Science and Social Studies Standards and stated that they would be replaced with TNCore Standards. • We do not currently have TNCore Standards. • The examples of instructional practices do not demonstrate the rigor and focus necessary for TNReady. • The structure of the proposed extended day is in not described in detail (only total times are given). 		15-26 81
Interview (if applicable)		
Strengths		
Concerns/Questions		

SECTION 1 ACADEMIC PLAN DESIGN AND CAPACITY

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION STANDARDS – IF APPLICABLE		
Characteristics of a strong response: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Plan for meeting the Tennessee Graduation Requirements (including credits, transcripts, electives, GPA calculation) and compelling explanation of any additional requirements beyond the State’s requirements. ▪ Clear, persuasive explanation of how the school’s graduation requirements will ensure student readiness for college or other postsecondary opportunities, including trade school, military service, or entering the workforce). ▪ Effective systems and structures for students at risk of dropping out or not meeting graduation requirements. 		
Application Review		
<input type="checkbox"/> Meets or Exceeds Standard	<input type="checkbox"/> Partially Meets Standard	Does Not Meet Standard
Strengths		Page
Not Applicable (NA)		
Concerns/ Questions		Page
Interview (if applicable)		
Strengths		
Concerns/Questions		

SECTION 1 ACADEMIC PLAN DESIGN AND CAPACITY

ASSESSMENTS		
<p>Characteristics of a strong response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assessment selection will provide sufficiently rich data for evaluation of the academic program and align with state standards. ▪ Assessment plan details the collection and analysis of individual students, student cohorts, and school level performance throughout the school year, at the end of the academic year and for the term of the charter. ▪ A process for using data to support instruction is clearly articulated, with detailed plans presented to provide adequate training for teachers and school leaders. ▪ An explanation of how the organization will use data to inform instruction and evaluate academic progress for at-risk students, students with disabilities and English Language Learners. ▪ Demonstrates an understating of the obligation under state law to participate in the statewide system of assessments and accountability. 		
Application Review		
<input type="checkbox"/> Meets or Exceeds Standard	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially Meets Standard	<input type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet Standard
Strengths		Page
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The plan incorporates regular use of formative assessments • The plan incorporates the use of regular (quarterly) interim assessments • The plan includes a K-2 assessment system 		74
Concerns/ Questions		Page
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The plan does not demonstrate the understanding of current and upcoming state assessments. • The plan does not demonstrate the ability to meet the online readiness requirements for online testing. • The Individualization and Assessment Plan does not define measures. • The assessment system is not fully aligned to the statewide standards and accountability. 		74-80
Interview (if applicable)		
Strengths		
Concerns/Questions		

**SECTION 1 ACADEMIC PLAN DESIGN AND CAPACITY
SCHOOL CALENDAR**

Characteristics of a strong response:

- School calendar and student schedules meet Tennessee minimum requirements of the equivalent of 180 days of instruction.
- Calendar and schedule support implementation of the academic plan and align with stated mission and vision.
- Attendance goals are clearly outlined.
- Description of a typical day for teachers and students align with key priorities of the academic plan and the overall mission and vision for the school.

Application Review

Meets or Exceeds Standard

Partially Meets Standard

Does Not Meet Standard

Strengths

Page

- Information provided regarding the calendar supported the academic plan and aligns with the mission and vision.
- The school calendar and schedules meet the Tennessee minimum requirements of the equivalent of 180 days of instruction.
- A typical day is outlined for teachers and students.
- The typical day is aligned with the academic plan.
- The amount of time spent per subject per week is outlined.

