



Executive Director’s Findings and Recommendation
Charter Appeal for Nashville Classical II

Pursuant to Tennessee Code Annotated (T.C.A.) § 49-13-108, Sponsors proposing to open a new charter school may appeal the denial of their amended application by a local board of education to the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission (Commission). On July 13, 2021, the Sponsor of Nashville Classical II (NCII) appealed the denial of its amended application by the Metro Nashville Public School (MNPS) Board of Education to the Commission.

Based on the procedural history, findings of fact, analysis, and Review Committee Report, attached hereto, I believe that the decision to deny the NCII amended application was not in the best interest of the students, local education agency (LEA), or community.¹ Therefore, I recommend that the Commission overturn the decision of MNPS Board of Education to deny the amended application for NCII and approve the school for authorization.

STANDARD OF REVIEW

Pursuant to T.C.A. § 49-13-108 and Commission Policy 2.000, Commission staff and an independent charter application review committee conducted a de novo, on the record review of NCII’s amended application. In accordance with the Tennessee Department of Education’s charter application scoring rubric states a “quality authorizer requires all applicants to present a clear and compelling mission, a quality educational program, a demonstration of community support, a solvent and sustainable budget and contingency financial plans, a clear demonstration of the effectiveness of the model for the target student population, effective governance and management structures and systems, founding team members demonstrating diverse and necessary capabilities in all phases of the school’s development, and clear evidence of the applicant’s capacity to execute its plan successfully. An application that merits a recommendation for approval should satisfy each of these criteria.”² In addition, the Commission 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 Commission must find that the application meets or exceeds the metrics outlined in the department of education’s application-scoring rubric and that approval of the amended charter application was in the best interests of the students, LEA, or community.⁴ If the local board of education’s decision is overturned, then the Commission has the ability to approve the application, and thereby authorize the school, or to affirm the local board’s decision to deny the application.

¹ T.C.A. § 49-13-108.

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

³ T.C.A. § 49-13-108.

⁴ Id.



PROCEDURAL HISTORY

1. On December 3, 2020, the Sponsor submitted a letter of intent to MNPS expressing its intention to file a charter school application.
2. The Sponsor submitted its initial application for NCII to MNPS on February 1, 2021.
3. MNPS assembled a review committee to review and score the NCII initial application.
4. On March 23, 2021, the MNPS review committee conducted a capacity interview with NCII's Design Team.
5. MNPS's review committee reviewed and scored the NCII initial application and recommended to the MNPS Board of Education that the initial application be denied based on the charter application scoring rubric and "concerns about location and ability to finance and complete any necessary renovations of the old Brookmeade school prior to the proposed school opening."
6. On April 27, 2021, MNPS Board of Education voted to deny the NCII initial application based on the review committee's recommendation.
7. The Sponsor amended and resubmitted its application for NCII to MNPS on May 27, 2021.
8. MNPS's review committee reviewed and scored the NCII amended application based on the charter application scoring rubric.
9. MNPS's review committee rated each section of NCII's amended application as "meets or exceeds the standard."
10. On July 13, 2021 MNPS Board of Education voted to deny the NCII amended application, stating "[t]he location proposed is not likely to support a school," and "concerns about enrollment based on the lack of support for the school from its immediate geographic area (school board district 9)".
11. The Sponsor appealed the denial of the NCII amended application in writing to the Commission on July 21, 2021, including submission of all required documents per Commission Policy 2.000.
12. The Commission's review committee independently analyzed and scored the NCII amended application using the Tennessee Department of Education's charter application scoring rubric.
13. On September 1, 2021, the Commission staff held a public hearing at Davy Crockett Tower in Nashville, Tennessee. At the public hearing, the Executive Director, sitting as the Commission's Designee, heard presentations from the Sponsor and MNPS and took public comment regarding the NCII amended application.
14. The Commission's review committee conducted a capacity interview with key members of the NCII leadership team on September 17, 2021 via Microsoft Teams.
15. After the capacity interview, the Commission's review committee determined a final consensus rating of the NCII amended application, which served as the basis for the Review Committee Recommendation Report, attached hereto as **Exhibit A**.

FINDINGS OF FACT

District Denial of Initial Application

The review committee assembled by MNPS to review and score the NCII initial application consisted of the following individuals:

Name	Titles
Katy Enterline Miller	Director of Talent Management, MNPS
Michelle Doane	Consultant
Rick Caldwell	Exceptional Education Coach, MNPS
Shereka Roby-Grant	Coordinator Priority and Focus Schools, MNPS
Joe Gordon, Ed.D.	Coordinator of School Counseling, South, MNPS
Jennifer Berry, Ph.D.	Director of STEAM and Science, MNPS
Alyssa Udovitsch	English Learner Coach, MNPS
James Starron	English Learner Coach, MNPS
Shavoncia Watts, Ed.D.	Secondary Literacy Coordinator, MNPS
Adrienne Useted	Chief Financial Officer, LEAD Public Schools

The NCII initial application received the following ratings from the MNPS review committee:

Sections	Ratings
Academic Plan Design and Capacity	Partially Meets Standard
Operations Plan and Capacity	Meets or Exceeds Standard
Financial Plan and Capacity	Meets or Exceeds Standard
Portfolio Review/Past Performance	Meets or Exceeds Standard

After the MNPS review committee completed its review and scoring of the initial application, its recommendation was presented to the MNPS Board of Education on April 27, 2021. Based on the review committee’s recommendation, the MNPS Board of Education voted to deny the initial application of NCII.

