



TENNESSEE
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Tennessee's New Charter Application

October 24, 2025

Agenda

For Charter School
Sponsors Submitting a
Charter School Application
by February 1, 2026

- ❖ Welcome & Introductions
- ❖ Charter Schools in Tennessee
- ❖ The Life of a Charter School Application
- ❖ Application Scoring Criteria
- ❖ Training Wrap Up





In the chat box, please share your name and the numbered statement that most closely represents your experience with charter schools in Tennessee.

1 = I am interested in applying to open a charter school in Tennessee for the first time.

2 = I have applied to open a charter school in Tennessee before but have not yet been approved.

3 = I currently operate a Tennessee charter school and am interested in replicating that school.

4 = I am part of an authorizing team or charter support organization.



 Charter School Rules and Policies	Supports charter schools and charter authorizers in the implementation of rules and policies	Sets rules and policies for K-12 public education, including charter schools and charter authorizers	Sets rules and policies for the charter school appeals processes
 Charter School Applications <i>(New Start, Amendment, Renewal)</i>	Maintains record of charter authorizer decisions for charter school applications	Develops and publishes charter school applications	Appellate body responsible for hearing appeals of charter authorizer decisions on charter school applications; may also receive applications directly in specific instances outlined in law
 Charter School Authorizing	Does not authorize charter schools	Does not authorize charter schools	Can authorize charter schools upon appeal and in specific instances outlined in law
 Charter Oversight and Accountability	Monitors state reporting requirements for charter schools	Ensures the effective operation of charter authorizers and evaluates authorizer quality	Oversees and evaluates the charter schools it authorizes



Charter Schools in Tennessee



Definitions

- **Authorizer** – A local board of education or the TN Public Charter School Commission that makes decisions regarding approval of a charter school application and the renewal or revocation of a charter school agreement. Tennessee authorizers also serve as the LEA for their charter schools.
- **Authorizing** – The process of approving an application, negotiating a contract, and conducting ongoing monitoring and oversight of a charter school, including the decision to close or renew.
- **Governing Body** – The organized group who will operate a public charter school that's responsible for deciding on budgeting, curriculum, operating procedures and overseeing administration of the school.
- **Sponsor** – The proposed governing body filing an application for the establishment of a public charter school.



What is a charter school?

- Charter schools are public schools operated by independent, non-profit governing bodies with oversight and monitoring conducted by the authorizer.
- Charter schools are required to teach the same state standards and administer the same state assessments as traditional public schools.
- Charter schools receive state letter grades and are held to the same accountability metrics as traditional public schools in addition to metrics established by the authorizer.
- Pursuant to Tennessee Code Annotated (T.C.A.) § 49-13-106, a charter will not be granted to a for-profit corporation, a nonpublic school, as defined in T.C.A. § 49-6-3001, or other private, religious, or church school. Cyber-based public charter schools are not allowed.



Charter School Purpose in Law

1. Improve learning for all students and close the achievement gap between higher and lower performing students;
2. Provide options for parents to meet educational needs of students;
3. Encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods, and provide greater decision-making authority to schools and teachers in exchange for greater responsibility for student performance;
4. Measure performance of pupils and faculty, and ensure that children have the opportunity to reach proficiency on state academic assessments;
5. Create new professional opportunities for teachers; and
6. Afford parents substantial meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children.



Tennessee's Charter Landscape

Approximate number of open and operating charter schools in the 2025-26 school year by authorizer:

- Achievement School District: 2
- Hamilton County: 9
- Knox County: 2
- Memphis-Shelby County: 54
- Metro Nashville Public Schools: 26
- Rutherford County: 2
- TN Public Charter School Commission: 24



Quality Charter Authorizing Standards

State Board Policy 6.111 – Quality Charter Authorizing Standards

- Adopted in 2018, the standards align to national best practices and law and detail the essential practices that govern the operation of charter school authorizers in Tennessee.
- A quality authorizer maintains high standards for its charter schools in exchange for autonomy while ensuring student and public interests are protected.
- The Quality Charter Authorizing Standards govern the charter application process and all authorizer responsibilities following the approval of a charter school application.