11, 78

Concerns/ Questions

Page

Interview (if applicable)

Strengths

Concerns/Questions

SECTION 1 ACADEMIC PLAN DESIGN AND CAPACITY

SPECIAL POPULATIONS AND AT-RISK STUDENTS		
<p>Characteristics of a strong response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ An identified founding school team member with experience working with special populations. ▪ Clear process for identifying students with disabilities, English Language Learners and at-risk students. ▪ Clear description of RTI² procedures, including a plan for how data will be collected, progress will be monitored, and instructional decisions made related to student performance ▪ A viable plan to provide students with special needs with instructional programs, practices and strategies that ensure access to the general education curriculum and academic success. ▪ Requirements and processes for monitoring services to students in need and plans to exit students that attain sufficient progress. ▪ An understanding of, and capacity to fulfill, State and federal obligations and requirements pertaining to students with disabilities and English Language Learners. ▪ A realistic plan for hiring licensed and highly qualified personnel including service providers, nursing and educational assistants. ▪ Evidence of adequate resources and staff to meet the needs of all students, including professional development for teachers. 		
Application Review		
<input type="checkbox"/> Meets or Exceeds Standard	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially Meets Standard	<input type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet Standard
Strengths		Page
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The plan identifies a school team member to work with special populations – the Director of Teaching & Instruction. • The process for identifying at-risk students is clear using pre-tests for incoming kindergarteners and “new” students, as well as analyzing individual student progress and providing interventions for at-risk students. • Plans for data collection, progress monitoring, and instructional decisions are made related to student performance on an individual basis. There is a plan to provide adequate staff and resources to meet the needs of students who need additional support through interventions and after-school tutoring 		82-84
Concerns/ Questions		Page
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The plan does not include a clear process for identification and federal obligations of services for ELL students. • The plan is to “seek resources and guidance from the State to make sure we are in compliance.” • The plan also states that the “curriculum choices have proven to produce exceptional results in urban schools are suitable for student with special needs, advanced students and students designated as ELL.” • There is no information regarding the exiting of students attaining sufficient progress. • (RTI-Tier3) is mentioned on page 83 as a more intensive intervention prior to a referral for further evaluation through Jackson Madison County Special Education Department or family physician. However, the specific intervention or curriculum resources for Tier 3 are not identified. • Do the interventions and resources for Tier 3 meet the state’s research-based criteria? • Professional development for teachers to meet the needs of special populations is limited. 		44 72 143
Interview (if applicable)		
Strengths		

Concerns/Questions

SECTION 1 ACADEMIC PLAN DESIGN AND CAPACITY

SCHOOL CULTURE AND DISCIPLINE		
<p>Characteristics of a strong response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A clear vision for school culture or ethos that will promote a positive academic environment and will reflect high levels of academic expectation and support. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coherent plan for creating and sustaining the intended culture for students, teachers, administrators, and parents from school's inception, and for integrating new students and families as they arrive. • Plan for how school culture will embrace students with special needs. • Student discipline policy that provides for effective strategies to support a safe, orderly school climate and strong school culture while respecting student rights. • Evidence of legally sound discipline policies that outline discipline procedures, suspension and expulsion procedures and appeals processes. • Thoughtful consideration of how the discipline policies protect the rights of students with disabilities. 		
Application Review		
<input type="checkbox"/> Meets or Exceeds Standard	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially Meets Standard	<input type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet Standard
Strengths		Page
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The plan is clear in how it will engage parents in the life of the school, especially through required volunteer opportunities. • There is evidence of community resources and partnerships that will benefit students and parents in the Letters of Support (Attachments) as evidence of commitment from identified community partners. 		29-37 85-87 Attachment II
Concerns/ Questions		Page
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The plan for marketing includes local media, social media, and the school's website, and the plan for recruitment is unclear. • A student handbook is not available for review; thus the plan is unclear for informing and educating parents on school policies. • The plan for engaging community partners in the design and life of the school is not fully developed until chartered, although there are letters of support. 		29 85-87 Attachment II
Interview (if applicable)		
Strengths		
Concerns/Questions		