District Denial of Amended Application

The review committee assembled by MNPS to review and score the NCII amended application consisted of the following individuals:

Name	Titles
Katy Enterline Miller	Director of Talent Management, MNPS

Michelle Doane	Consultant
Rick Caldwell	Exceptional Education Coach, MNPS
Shavoncia Watts, Ed.D.	Secondary Literacy Coordinator, MNPS
Juan Seda	Director of English Language Learners, MNPS
Ryan Latimore	Director of Boundary Planning and Enrollment Forecasting, MNPS

Upon resubmission, the amended application from the MNPS review committee indicated that the Academic Plan Design and Capacity section had an amended rating of “Meets or Exceeds Standard.” After the MNPS review committee completed its review and scoring of the amended application, its recommendation that the amended application meets or exceeds the standards in all section of review was presented to the MNPS Board of Education on July 13, 2021. At the July 13, 2021 board meeting, the MNPS Board of Education voted to deny the amended application of NCII citing “[t]he location proposed is not likely to support a school,” and “concerns about enrollment based on the lack of support for the school from its immediate geographic area (school board district 9).”

Commission Review Committee’s Evaluation of the Application

Following the denial of the NCII amended application and subsequent appeal to the Commission, Commission staff assembled a diverse review committee of internal and external experts to independently evaluate and score the NCII application. This review committee consisted of the following individuals:

Name	Title
Binh Doan	Review Committee Member, External Reviewer
Cheryl Green	Review Committee Member, External Reviewer
Kelly Kroneman	Review Committee Member, Coordinator of Federal Programs and Special Populations
Mark Modrcin	Review Committee Member, External Reviewer
Whitney O’Connell	Review Committee Member, External Reviewer
Alex Roberson	Review Committee Member, External Reviewer

The review committee conducted an initial review and scoring of the NCII 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 NCII application was as follows:

Sections	Ratings
Academic Plan Design and Capacity	Meets or Exceeds Standard
Operations Plan and Capacity	Meets or Exceeds Standard
Financial Plan and Capacity	Meets or Exceeds Standard
Portfolio Review/Past Performance	Meets or Exceeds Standard

The review committee has recommended approval of the application for NCII, citing a compelling need in the proposed community and a successful academic program aligned to the mission and vision of the school. The committee highlighted that the Sponsor provided a clear and robust five-year network plan that supports opening the proposed school. The committee also noted that the Sponsor’s strong financial plans and past performance demonstrate a readiness to open the proposed school. The committee indicated that the Sponsor’s academic plan noted enrollment needs for the West Nashville community cluster and included sufficient evidence that the recruitment strategies would assist the Sponsor in meeting the enrollment projections. The committee noted that the Sponsor summarized their classical curriculum model and the past success with students in underserved communities.

The committee indicated that the Sponsor’s operations plan included a comprehensive growth plan that includes necessary knowledge transfer in expanding the network. The committee highlighted that the Sponsor’s operations plan included leadership and staffing plans to ensure that leadership at the proposed school would be ready upon opening. The Sponsor’s operations plan also included a facility plan that accounted for renovations and repairs, with the review committee highlighting that the Sponsor’s experience as an operator is reflected in the evidence to open the proposed school.

The committee also indicated that the Sponsor’s financial plan is comprehensive and reflected positive financial health. The committee found that the Sponsor’s financial plan demonstrated strong operating and start up budgets, provided realistic estimates for a new start, and accounted for philanthropic and fundraising efforts as evidence of the Sponsor’s ability to secure and maintain funding sources for the school. The committee noted that the Sponsor provided multiple contingency plans for any fall throughs that may occur.

The final note from the review committee related to the Sponsor’s past performance. The review committee emphasized that the success of the network’s current school on assessments and performance of Nashville Classical’s super subgroup shows their ability to create positive outcomes for students. The review committee noted that the Sponsor provided evidence of the network’s high performance under the current model and intention to replicate that with the proposed school. In total, the review committee found that the Sponsor’s amended application meets or exceeds the standard in all sections.



For additional information regarding the review committee’s evaluation of the NCII amended application, please see **Exhibit A** for the complete Review Committee Recommendation Report, which is fully incorporated herein by reference.

Public Hearing

Pursuant to statute⁵ and Commission Policy 2.000, a public hearing chaired by the Executive Director was held on September 1, 2021. MNPS’s presentation at the public hearing focused on the deficiencies found by the MNPS Board of Education. Representatives from MNPS indicated that NCII’s amended application was denied by the board based on “enrollment concerns, location, and lack of demonstrated family support in District 9.” MNPS expounded in that the Board of Education indicated that NCII failed to demonstrate proof that they can enroll enough students at the proposed location. MNPS further stated that Nashville Classical failed to show how they would be successful in the proposed location where two schools failed previously. MNPS highlighted that one of the previously failed schools included a charter school run by a successful charter network, and that the school fails to have “meaningful support from the actual families in District 9 who are old enough to attend.”

