



GENERAL APPLICATION/ AUTHORIZATION GUIDANCE FOR CHARTER SCHOOLS

PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance for potential charter school applicants, to clearly articulate the priorities of Rutherford County Schools, and to outline the process for application review. Rutherford County Schools strongly recommends that applicants review the guidance document and use it in developing responses throughout their charter application. The RCS Charter Review Committees consider all aspects of this information when assessing the quality of proposals and dedication of the applicant to the needs of the local community.

Rutherford County Schools seeks charter school applications that emphasize high-quality academic instruction and opportunities for all students. The mission of Rutherford County Schools is to empower today's students to grasp tomorrow's opportunities. The purpose of authorizing charter schools in Rutherford County is to offer innovative, high-quality, and diverse school choice options that meet the needs of a rapidly growing district.

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OVERVIEW

A seven-member elected School Board and its appointed Director of Schools lead Rutherford County Schools. The Board provides leadership and policy direction to RCS.

Rutherford County Schools' Department of Curriculum and Instruction, in partnership with the School Board, has established a strong Charter Application Review Committee, which harnesses clear, equitable, and consistent practices to recommend applications for new schools for approval or denial. The applicant should be prepared for an extremely rigorous approval and authorization process that is grounded in accountability and transparency.

RCS seeks new school proposals and proposals for existing school operators/replicators that offer all the following:

1. Create innovative educational structures that are not already offered within the district and that enhance the positive culture of Rutherford County Schools
2. Advance academic achievement for a diverse range of learners through excellent instruction that reaches all students, regardless of race, color, national origin, religion, gender, disability, proficiency in English, academic ability, social capital, and family income.
3. Add to and do not diminish the number of schools with diverse student enrollment in Rutherford County
4. Indicate a willingness to collaborate with the authorizing LEA to align the goals and performance outcomes to the mission and vision of RCS

Rutherford County Schools invites charter school applicants to contact the Rutherford County Board of Education Office to consult with the Coordinator of School Choice/ Charter Schools (charterschools@rcschools.net) prior to submitting a letter of intent on December 1, 2023.

Applications for schools that do not serve the best interest of the students, the district, and the community will be recommended for denial.

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ADDRESSING AREAS OF NEED

Applicants are strongly encouraged to review the areas of need below prior to submitting a Letter of Intent.

RUTHERFORD COUNTY SCHOOLS EOC TVAAS RESULTS, 2023

| System-Wide: Composite | System-Wide: Literacy | System-Wide: Numeracy | System-Wide: Literacy and Numeracy | System-Wide: Science | System-Wide: Social Studies |
|------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| 5 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 5 |

RUTHERFORD COUNTY SCHOOLS 3-8 GRADE TVAAS RESULTS, 2023

| TCAP (Grades 4-8): System-Wide: Composite | TCAP (Grades 4-8): System-Wide: Literacy | TCAP (Grades 4-8): System-Wide: Numeracy | TCAP (Grades 4-8): System-Wide: Literacy and Numeracy | TCAP (Grades 4-8): System-Wide: Science | TCAP (Grades 4-8): System-Wide: Social Studies |
|---|--|--|---|---|--|
| 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |

The District identifies 4-8 Literacy, Numeracy, Science, and College and Career Readiness as priorities for continued growth. Applicants should ensure that K-8 proposals emphasize what research-based strategies the school will utilize to generate improvements in Literacy and Numeracy. Applicants who are proposing a high school should also discuss specific strategies that will provide additional college/ career readiness exposure and early post-secondary opportunities to students, and research-based practices that will raise the average ACT composite score of their students above a 21.

Existing school operators/ replicators should plan to include evidence of these strategies and their effectiveness along with their proposal.

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CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

The District shall give preference to applicants who demonstrate the capability to meet the needs of one or more of the following groups of students:

- a. Students who represent special populations, including students with disabilities and students who qualify for English Language Learner services
- b. Students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch
- c. Students who, in the previous year, failed to score proficient on the subjects of reading/ language arts or mathematics in grades three through eight (3-8) on the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) examinations
- d. Students who, in the previous year, failed to score proficient on the subjects of reading/ language arts or mathematics in grades nine through twelve (9-12) on the End of Course (EOC) assessments

The Review Committee's preference of applications with the focus on serving students from one or more of the groups listed above will not reduce the score of applications that demonstrate other strengths or focuses; however, the review committee seeks to recommend schools for consideration which strive to align to RCS's needs and goals.