SECTION 1 ACADEMIC PLAN DESIGN AND CAPACITY

MARKETING, RECRUITMENT AND ENROLLMENT		
Characteristics of a strong response: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Articulated student recruitment and marketing plan, timeline, and enrollment policy that will provide equal access to all interested students and families, including those in poverty, academically low-achieving students, students with disabilities, and English Language Learners. ▪ Enrollment policy that complies with state law and district policies. ▪ Compelling student outreach plan that includes community, family, and student involvement, and that is realistic and likely to foster student retention and community support. 		
Application Review		
<input type="checkbox"/> Meets or Exceeds Standard	Partially Meets Standard	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet Standard
Strengths		Page
Concerns/ Questions		Page
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The following concerns that were raised during the first submission are still concerns. There were not revisions to this section on the resubmission, and therefore, the following are still concerns: • While there is a general statement concerning marketing, recruitment, and enrollment, the plan lack specific details. • Marketing- There are not specific guidelines as to how the local media, social media, and school's website will be used to market and promote the school. The marketing focus seems to be that the school will prepare K-5 students with a "college-prep themed, high quality academic and ethical foundation..." Such preparation is, as stated, is inferior to what the public school system can provide its students as it relates to college and/or career readiness. • Recruitment- The "slow" growth to develop culture, curriculum, and assessment systems do not adequately explain how the school will recruit students or staff. There is no clear plan for this process. Further, the kindergarten enrollment age is inconsistent with the state's kindergarten enrollment age. • Enrollment- There is inconsistency in the maximum capacity of the school's maximum capacity for enrollment. Further, there is not concise plan of how administration will increase enrolment if goals, which are not clearly defined, are not met. 		86
Interview (if applicable)		
Strengths		
Concerns/Questions		

SECTION 1 ACADEMIC PLAN DESIGN AND CAPACITY

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND PARENT ENGAGEMENT		
<p>Characteristics of a strong response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Effective strategies for informing parents and the community about the school's development both pre- and post-authorization. ▪ Effective plan for recruiting students prior to the school's opening. ▪ Student handbook required as Attachment 3 is comprehensive and provides all necessary information. ▪ Clear plan for informing and educating parents on school policies. ▪ A sound and compelling plan for engaging parents and community partners in the design and life of the school. ▪ Description of existing community resources and partnerships already formed that will benefit students and parents and that include a description of the nature, purposes, terms, and scope of services of any such partnerships; and evidence of commitment from identified community partners. 		
Application Review		
<input type="checkbox"/> Meets or Exceeds Standard	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially Meets Standard	<input type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet Standard
Strengths		Page
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The plan is clear in how it will engage parents in the life of the school, especially through required volunteer opportunities. • There is evidence of community resources and partnerships that will benefit students and parents in the Letters of Support (attachments) as evidence of commitment from identified community partners. • The Letters of Support (attachments) provide evidence. 		86-88
Concerns/ Questions		Page
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The plan does not address effective strategies for informing parents about the school's development prior to charter authorization or for recruiting students prior to the school's opening. • There is no student handbook to review, thus the plan is unclear for informing and educating parents on school policies. • The plan for engaging community partners in the design and life of the school is not fully developed. • The description of the nature, purpose, terms, and scope of service relative to partnerships are incomplete. 		86
Interview (if applicable)		
Strengths		
Concerns/Questions		