In response to MNPS, the Sponsor presented rationale that approval of its charter application is in the best interests of students, the local board of education, and the greater community based on the “organization’s successful track record...need for the school in the greater community...and the flawed, factually inaccurate process used by the LEA to evaluate [the] application.” The Sponsor indicated Nashville Classical enrolls Black, Hispanic, and Native American students at a higher rate than the top five (5) schools in Nashville and economically disadvantaged students at a rate double of the top five (5) schools in Nashville. The Sponsor cited that the MNPS review team recommended approval of the NCII amended application. The Sponsor stated that Nashville Classical has the second longest waitlist of any K-12 school in the city, ranks second in applications among Nashville’s K-4 schools and a prior school’s failure at the proposed location should not preclude approval of the amended application. The Sponsor differentiated the prior school’s failures from NCII’s plan for the proposed location which included larger district initiatives such as rezoning and a move necessitated by a natural disaster.

In response to questions from the Executive Director, MNPS indicated that its primary focus in review of the amended application review was enrollment, indicating that NCII failed to provide proof that it could achieve the projected enrollment numbers. MNPS explained that the Hillwood Cluster schools have capacity for growth, based on a stagnation in birth rates, and a shrinking capture rate in the city. MNPS stated that there are currently 1900 students in the Hillwood cluster, and the schools currently in that cluster can serve those families. MNPS stated that enrollment ability as well as facility concerns were factors that contributed to the board’s decision that NCII would not be successful in the proposed location. In response to concerns about community support, MNPS explained that NCII failed to demonstrate support specifically from families in District 9.

⁵ T.C.A. § 49-13-108(5)(b)(i).



The Executive Director then questioned the Sponsor. The Sponsor indicated that based on preliminary data from SY21-22, NCII would close gaps in academic trends through robust RTI support, summer learning programs with a high-quality curriculum, and a positive school culture. To alleviate concerns about the proposed facility, the Sponsor indicated that NCII would follow all building codes and/or inspections to receive a certificate of occupancy. The Sponsor further indicated that NCII is working with a local design team as well as national experts on a renovation of the proposed location, including the local Hillwood Neighborhood Association. The Sponsor expounded on the community groups working with NCII, which includes council members, parents in the Nations neighborhood, and outreach to various faith centers. The Sponsor determined parent desire for NCII through an intent to enroll form and have expressed interest from parents of rising NCII students, and the Sponsor cited its lengthy waitlist based on this proof of concept. If approved, the Sponsor indicated that they have begun building out the central office to support a second school, creating a fund balance that includes securing nationwide grants, and planning for a second location should facilities issue arise.

A portion of the public hearing was dedicated to taking public comment, and nine (9) individuals provided public comments in support of NCII. The Commission also provided a window for members of the public to submit written comments. In total, the Commission received seven (7) written comments in support of NCII, six (6) of whom also spoke at the public hearing.

ANALYSIS

State law requires the Commission to review the decision of the local board of education and determine if the application “meets or exceeds the metrics outlined in the department of education’s application-scoring rubric and⁶,” whether “approval of the application is in the best interests of the students, LEA, or community⁷.” In addition, pursuant to T.C.A. § 49-13-108, the Commission adopted the State Board of Education’s quality public charter schools authorizing standards and utilizes these standards to review charter applications received upon appeal. In making my recommendation to the Commission, I have considered the Review Committee’s Recommendation Report, the documentation submitted by both the Sponsor and MNPS, the arguments made by both parties at the public hearing, and the public comments received by Commission staff and conclude as follows:

In consideration of the Review Committee’s report and recommendation, I find that they have cited specific examples in the application and referenced information gained at the capacity interview in support of its findings. For the reasons delineated in the report, I agree that the NCII amended application has met all requirements for approval as outlined in the scoring rubric for the academic, operational, and financial sections of the application and that its past performance merits expansion. Specifically, the school’s academic plan aligns with the mission and values and has a proven success based on the past performance of Nashville Classical I. The NCII amended application highlights a plan to enroll 699 students, beginning in Year 1 with only 81 students in kindergarten. The Sponsor has demonstrated sufficient community demand for the school through the support of numerous community organizations and locally elected officials. The Sponsor’s plan to only enroll

⁶ T.C.A. § 49-13-108(5)(E).

⁷ *Id.*



kindergarten in Year 1 allows them time build further community and parent connections before expanding to serve additional grades. Additionally, the NCII amended application indicates that the school will be the first K-8 option outside of East Nashville and the 4th public K-8 option for Nashville which would be a draw for parents seeking a K-8 pathway.

As evidenced by the past performance rating and the entirety of the record, the Sponsor has a proven track record on its academic plan. The Sponsor has indicated a plan to replicate the successful academic plan of Nashville Classical I. The Sponsor put forth evidence that the Nashville Classical academic plan results in a higher success rate than both the MNPS public schools as well as schools throughout Tennessee. The Sponsor's academic plan has strong results among underserved communities, and the plan is aligned with its mission and vision. The Sponsor put forth an academic plan that is focused on diversity within the student body and strong foundational literacy. The Sponsor's amended application reflects an academic plan that will provide the students in the target community a high performing choice for education.