The Life of a Charter School Application



Laws, Rules and Policies

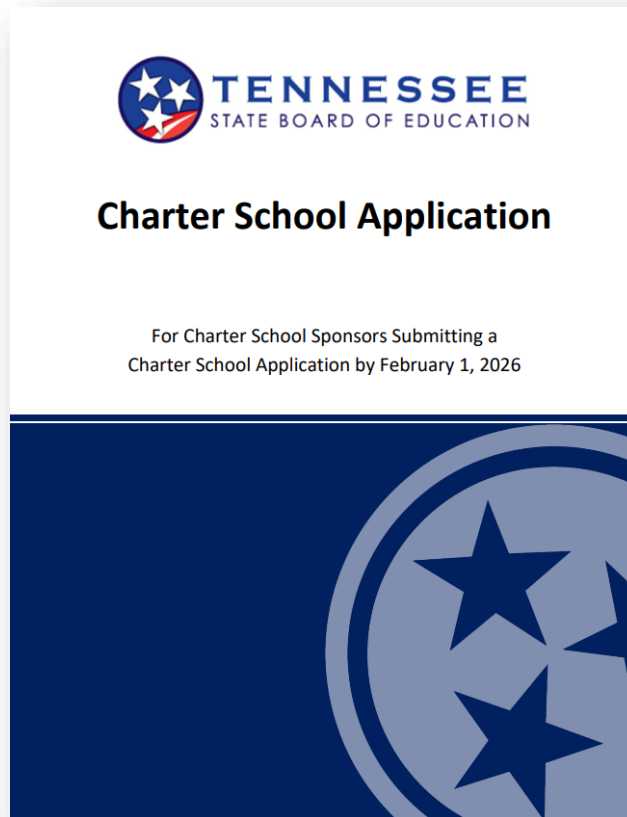
The following laws, rules and policies govern the charter application process:

- T.C.A. § 49-13-107 Application Process
- T.C.A. § 49-13-108 Approval or Denial of Public Charter School Application by Public Charter School Authorizers
- T.C.A. § 49-13-111 Charter School Compliance
- State Board Rule 0520-14-01-.01 Approval of a Charter School
- Charter Commission Rule 1185-01-01-.01 New Start Charter School Appeals
- State Board Policy 6.111 Quality Charter Authorizing Standards

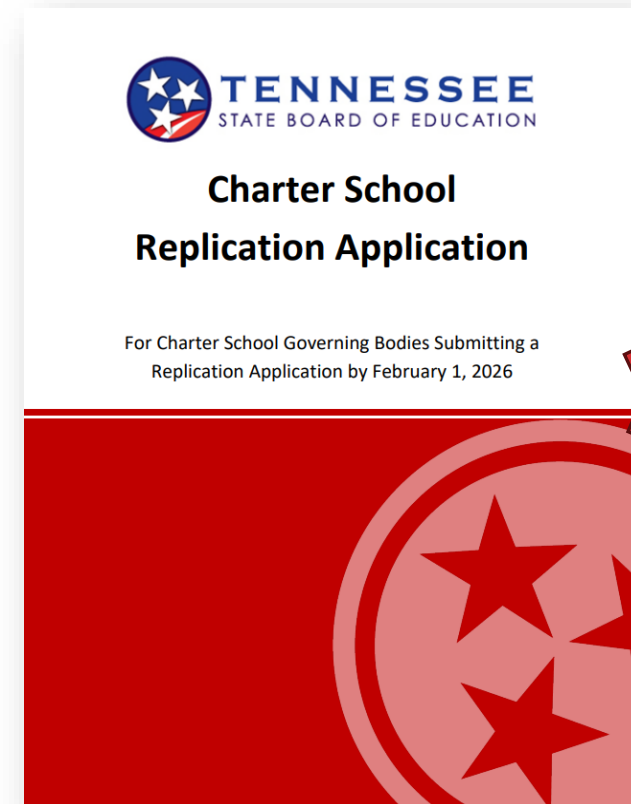


Two Application Pathways

OPEN A PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL



REPLICATE A PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL



Application A

Application B



What is a Replication?