SECTION 2 – OPERATIONS PLAN AND CAPACITY

GOVERNANCE		
<p>Characteristics of a strong response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strong understanding of the roles and responsibilities of a governing board including structure, size, powers, duties and expertise that aligns with the school’s mission and vision. ▪ Proposed structure is likely to ensure effective governance and meaningful oversight of school performance, operations and financials. ▪ Evidence the proposed board members will contribute the wide range of knowledge, skills, and commitment needed to oversee a successful charter school, including but not limited to educational, financial, legal, and community experience and expertise. ▪ Plans for meaningful board training as required by law. ▪ If applicable, a timely plan for creating or transitioning from a founding board to a school governing board. ▪ Clear, compelling plans to ensure parents have access to the governing board, including a process for complaints that is fair, transparent and a plan for communicating the process. ▪ Sound plan and timeline for board recruitment, expansion and orientation of new members. ▪ Governance documents required as Attachments 7a-7h are complete and align with state laws and district policies. 		
Application Review		
<input type="checkbox"/> Meets or Exceeds Standard	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially Meets Standard	<input type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet Standard
Strengths		Page
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board membership shows some diversity of experience and skills. • Some Board member information is included. • Some understanding of Board operations, performance, and what is required by law. 		126-132
Concerns/ Questions		Page
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance Section lacks continuity and consistency between the application narrative pages and the By Laws. For example, the process of electing board members in the application narrative is different than what is stated in the By Laws. Also, the application narrative states the Connections Prep Governing Board members will be elected for 2 year terms. The By Laws state that board members will be elected to 2 consecutive three year terms. • The listings of priority skill set areas for Board members expertise is not consistent throughout the application narrative and By Laws. • Neither an accountant nor professional financial person is on the present Board to aid in those areas. • In the Governance Section, the application narrative does not address how the Governing Board will handle complaints or give a process for resolution. • The Founding Board was formed in 2010. In Attachment 7, the following documents are missing: (7a) the Articles of Incorporation, (7b) the Proof of Non-Profit and Tax Exempt Status, and (7h) an incomplete Board Policy document. The only policies listed are Board composition, meeting times, members needed for a quorum, and the Open Meeting Law. The application narrative states that sections 7a and 7b of the Attachments are “in progress.” A “board manual” to guide board activities will not be created until charter approval. 		Concerns found on pages 126-132, 138 and Attachments pages 18-41

Interview (if applicable)	
Strengths	
Concerns/Questions	

SECTION 2 – OPERATIONS PLAN AND CAPACITY

START-UP PLAN		
<p>Characteristics of a strong response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Compelling plan for leading the development of the school from post-approval to opening, including identification of a capable individual or team to lead the planning and start-up, as well as a viable plan for compensating this individual or team during the planning year. ▪ Adequately addresses potential challenges. ▪ Detailed start-up plan specifying tasks and timelines which are aligned with a sound start-up budget. 		
Application Review		
<input type="checkbox"/> Meets or Exceeds Standard	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially Meets Standard	<input type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet Standard
Strengths		Page
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start-up plan is developed with timelines and identifies the individual(s) responsible for leading. 		132-136
Concerns/ Questions		Page
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are no salaries listed in budget for Start-Up Plan. • Different manager titles are used in the Start-Up Plan from what is used in the staffing plan, organization chart for the start-up or first year of operation (Dean of Instruction, Director of Teaching and Instruction, Scholar Supports Coordinator). • The plan has a commitment from an individual to donate the \$15,000 that is <u>budgeted</u> for the start-up. This amount of money is to pay for possible legal fees, professional development, student recruitment events, general office supplies, staff recruitment trips and postings, technology and other related expenses. This amount is not sufficient to cover all that is listed or will be needed in the start-up. • Plan does not address potential challenges. 		132-136 140, 162
Interview (if applicable)		
Strengths		
Concerns/Questions		

SECTION 2 – OPERATIONS PLAN AND CAPACITY

FACILITIES		
Characteristics of a strong response: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Facility plans are reasonable and adequately meet the requirements of the educational program and anticipated student population. ▪ A sound plan and timeline for identifying, financing, renovating, and ensuring code compliance for a facility. 		
Application Review		
<input type="checkbox"/> Meets or Exceeds Standard	<input type="checkbox"/> Partially Meets Standard	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet Standard
Strengths		Page
Concerns/ Questions		Page
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The main entrance for the school does not have handicap access. There didn't appear to be any entrance to the school that had handicap access. The boys and girls restrooms are not ADA compliant; the door ways now will not allow for wheelchair access, the sinks do not allow for wheelchair access, there are no grab bars or hand rails for toilets and there are no partitions for the toilets to allow for privacy. • The fire system is not functional, all zones were in the trouble mode and some wires were disconnected. The doors throughout the school did not appear to be fire rated and none of the doors positive latch to meet fire code. There are not any fire exit windows in the rooms without outside exit doors. • Total square footage that was shown to our group that visited the campus was less than 3000, will that be adequate? • Emergency back-up lighting and exit signs per code must be in place and currently are not in place. Handicap parking for the school needs to be identified. 		
Interview (if applicable)		
Strengths		
Concerns/Questions		