Moreover, the Sponsor's application set forth operational plans for the next five (5) years to support the opening of a second school for the network. The Sponsor identified a leadership team as well as central office support through its Terra Firma, and it described how it would intentionally grow the network team to support the schools. The Sponsor has a plan for its Board of Directors to evolve with the growth of the network, including a clear committee structure and a plan to continue to grow the governing board to support both schools.

During its review of the initial application, the MNPS review committee found that the financial plan and capacity met the standard, and therefore, based on MNPS's internal procedures, did not permit the Sponsor to make any edits to the financial plan and capacity in their amended application. However, to address the MNPS review committee's concerns with the initial application's academic plan and capacity, Sponsor changed its enrollment configuration in the amended application (going from a plan to enroll kindergarten and first grade in Year 1 to a plan to only enroll kindergarten in Year 1). This change to the academic plan but not to the financial plan resulted in discrepancies between the financial budget and projected enrollment numbers during the appellate review. I find this to reflect the application process of MNPS, as the Sponsor was not required to submit new financials with its amended application. As such, I permitted the Sponsor to submit additional budgetary information for the Commission committee's review. Upon that review, there is alignment across the application, and the review committee held that the financial plan and capacity, with the amended numbers, met the standard for approval. Specifically, the Sponsor has identified a strong fundraising strategy and documented philanthropic support which will ensure a strong pre-opening process and early support of NCII.

The Commission strives to be a first in class authorizer and holds a high bar for authorization. Any operator in the portfolio of the Commission is expected to meet a high but attainable bar and maintain the standards set forth by the Commission. The MNPS review committee assessed the fitness of the Sponsor to establish a charter school against the state's scoring rubric, and through the amended application, the MNPS Review Committee determined that in each aspect, NCII met the standard of the rubric and was prepared to open successfully. Based on the entire review of the record, I concur with the MNPS review committee's assessment of the Sponsor's application. The Sponsor has demonstrated both a need in the community as well as reasonable enrollment projections. The Sponsor provided evidence of a strong network structure, both in governance and management, that it can support the expansion of the network, and the amended financial



plan demonstrated that the school has a high likelihood of financial viability. Lastly, Nashville Classical is one of the highest performing elementary schools within MNPS, and it regularly outperforms the district while still serving a diverse population of students. The evidence is clear that this network is ready to expand both in terms of capacity and student outcomes.

While prior schools have not been successful in the proposed location, NCII highlighted during the public hearing that the previous schools 1) did not invest in the renovation as planned by the Sponsor and 2) utilized the space as a temporary location after the 2010 flood that occurred in Nashville, TN. While the performance of other schools could have the possibility of being an indicator of NCII’s ability to succeed, in this instance, the Sponsor set forth plans for NCII that differentiate it from the prior schools and establish a plan for success. Additionally, the Sponsor presented significant evidence of the success of the additional school in its network and rationale that this formulation would be successful at the Brookmeade location in West Nashville.

Therefore, for the reasons outlined above, I recommend that the Commission approve the NCII amended application.

CONCLUSION

For these reasons, and for the reasons stated in the Review Committee attached hereto as **Exhibit A**, I believe that the decision to deny the amended application for Nashville Classical II was contrary to the best interests of the students, the LEA and the community. The amended application meets or exceeds the metrics outlined in the department of education’s application-scoring rubric and approval of the application is in the best interests of the students, LEA, and the community. Therefore, I recommend that the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission overturn the decision of the MNPS Board of Education to deny the amended application for Nashville Classical II and authorize the school.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tess Stovall".

Tess Stovall, Executive Director
Tennessee Public Charter School Commission

10/4/21

Date

Exhibit A



Charter Application Review Committee Recommendation

October 4, 2021

School Name: Nashville Classical II

Sponsor: Nashville Classical Charter School

Proposed Location of School: Metro Nashville Public Schools

Evaluation Team:

- Binh Doan
- Cheryl Green
- Kelly Kroneman
- Mark Modrcin
- Alex Roberson

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 sponsor of a public charter school to appeal the denial of an application by the local board of education to the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission (Charter Commission). In accordance with T.C.A. § 49-13-108, the Charter Commission shall conduct a de novo, on the record review of the proposed charter school's application, and Charter Commission has adopted national and state quality authorizing standards to guide its work. As laid out in Charter Commission Policy 3.000 – Core Authorizing Principles, the Charter Commission is committed to implementing these authorizing standards that are aligned with the core principles of charter school authorizing, including setting high standards for the approval of charter schools in its portfolio.

In accordance with T.C.A. § 49-13-108, the Charter Commission adopted Charter Commission Policy 2.000 – Charter School Appeals. The Charter Commission has outlined the charter school appeal process to ensure the well-being and interests of students are the fundamental value informing all Charter Commission actions and decisions. The Charter Commission publishes clear timelines and expectations for applicants, engages highly competent teams of internal and external evaluators to review all applications, and maintains rigorous criteria for approval of a charter school. In addition, the Charter Commission plans to evaluate its work annually to ensure its alignment to national and state standards for quality authorizing and implements improvement when necessary.