- Pursuant to T.C.A. § 49-13-104, a charter school replication “means the creation of one (1) or more charter schools pursuant to the process authorized in [law] that utilize the same academic focus of an existing charter school operated by a governing body.”
- Additionally, “A governing body that has at least one (1) public charter school authorized by a local board of education or by the commission that has been in operation for at least one (1) full school year at the time the governing body submits its letter of intent pursuant to § 49-13-10(a) may apply for **replication in the LEA in which the governing body is currently operating** to the local board of education or directly to the commission.”
- For Example: A governing body that wishes to replicate one of its charter schools in Nashville can apply to replicate that school in Nashville to either Metro Nashville Public Schools or the Charter Commission.



Replication Application A & B

There are two versions of the replication application contained in the replication application document. A governing body only needs to complete one version.

Application A: Replication Application to a New Authorizer

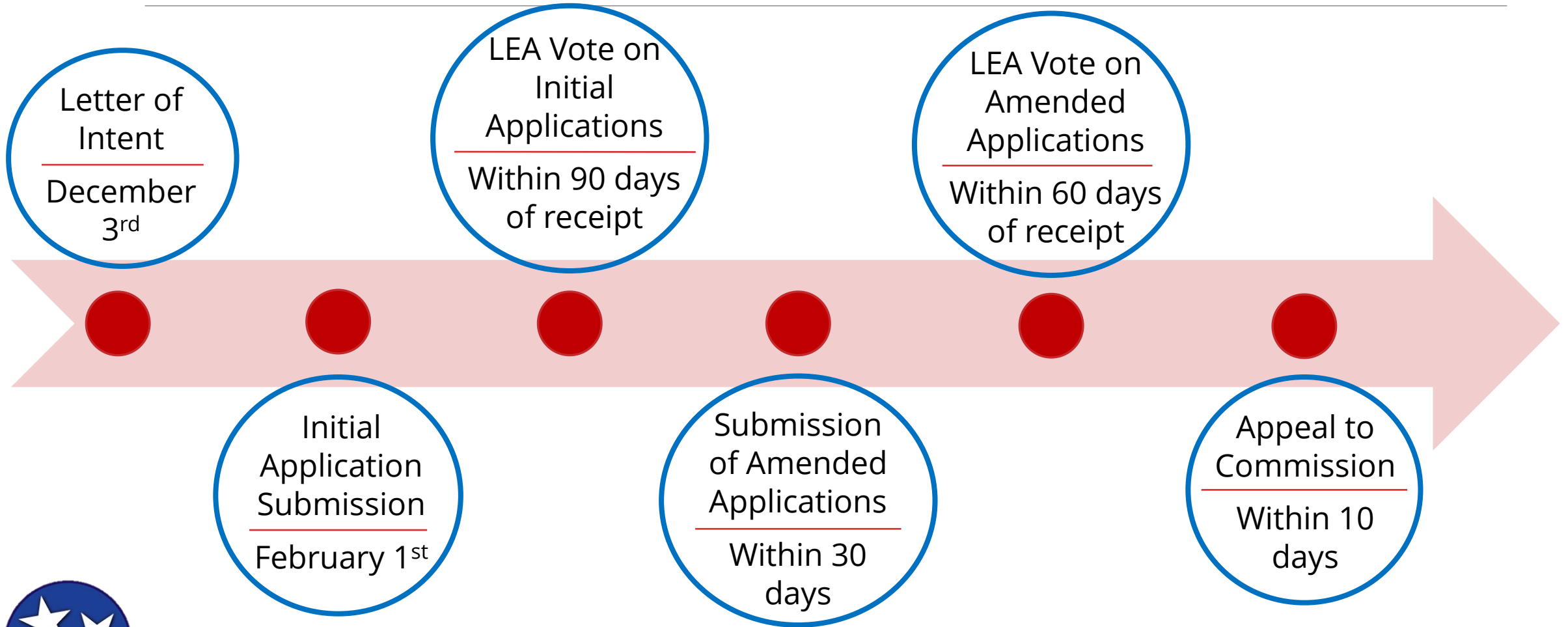
The governing body of the proposed charter school is applying to replicate an existing school with an authorizer that is different from the authorizer of the existing school.