SECTION 2 – OPERATIONS PLAN AND CAPACITY

PERSONNEL/ HUMAN CAPITAL		
<p>Characteristics of a strong response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Chosen leaders have necessary qualifications, competencies and capacity for their assigned roles. NOTE: If school leader has not been chosen, a clear description of qualifications, expectations, responsibilities and timeline for hiring is included. ▪ Identifies strategies for supporting school leadership. ▪ Recruitment and hiring strategy, criteria, timeline, and procedures are likely to result in a strong staff and meet ESEA requirements for being “highly qualified” and are well suited to the school. ▪ Compensation packages are likely to attract and retain strong staff are clearly defined. ▪ Provides a strong plan for supporting, developing, and annually evaluating school leadership and teachers that aligns statewide evaluation requirements. ▪ Effective planning for unsatisfactory leadership/teacher performance and turnover. ▪ Employee manual required as Attachment 9 is complete and effective. ▪ The organizational charts provided as Attachment 10 clearly delineate the roles and responsibilities of – and lines of authority and reporting among – the Board, staff, any related bodies (such as advisory bodies or parent/educator councils), and any external organizations that will play a role in managing the school. ▪ Staffing projections for each year are robust and aligned with the educational program and conducive to the school’s success. 		
Application Review		
<input type="checkbox"/> Meets or Exceeds Standard	<input type="checkbox"/> Partially Meets Standard	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet Standard
Strengths		Page
Concerns/ Questions		Page
<p>There are many concerns with the Personnel/Human Capital section of this application.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no clear description of how the “vetted” substitute teacher list will be maintained and no explanation of selection criteria for these “vetted” substitute teachers. • It is stated that “All Connections Prep teachers will be required to meet the Highly Qualified requirements for Tennessee teachers.” It is stated that potential teachers must hold a Bachelor’s Degree and Teacher’s License with “not requirements waived,” yet the applicants are asking for a waiver to not have to have licensed principals, which serve as the instructional leader of the school. This is clearly substandard to what the public school system offers and what the state department of education requires. • There is no clear criteria of how “FIRST Core Values” will enhance student achievement, there is not method by which to evaluate its effectiveness. • <i>Teach Like a Champion</i> is named as a reference to guide professional development for one years. This clearly speaks to the lack of PD planning that this application entails, as PD should not be centered totally on a book and there is no mention of how performance will be measured. • There is no clear criteria to define the personal and professional goals the instructional staff is supposed to set at the beginning of the year. An assessment measure of these goals is also not included. • The asking of teachers to “waive” their duty free lunch was removed on page 151, however, on page 156 it is still a waiver that that hasn’t been removed form. • There is a request for a waiver for “Licensed Personnel Salaries.” If salaries are not equal to those of public school districts, this could attract substandard teachers to the school, and high academic achievement cannot be assured. • There is a waiver for granting “Tenure. “If teachers meet the evaluation requirements set forth by the state department of education, why wouldn’t they allowed tenure? Again, this the concern is that this could attract substandard teachers and high academic achievement cannot be assured. 		136-142

<p>This application asks for 24 waivers as it relates to personnel. This vast amount of waivers clearly indicates that Connections Prep Charter School is not adding educational value to students of Jackson and Madison County. The inconsistencies throughout the plan coupled with the vast amount of waiver requests and lack of details as to how this school will supersede what the public school system already offers to its students is alarming and very questionable.</p>	
Interview (if applicable)	
Strengths	
Concerns/Questions	