The Charter Commission's charter application review process is outlined in T.C.A. § 49-13-108, Charter Commission Policy 2.000 – Charter School Appeals, and Charter Commission Policy 2.100 – Application Review. The Charter Commission assembled a charter application review committee comprised of highly qualified internal and external evaluators with relevant and diverse expertise to evaluate each application. The Charter Commission provided training to all review committee members to ensure consistent standards and fair treatment of all applications.

Overview of the Evaluation Process

The Tennessee Public Charter School Commission'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 four sections of the application: Academic Plan Design and Capacity, Operations Plan and Capacity, Financial Plan and Capacity, and Portfolio Review and Performance Record.
2. Capacity Interview: Based on the independent and collective review of the application, the review committee conducted a 90-minute interview with the sponsor, members of the 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, operations, financial plans, and performance record.
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 four 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: enrollment summary; community involvement and parent engagement; existing academic plan; and performance management.
 - b. Operations Plan and Capacity: network vision and growth plan; network management; network governance; and network personnel/human capital.
 - c. Financial Plan and Capacity: budget narrative; budgets of network and school; cash flow projections; related assumptions; financial policies and procedures; and the capacity to implement the proposed plan.
 - d. Portfolio Review and Performance Record: evidence of successful student outcomes in network; evidence that schools within network are high-performing; detailed narrative of high-performing and low-performing schools; latest audit presented without findings; and organization in good standing with authorizers.

The Charter Commission’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 local boards of education when evaluating an application. The rubric states:

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.

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

Rating	Characteristics
Meets or Exceeds 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.



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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.
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Summary of the Application

School Name: Nashville Classical II

Sponsor: Nashville Classical Charter School

Proposed Location of School: Metro Nashville Public Schools

Mission:¹ Nashville Classical Charter School’s mission is to educate K-8 scholars through a classical curriculum and within an achievement-oriented culture, building a strong foundation for academic successes and personal excellence in high school, college, and life.

Number of Schools Currently in Operation by Sponsor:

The sponsor has one (1) operating charter school authorized by Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools.

Proposed Enrollment:²

Grade Level	Year 1: 2022-2023	Year 2: 2023-2024	Year 3: 2024-2025	Year 4: 2025-2026	Year 5: 2026-2027	At Capacity: 2029-
K	81	81	81	81	81	81
1	0	79	79	79	79	78
2	0	0	77	77	77	77
3	0	0	0	75	75	75
4	0	0	0	0	75	75
5	0	81	81	81	81	81
6	0	0	79	79	79	79
7	0	0	0	77	77	77
8	0	0	0	0	75	75
Totals	81	241	397	549	699	699

Brief Description of the Application:

The sponsor, Nashville Classical Charter School, is proposing to open a charter school in the west area of Nashville, Tennessee and serve students in Kindergarten through 8th grades. The school, Nashville Classical II, is a new-start school and would be the second school for the sponsor. The school intends to operate in the Hillwood and White’s Creek community of Nashville to “address racial isolation, underperformance, and overcrowding in the District.”³ The school plans to offer a “classical school model” that will be based on Nashville Classical Charter School’s current operating elementary school, Nashville Classical, and provide an opportunity for students in the West Nashville additional school options.

The proposed school will be organized under the existing charter management organization, Nashville

¹ Nashville Classical II Amended Application, pg. 3.

² Ibid, pg. 18.

³ Ibid, pg. 4.



Classical Charter School, and the current Board of Directors will govern the new school. In Year 0, Nashville Classical Charter School has budgeted \$950,000 in revenue, primarily from the Sunnyside Foundation/Blair J. Wilson and projects \$186,916 in expenses for the school. Nashville Classical Charter School projects the school will have \$2,074,059 in revenue and \$1,664,586 in expenses in Year 1 resulting in a balance of \$409,473. By Year 5, the school projects to have a \$10,030,959 in revenue and \$8,999,846 in expenses, resulting in a positive ending fund balance of \$2,898,383.⁴ The school anticipates that 35% of the student population will qualify as economically disadvantaged, 13% of the student population will be students with disabilities, and 12% of the student population will be English Learners.⁵

⁴ Nashville Classical II Amended Budget, pg. 23

⁵ Ibid, pg. 5.



Summary of the Evaluation

The review committee recommends the approval of the amended application for Nashville Classical II because of a compelling need in the proposed community and a successful academic program aligned to the mission and vision of the school. Additionally, the applicant provides a clear and robust five-year network plan that supports opening the proposed school. Finally, the applicant's strong financial plans and performance of its current school demonstrate a readiness to open the proposed school.

The applicant submitted a compelling academic plan and aims to serve as an additional optional in the West Nashville community. The plan details persuasive reasons for the proposed location, noting identified enrollment needs for the cluster as a primary factor. The academic plan also included sufficient evidence that their recruitment strategies would assist the applicant in meeting their enrollment projections. The applicant also outlined their classical curriculum model and their success with students in underserved communities and their plans to serve all students.