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ENROLLMENT

Rutherford County is a rapidly growing district. In January 2022, the Rutherford County School Board proposed a county-wide zoning study be conducted to evaluate areas of future growth. At that time, high school enrollment in the district's fastest-growing schools were as follows:

| School | January 2022 Enrollment | 22-23 Enrollment |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Blackman High School | 1970 | 2214 |
| Oakland High School | 1959 | 1956 |
| Riverdale High School | 1804 | 2065 |
| Rockvale High School | 2424 | 2338 |
| Smyrna High School | 2137 | 2215 |
| Stewarts Creek High School | 2314 | 2418 |

LOCATIONS AND GRADE LEVELS

Rutherford County Schools requests that all charter applications include a grade span of no more than two tiers. Schools may choose from the following grade structure options K-5, K-8, 6-8, 6-12, or 9-12. Operators who wish to open a K-12 campus are welcome to submit two charter applications simultaneously. Additionally, schools should identify the specific areas or communities within Rutherford county that they are applying to serve and operate within.

Because there are multiple authorizing LEAs in Rutherford County, any operator applying to serve grades K-5 must specify their planned location or community within Rutherford County Schools jurisdiction in the charter application. Zone information can be found [here](#).

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CURRENT SCHOOL CHOICE OPTIONS

A list of the current schools that are open for application throughout the district can be found [here](#).

RCS encourages applicants to provide a thorough explanation of how the proposed new school will provide unique opportunities to Rutherford County residents which are not already offered in the district.

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APPLICATIONS

Proposals must follow the Charter School Application found on the State of Tennessee website. Applicants should ensure alignment of their proposals with the application scoring rubric on the State of Tennessee website, as the rubric clearly describes each criterion that will be rated by reviewers.

Full application proposals are due on February 1 by 11:59 PM CST. RCS will not accept any proposals received after this date and will only accept applications for a period of 10 calendar days prior to the deadline. Applications must be accompanied by a \$2,500.00 application fee made out to Rutherford County Schools.

Proposals must include sections and numbering that aligns with each set of questions found on the application. Full proposals should include a table of contents which denotes that page number on which each section and appendix begin. Incomplete applications which are missing required components or attachments may not be considered for further review. RCS staff will determine whether an application is complete within ten (10) business days of receiving the application and shall notify the sponsor within five (5) business days of the determination if the application is determined to be incomplete.

An electronic (PDF) and copy of the application is required. Five (5) hard copies are requested. The electronic copy is considered the master copy in the event of discrepancies, and shall be submitted via email, flash drive, or Sharepoint. Emailed proposals must be submitted to the Coordinator of Charter Schools/ School Choice at charterschools@rcschools.net. Hard copies should be submitted at the address below.

Attn: Charter Schools/ School Choice
Rutherford County Schools
2240 Southpark Drive
Murfreesboro, TN 37128

All letters of intent and submitted proposals become public record after submission.

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**TIMELINE FOR 2024 SUBMISSIONS**

| Deadline | Item |
|----------------------------------|---|
| December 1, 2023 | Letter of Intent Deadline to RCS and TN Department of Education |
| December 15, 2023 | RCS School Board recommends Review Committee Members |
| February 1, 2024 | Completed applications are due to the RCS Charter Schools/ School Choice Coordinator no later than 11:59 PM CST |
| February 2- February 19, 2024 | Independent Application Review by RCS Charter Review Committee, team members upload individual rubrics |
| February 20- March 1, 2024 | Charter Review Committee meets to analyze Independent Review Applications, prepare for Capacity Interview |
| March 4- 13, 2024 | Conduct Capacity Interviews |
| March 15, 2024 | Charter Review Committee members finalize consensus rubric and ratings |
| March 17- 29, 2024 | Charter Schools/ School Choice Coordinator and Charter Review Committee staff complete findings reports |
| April 12, 2023 | Findings Reports due to RCS School Board |
| April 18, 2024 | RCS School Board votes on Charter School Applications |

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In the event the Rutherford County Board of Education does not approve the charter application, the applicant will receive a letter outlining the details that led to the decision to deny the applicant a charter. Should the applicant decide to remedy the deficits, the applicant has 30 calendar days to submit an *amended* application to the Rutherford County Board of Education. The RCS Charter Review Committee will then have 60 days to review the amended application and make a recommendation based on the *amended* application to the Rutherford County Board of Education.

Any new information inserted in the application should be marked through a “track changes” feature, highlighted, and/ or flagged. New information, including appendices, will be reviewed by the Rutherford County Charter Review Committee and a new RCS recommendation will be made based on the amended application.

The amended application review process includes the review of the application by appropriate staff and community members from academic, enrollment, operational, legal, and fiscal departments. Once this review has occurred and individual Review Committee members have assigned ratings based on the state rubric, the Charter Review Committee will meet to determine whether the application thoroughly met or exceeded the standards for recommendation for approval.

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