SECTION 2 – OPERATIONS PLAN AND CAPACITY

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT		
Characteristics of a strong response: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Professional development standards, opportunities, leadership, and calendar/scheduling effectively support the education program and are likely to maximize success in improving student achievement. ▪ Thoughtful plan for professional development in the areas of special education and English Language Learners, including implementation of IEP's, discipline of students with disabilities and communication with ELL families. ▪ Professional development plan supports professional growth, generates collaboration and cultivates future leadership. 		
Application Review		
<input type="checkbox"/> Meets or Exceeds Standard	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially Meets Standard	<input type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet Standard
Strengths		Page
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some professional development opportunities are stated. • Mentors for coaching efforts are addressed through year one in intensive PD and one-on-one. • The plan provides some information for optional professional development for students with disabilities and English Language Learners and ongoing training with the Student Support Coordinator. 		142-145
Concerns/ Questions		Page
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional development for teachers to meet the needs of special populations is limited, identified as optional, and do not effectively support the education program. 		142-145
Interview (if applicable)		
Strengths		
Concerns/Questions		

SECTION 2 – OPERATIONS PLAN AND CAPACITY

INSURANCE	
Characteristics of a strong response: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Plan to secure comprehensive and adequate insurance coverage, including worker’s compensation, liability, property, indemnity, directors and officers, automobile, sexual abuse and any other required coverage. ▪ If applicable, additional liability for such activities as sports teams. 	
Application Review	
<input type="checkbox"/> Meets or Exceeds Standard	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially Meets Standard <input type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet Standard
Strengths	Page
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The information relative to property and liability insurance indicates a proposal for coverage. 	146
Concerns/ Questions	Page
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no accompanying provision for assuring that the insurance provider will notify the department of education within ten days of the cancellation of any insurance it carries on the charter school. 	
Interview (if applicable)	
Strengths	
Concerns/Questions	

SECTION 2 – OPERATIONS PLAN AND CAPACITY

TRANSPORTATION – IF APPLICABLE	
Characteristics of a strong response: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clear description of transportation plan that includes anticipated routes, extracurricular activities, and Saturday school where applicable. ▪ A comprehensive oversight plan that identifies school staff responsible for this oversight. ▪ Description of how the school will arrange transportation for special needs students where necessary. ▪ Demonstrated familiarity with state and federal regulations relating to provision of transportation services to students. 	
Application Review	
<input type="checkbox"/> Meets or Exceeds Standard	<input type="checkbox"/> Partially Meets Standard
<input type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet Standard	
Strengths	Page
Not Applicable (NA)	
Concerns/ Questions	Page
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The application indicates that no transportation services will be provided. 	146
Interview (if applicable)	
Strengths	
Concerns/Questions	

SECTION 2 – OPERATIONS PLAN AND CAPACITY

FOOD SERVICE		
Characteristics of a strong response: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A clear description of how the school will offer food service to all students, adhering to all nutritional guidelines. ▪ A plan to collect free and reduced price lunch information, including procedures to receive reimbursement ▪ A plan to ensure compliance with applicable state and federal regulations. 		
Application Review		
<input type="checkbox"/> Meets or Exceeds Standard	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially Meets Standard	<input type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet Standard
Strengths		Page
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The charter school has indicated that they have chosen the Satellite Food Service Model. 		
Concerns/ Questions		Page
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By stating that the charter will contract with the JMCSS School Nutrition Department, it indicates that they wish for the JMCSS School Nutrition Department to be their vendor and for the JMCSS to satellite/deliver meals to the charter school. • The charter school states they want to utilize the CEP Program. If the JMCSS is a contracted vendor the charter school would have to qualify for the Community Eligibility Program on their own. • The charter school does not clearly state if they wish to contract with the JMCSS (SFA) with the SFA being their food vendor or if they are proposing that the charter school be a site under the JMCSS SFA. • Cost, compliance, food safety and other logistics are not addressed. 		146
Interview (if applicable)		
Strengths		
Concerns/Questions		