The operations plan includes a comprehensive growth plan that includes the knowledge transfer necessary to expand the network. Relatedly, the leadership and staffing plans would ensure prepared school-level leadership at the proposed school. The applicant also describes their governing board and their plans to involve the board in monitoring and committee-level governance of the network. Network-level operations are detailed include a facility plan that account for renovations and repairs. In totality, the operations plan includes thoughtful strategies and organization by the applicant which reflects an operator with experience opening a charter school.

The financial plan provided by the applicant is comprehensive and reflect positive financial health. The applicant's financial plan reflects strong operating and start up budgets, providing realistic estimates for a new start. The network has impressive funds to start the proposed school, with several donations from philanthropic and fundraising efforts that show the applicant's ability to secure and maintain funding sources for the school. The financial plans show evidence that the funds would support operating costs, which include renovating the facility. Furthermore, the applicant provides multiple contingency plans if their anticipated funding is not realized which are logical and satisfactory.

Finally, the applicant supplied convincing evidence that the past performance of the network would be replicated at the proposed school. The success of the network's current school on assessments and performance of Nashville Classical's super subgroup shows their ability to create positive outcomes for students. Overall, the application provides evidence that the network's current school is high performing under the current model and that the proposed school will be a welcome option in the community.

Summary of Section Ratings

In accordance with the Tennessee Department of Education's charter application scoring rubric, applications that do not meet or exceed the standard in all sections will be deemed not ready for approval ⁶ and strengths in one area of the application do not negate 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. The review committee's consensus ratings for each section of the application are as follows:

⁶ Tennessee Charter School Application Rubric-Evaluation Ratings and Sample Scoring Criteria, pg. 1.



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Sections	Rating
Academic Plan Design and Capacity	Meets or Exceeds Standard
Operations Plan and Capacity	Meets or Exceeds Standard
Financial Plan and Capacity	Meets or Exceeds Standard
Portfolio Review and Performance Record	Meets or Exceeds Standard



Analysis of the Academic Plan Design and Capacity

Rating: Meets or Exceeds Standard

Strengths Identified by the Committee:

The applicant's Academic Plan Design and Capacity meets or exceeds the standard because the applicant presented a compelling description of how the school will serve as an additional option in the intended community, a successful academic plan aligned to the mission of the school and modeled after the network's current successful school, and a clear plan to serve and support all students.

The applicant outlines several compelling reasons for the selected location of the Hillwood and White's Creek area, noting the need for an additional school in the community based on a detailed landscape analysis, which consisted of data inputs from the MNPS Enrollment and Capacity report, private school data, and the Census Bureau. The applicant provided evidence of interest from prospective parents through participation in focus groups and parents signing up at outreach events, and the applicant demonstrated a deep understanding of the need to continue to build interest and knowledge of the school model if authorized in a new community. As further articulated in the capacity interview, the applicant uses a four-part recruitment strategy for its current school, and it plans to replicate this model with the new proposed school. For this new school, their primary method of building interest in the community is through relationships with community organizations, and through these efforts, they have been able to reach at least fifty parents, some of which have already completed an intent to enroll survey. The review committee found detailed evidence that the school had a high likelihood of reaching its initial enrollment projection of 81 kindergarteners in Year 1 through the information provided in both the capacity interview and the application and in the well-supported pre-opening process.

The applicant's mission to provide a classical curriculum with an achievement-oriented culture directly supports their academic plan. Nashville Classical has a strong academic plan that is research-based, effective, and transferable, which is important given its plans to implement this model in another part of the city. The classical curriculum is a proven curriculum that has strong academic results with students who come from underserved communities and subgroups such as Black, Hispanic, English Language Learners. Additionally, students currently enrolled in this model are outperforming their peers in both Metro Nashville Public Schools and Tennessee on the TNReady state assessment, speaking to the applicant's commitment and track record with student growth and achievement. During the capacity interview, the applicant also noted their specific efforts to support English Learners (EL), a population that would have higher enrollment at the proposed school than their current school. The applicant plans to support those students by using Imagine Learning programs, as well as ensuring certified and licensed teachers are regularly monitored and observed. Given the applicant's goal to replicate their academic model and their plans for the increased EL student support, the review committee found evidence that the school would be prepared to meet the academic needs of students.

Overall, the applicant presented a comprehensive and clear academic plan that meets or exceeds the standard of the rubric because of the need in the community, a demonstrated successful model, and their commitment to supporting students. Based on the evidence found in the application and information provided in the capacity interview, the review committee rated this section as meeting the standard.

Analysis of the Operations Plan and Capacity

Rating: Meets or Exceeds Standard

Strengths Identified by the Committee:

The applicant's Operations Plan and Capacity meets or exceeds the standard because it includes a clear and robust five-year network plan that encompasses the flagship and proposed school, strong leadership and governing board, and a comprehensive and logical facility plan.