SECTION 2 – OPERATIONS PLAN AND CAPACITY

ADDITIONAL OPERATIONS – IF APPLICABLE		
<p>Characteristics of a strong response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Detailed plans for use of technology within the classroom and for state assessments ▪ Provides compelling data management plan that includes communication strategies for parents. ▪ Demonstrates understanding of health and safety requirements that includes a plan for hiring a registered nurse for creating individual health plans as required by law. ▪ Detailed safety and security plans for students, staff, guests, and property. ▪ Provides detailed maintenance plan for school facilities. ▪ Rationale and process for selecting CMO and explanation of why the CMO is a strong choice and good fit for the proposed school and community. ▪ Provides clear division of roles between the board and the service provider. ▪ The service arrangement is free of conflicts of interest and there is a viable plan for identifying and managing potential conflicts. 		
Application Review		
<input type="checkbox"/> Meets or Exceeds Standard	<input type="checkbox"/> Partially Meets Standard	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet Standard
Strengths		Page
Concerns/ Questions		Page
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The documents for safety, technology, security and the roles by each member of the staff are not detailed enough to give prudence to their validity. • The plan mentions the communication with parents will be through emails, no other details are mentioned. (141). • The mention of 9 classrooms to support 25 students each is not reflective in the plan when discussing bullet point 3 and 4 above. • The plan only demonstrates the charter school will comply but gives no explanation of how. (131). Page 129 discusses how the plan will not begin implementation until the charter is approved, therefore the remaining bullets above will not be implemented until fall of 2015 and additional information addressing the bullets above will not be addressed until June of 2016. See attached photos. 		133 141-142
Interview (if applicable)		
Strengths		
Concerns/Questions		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No detailed safety and security plans are in the application, per page 148 Policies are being developed and will be finalized upon charter approval. Connections Preparatory will negotiate with the Lessor for setting up and managing security and fire alarm systems. • Safety and Security – The fire system as noted above is nonfunctional at this time. The main entry is on a different level from the office. The office does not have any way to determine who the visitor is or control their access into the building. 		

SECTION 2 – OPERATIONS PLAN AND CAPACITY

WAIVERS		
Characteristics of a strong response: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Detailed description of waivers requested that includes compelling and thoughtful rationale describing how the waivers will impact student achievement. ▪ A demonstrated understanding of the rules and statutes that cannot be waived under Tennessee law. 		
Application Review		
<input type="checkbox"/> Meets or Exceeds Standard	<input type="checkbox"/> Partially Meets Standard	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet Standard
Strengths		Page
Concerns/ Questions		Page
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The plan provides irrelevant and disconnected descriptions as to how a request for waivers will impact student achievement. • There is little evidence of compelling and thoughtful decision-making to support a request for waivers in most categories. • There are request for waivers that are prohibited by state standards. • The request by the Charter School for freedom from non-health and safety standards is evident of a waiver that can't be granted under Tennessee law. Non-health and safety standards are not vested in the Charter's local board; rather governed by local and state law. <p>The plan does not demonstrate an understanding of the rules and statutes that cannot be waived under Tennessee law. The waiver request list circumvents standards that protect children and adults.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formulation and Administration of Behavior and Discipline Codes – The process to provide due process and procedural safeguards under TCA and IDEA are limited. • Custody of School Property - Freedom from non-health and safety standards place students, staff and parents in danger, as well as escalates incidents of liability claims on the Charter School and other governmental agencies. • Local Fiscal Accounting – Reduces fiscal accountability for the proposed school when both oversight and accountability is an expectation of the LEA and State of Tennessee. 		149-157
Interview (if applicable)		
Strengths		
Concerns/Questions		