The applicant provides a comprehensive growth plan that streamlines and codifies institutional knowledge to allow for the transfer of systems to the proposed school. The plan includes a decision rights matrix and R.A.P.I.D. decision making framework for how Terra Firma, the network's central office, will support the growth and development of the existing school and the new school. Support services to be provided by the central office are outlined in the application clearly, from the network to the local school level. Relatedly, the responsibilities of network leaders and local school leaders are clear and easy to understand and well-established for a 2022-23 school year opening. The school-level staffing model supports the proposed plan for student-supports throughout the school day, including the number of aides and exceptional educators planned for each school. Network staffing projections are in alignment with its plan for adding a new grade-level every year at the proposed school. Additionally, the applicant team appears to have a strong grasp on possible challenges in the months ahead, identifying likely issues that can be avoided for a successful opening. The applicant has also carefully delineated responsibilities related to operations, showing clear intention that the applicant understands the necessary details for a successful opening.

The applicant's governing board has been in place since 2011. The nine-member board oversees the current school and is responsible for participating in the work of the network and managing risk. The applicant provided evidence a strong governing board with varying backgrounds and areas of expertise. Additionally, three board members are parents of students, which is one-third of the current board, which is a strong avenue for the community to oversee the school. Evaluative measures for the Executive Director are provided in addition to other metrics that are to be monitored by the governing body on a regular basis. This demonstrates strong organizational capacity and that the organization is measuring what matters most to their success. Given the network's growth from one school to two schools, particular attention by the governing board will be required to ensure appropriate monitoring and oversight occurs across the network.

The applicant also noted their plans to renovate and prepare the facility they plan to use, citing realistic estimates for renovations and repairs. The applicant detailed the challenges that other operators have faced in the building and have taken that into account in their plans. Additionally, in the capacity interview, the applicant detailed the timeline for purchase of the facility and realistic contingency plans should any unforeseen challenges arise, showing their team's ability to shift strategies as needed.

Overall, the review committee found compelling evidence that the operations plan meets or exceeds the standard for approval because of its solid network plan, strong leadership and governing board, and comprehensive and logical facility plans.



Analysis of the Financial Plan and Capacity

Rating: Meets or Exceeds Standard

Strengths Identified by the Committee:

The applicant's Financial Plan and Capacity meets or exceeds standard because of their realistic start-up and operating budgets, the current financial health of the network, and their contingency plans.

Due to the Metro Nashville Public School charter application process, the applicant was unable to resubmit sections of the application that met the standard, which included their proposed budget. The General Counsel for the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission requested an updated budget, which was aligned with enrollment and grade projection of the amended application. In review of these materials, the review committee found the applicant's budget included reasonable assumptions for the related costs to opening a new charter school, including staffing, contracting, and all other operating costs. The applicant's recruitment funds were lower than the review committee anticipated due to recruitment being supported at the network level, but this point was clarified at the capacity interview and is ultimately reflective of effective recruitment plans. In the capacity interview, the applicant provided information of how it came to the proposed facility costs and how it is planning for long-term facility maintenance based on the operator's experience in older facilities.

The network's first school, Nashville Classical Charter School, has been in operation since 2013, and the applicant has developed a solid financial foundation upon which to build a network and expand capacity to serve students. In addition, their board is deeply engaged in fundraising efforts and monitoring the network's finances. The philanthropic efforts of the applicant are noted in their growth strategy, and the school has a successful track record in this area. The applicant also detailed the significant funding from the Scarlett Family Foundation and Charter School Growth Fund, who have already provided the first installment of funding for the proposed school. The review committee noted the significant funding the applicant plans to have and how those dollars would assist in opening the proposed school in Year 0.

During the capacity interview, the applicant noted their contingency plans if their fundraised funds were not realized. The applicant plans to use their B. Wilson donation, utilize their revolving line of credit with Pinnacle Bank, and even adjust their network staffing plan if needed. They also noted that since they are replicating the current model, that they understand the costs related to opening a new school. Overall, the review committee found the financial plan and capacity meets or exceeds the standard given the entirety of the information analyzed.

Analysis of the Portfolio Review and Performance Record

Rating: Meets or Exceeds Standard

Strengths Identified by the Committee:

The applicant's Portfolio Review and Performance Record meets or exceeds standard because of the network's strong performance with its current school and their commitment to continuous improvement and data monitoring.

The applicant's first school opened its first school in 2013 after approval by the Metropolitan Board of Education. Since that time, the applicant has demonstrated their classical model is effective and successful. The Scoring Rubric notes that the applicant must provide "clear, compelling evidence of raising student achievement levels at each school in the network."⁷ NCCS has been regularly recognized for their performance, with Nashville Classical being named a 2019 Reward School by the Tennessee Department of Education and in 2018-2019 Nashville Classical's TVAAS growth rating was a 3 in Math and a 4 in ELA. Their data also reflects their progress and growth reflective of their commitment to all students, as their subgroup population (Black/Hispanic, Economically Disadvantaged, EL, and Students with Disabilities) outscored the district's overall average by 24 points. The applicant also noted that their school has surpassed the state and district on the TNReady exam for the past three years and that on the NWEA MAP Fall 2018 Assessment, the average percentile for grade bands K-5 at Nashville Classical was above 50th percentile in ELA and Math, surpassing averages for the district at every grade band.

The application demonstrates the importance of data collection and analysis in the school's ability to drive student and teacher performance. The data is collected from students, teachers, and families to provide clear feedback pathways which inform the direction the school is headed. The applicant noted the pitfalls related to effective assessment and outlined the ways to avoid those pitfalls and how they plan to use a Data Reporting and Responsibility Framework to allow for close monitoring of student performance. The applicant also noted during the capacity interview the frequent observations and professional development provided to teachers, a cornerstone of their successful academic implementation.

The applicant demonstrates a strong past performance and can articulate lessons learned, as well as opportunities for improvement and growth. Furthermore, they applicant provided evidence that the network is in sound financial health. A 2020 audit conducted by Baker Tilly yielded no findings and was prepared in accordance with accepted accounting and auditing principles, which speaks to their strong financial practices. Overall, the applicant has a strong record of performance and practices which will generate success for students.

⁷ Tennessee Charter School Application Rubric-Evaluation Ratings and Sample Scoring Criteria, pg. 37.



Evaluation Team

Binh Doan is a Director at Memphis Education Fund, an education non-profit fueling innovation, collaboration, and investments in Memphis, Tennessee. Binh has experience working in schools both as a classroom teacher and as a Director of Operations. Additionally, she has served on the board of The Collective Memphis, Teach For America's association for alumni of color and the regional strategy team for 90-ONE, a Memphis-based organizing network for educational equity. Binh is an alum of Teach For America - Memphis, New Memphis' Embark program, and the Breakthrough Collaborative's teaching fellowship. Binh holds a Bachelor of Arts from Yale University and a Master of Education from Christian Brothers University.

Cheryl Green is the Associate Director for Learning Strategy for the Aspen Young Leaders Fellowship (AYLF), where she oversees the AYLF Learning Strategies team, informs AYLF strategy, and ensures the design and implementation of culturally responsive programming. At her core, Cheryl is an educator, having served as a teacher, principal, and district leader in multiple school districts. After ten years living and working as an educator in Mississippi, Cheryl moved to Memphis, Tennessee and took on multiple roles with New Leaders, Inc. and later Insight Education Group. Since 2015, Cheryl has used her expertise in organizational development to lead her own consulting practice. Her work is centered on supporting organizations in creating systemic change, resolving conflict, helping teams work more efficiently, and moving projects from strategy to action. Cheryl has a B.S. in Secondary Education from Alabama A&M University, an M.Ed. from Delta State University, and is certified in the field of Human Systems Dynamics.

Kelly Kroneman serves as the Coordinator of Federal Programs and Special Populations for the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission. In this role, she supports Charter Commission authorized schools in implementing federal programs and supporting student subgroups in compliance with federal and state laws, rules, and regulations. Prior to joining the Charter Commission, Kelly worked for three years with the State Board of Education in its capacity as a statewide authorizer. Kelly has enjoyed working with and for students in different capacities, including as a graduate research assistant at Vanderbilt University and as a first-grade teacher in Richmond, Virginia. Kelly graduated from James Madison University with a Bachelor of Science in Interdisciplinary Liberal Studies with a focus in Elementary Education and Women and Gender Studies, and has two graduate degrees: a Master of Arts in Teaching in Elementary Education from James Madison University and a Master of Public Policy in Education Policy from Vanderbilt University. She is passionate about supporting school leaders and teachers in prioritizing the needs of at-risk students to improve educational equity for all.

Mark Modrcin currently serves as the Director of Authorizing for the State Public Charter School Authority of Nevada, helping oversee the performance of nearly 40 charter school operators statewide that serve over 50,000 students. Mark has also worked as a district authorizer in Tulsa, Oklahoma, overseeing a much smaller portfolio while also focusing on the development of a Charter Collaboration Compact, which aimed to develop synergies between the district and the sponsored public charter schools. Mark holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Business from Miami University, a MBA from the University of Tulsa, and is a 2015 alum of the



National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) Leaders Program.

Whitney O'Connell works for Newsela as a Strategic Solutions Architect and as a curriculum consultant for Mosa Mack Science. She previously taught in a variety of school settings, most recently at Explore! Community School in East Nashville. Prior to working at Explore!, Whitney acted as an intern at the International Bureau of Education (UNESCO) in Geneva, Switzerland collaborating on projects with the Malaysian Ministry of Education regarding gender-responsive STEM education. She was previously a corps member in Teach For America acting as a kindergarten teacher in Connell, Washington and has taught early childhood education internationally in Peña Blanca, Honduras. She earned her B.A. at Gustavus Adolphus College in Spanish and History and her M.Ed. at University of Washington in Curriculum and Instruction, with an ELL Endorsement.

Alexander Burke Roberson is the School Administration Consultant for Charter Schools at the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, working with Wisconsin's thirty-two independent charter schools ("ICS") and five ICS authorizers. Roberson supports operators and authorizers in navigating bureaucratic burdens, so they can focus on educating Wisconsin students. Prior to returning to the grand old badger state, Roberson was the Advisor for School Governance & Compliance at Shelby County (Tenn.) Schools, helping establish systems of oversight and accountability in Tennessee's largest authorizing shop. Hailing from a family of educators, Roberson started his own career in education as a special education summer school aide in his hometown of Kenosha, Wisconsin for two summers during college. Roberson earned his undergraduate degree in political science from Auburn University and both his graduate degree in political science and juris doctorate from the University of Memphis. He lives in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin with his partner and their four pets.