SECTION 3 – FINANCIAL PLAN AND CAPACITY

CHARTER SCHOOL FINANCING		
<p>Characteristics of a strong response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Budget assumptions and reasonable budget numbers that reflect rent, utilities, maintenance, insurance and build-out costs. • Detailed budget assumptions that include the impact of the anticipated number of students who receive free or reduced price lunches. • Detailed financial procedures, policy, or other reasonable assurance that the proposed school will have sound systems and processes in place for accounting, payroll, and independent annual school-level and network-level (where applicable) financial and administrative audits. • Sound criteria and procedures in place for selecting contractors for any administrative services. • Complete, realistic, and viable start-up and five year operating budgets. • Detailed budget narrative that clearly explains reasonable, well-supported revenue and cost assumptions, including grant/fundraising assumptions, identification of the amounts and sources of all anticipated funds, property, or other resources (noting which are secured vs. anticipated, and including evidence of firm commitments where applicable). • Sound contingency plan to meet financial needs if anticipated revenues are lower than estimated. • Individual and collective qualifications for implementing the financial plan successfully, including capacity in areas such as financial management, fundraising and development, and accounting. 		
Application Review		
<input type="checkbox"/> Meets or Exceeds Standard	<input type="checkbox"/> Partially Meets Standard	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet Standard
Strengths		Page
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget assumptions are projecting 75% of students will receive free or reduced lunch. 		153
Concerns/ Questions		Page
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed budget is not presented in the format that is required by the state department of education for LEAs. • All pages should be numbered. The application document is very unorganized and hard to follow. • Multiple versions of projected budgets are included in the application with no indication of which document is the revised budget. • There is no documentation to support the budgeted numbers, such as a lease proposal, utility agreement for facility, nursing services proposal, security equipment leasing costs, etc. The budget assumptions on page 164 for contracted services do not have detailed information therefore it is not possible to determine if the amounts are reasonable nor adequate. • There are no reasonable assurances given that the proposed school will have sound processes and procedures in place for accounting, payroll and audits. For instances, there is no mention of procedures governing the deposit and investment of idle funds, no purchasing procedures and no comprehensive travel regulations. Information relative to the contracting for accounting and audit services are vague. What vendors are being considered? A resume from the vendor and letters of reference should be included in order to determine reasonable assurance. • Allocations for student textbooks, library books, musical instruments and art supplies are not sufficient. There is no documentation to support the budget amounts for a student information system and copier lease supplies and materials. • The application anticipates 60 students for the first year with 75% meeting the free and reduced lunch classification (40 students). The anticipated amount is \$300 per student which may fluctuate annually. The statement that these funds “have been projected conservatively at the quarterly interval” is a concern. 		<p>164</p> <p>152-153; 161; 79</p> <p>167</p>

- Additionally, tutoring is mandatory, and the school intends to utilize "Title I federal funding" for this, yet there is no mention of this in the financial section of the application.
- Criteria and procedures for the selection of contractors for services requested were not included in the application or an attachment to the application document.
- Complete, realistic and viable start-up and five year operating budgets are not given. Years one (1) and two (2) rely heavily on fundraising. The success or failure of such efforts are not known. There was one letter of commitment to financial support for \$15,000. No other letters of financial support were included.
- Contingency Planning – description of contingency plan is very general. It states: *"the budget developed is a feasibility analysis based on the program and school design being proposed, but not necessarily the final operating budget.might have to be tailored to align with the available startup resources, or be reduced so as to generate a carryover into Year 1"*. The proposed budget does not appear to be sufficient to begin and sustain 60 students. If there is insufficient funding causing the budget to be further reduced, how will the school meet the needs of the students? Who will make the decisions on what to reduce?
- Year one (1) is critical in moving ahead with year two (2) and the opening of the school year. If fundraising revenues are not available, will the school be ready to open and operate effectively?
- The application does not specifically define what is included in the various contracted services or at what level they are being budgeted, it is not possible to analyze if this can be reduced or to what level and still be effective.
- There is a plan to maintain cash flow which includes establishing a line of credit but this is not supported by a proposed agreement with a financial institution.
- In addition to a line of credit, the application references obtaining credit cards to ensure a positive cash flow. This option will provide time to increase cash flow – if increasing cash flow is a possibility. However, incurring debt to maintain cash flow is not a sound financial practice.

Interview (if applicable)

Strengths

Concerns/Questions