Application B: Replication Application to a Current Authorizer

The governing body of the proposed charter school is applying to replicate an existing school with the current authorizer of the existing school.



Application Process Timeline



Letter of Intent (LOI)

Deadline: December 3, 2025

- The first step in the application process is to submit a letter of intent to the proposed authorizer and the TN Public Charter School Commission. All letters of intent will be posted on the Charter Commission's website.
- Using the state's [letter of intent](#) form, sponsors must electronically file the letter of intent at least 60 days prior to the application deadline of February 1.
- Failure to submit a letter of intent by the deadline shall exclude a charter school sponsor from applying during that application cycle.



How do I determine who my “proposed authorizer” is?

For the 2025-26 application cycle, **some** applicants will be able to choose the authorizer to which they are applying.

When Applying to Start a New Charter School...

Sponsors must submit an LOI directly to the local board of education in which the proposed school will operate.

Example: A sponsor wants to open a school in Memphis and therefore must submit its application to Memphis-Shelby County Schools.

When Applying to Replicate a TN Charter School...

Governing bodies may choose to submit an LOI to either the local board of education in which the school its replicating currently operates or the Charter Commission.

Example: The governing body of a charter school in Hamilton County can submit a replication application to either Hamilton County Schools or the Charter Commission.



Check for Understanding

For those planning to submit a charter application by February 1, 2026, please enter the following in the chat:

1. New Application or Replication Application
2. Proposed Location
3. Proposed Authorizer

For Example:

“New Application in Memphis for Memphis Shelby County” **or** “Replication of a School in Hamilton for Hamilton”



Letter of Intent Components

Using the correct version, sponsors will complete the following:

- Primary Point of Contact
- General Information
- Sponsor Eligibility
- Sponsor History and Intent
- School(s) Being Replicated (*replication only*)
- Anticipated Authorizer (*replication only*)



Sponsor History and Intent

A sponsor's response to each statement will correspond with specific addenda in the application.

Yes	No	Sponsor History and Intent
		The sponsor currently has, or has previously had, any affiliation with a charter school in the United States, including but not limited to, its establishment, operation, or management.
		Sponsors proposing to open a new school that will create a network or as part of an existing network/ charter management organization (CMO). ⁵
		The sponsor is seeking to contract with a third-party education service provider (ESP), including a CMO.
		The sponsor is seeking approval of multiple schools during this application cycle.
		The sponsor is seeking to convert a non-charter public school to a charter school. ⁶
		The sponsor is seeking to open an Opportunity Public Charter School. ⁷
		The sponsor is a higher education institution seeking to open a charter school.



Initial Application

Deadline: 11:59pm Central on February 1, 2026*

- The second step in the application process is to submit a completed application to the proposed authorizer.
- Using the state's [application form](#), sponsors submit an electronic copy of the application by the deadline.
- Authorizers may charge an application fee of up to \$2,500 per application and may request up to 5 paper copies of the application. Sponsors should inquire about how to submit the application materials and these additional requirements directly with the authorizer.
- The authorizer's review team will evaluate each application using the state's required [scoring rubric](#) and conduct a capacity interview with the sponsor.



An application is considered “complete” if...

In accordance with State Board Rule 0520-01-14-.01, the following components are required by the deadline for the charter school application to be deemed complete and therefore reviewed by the authorizer:

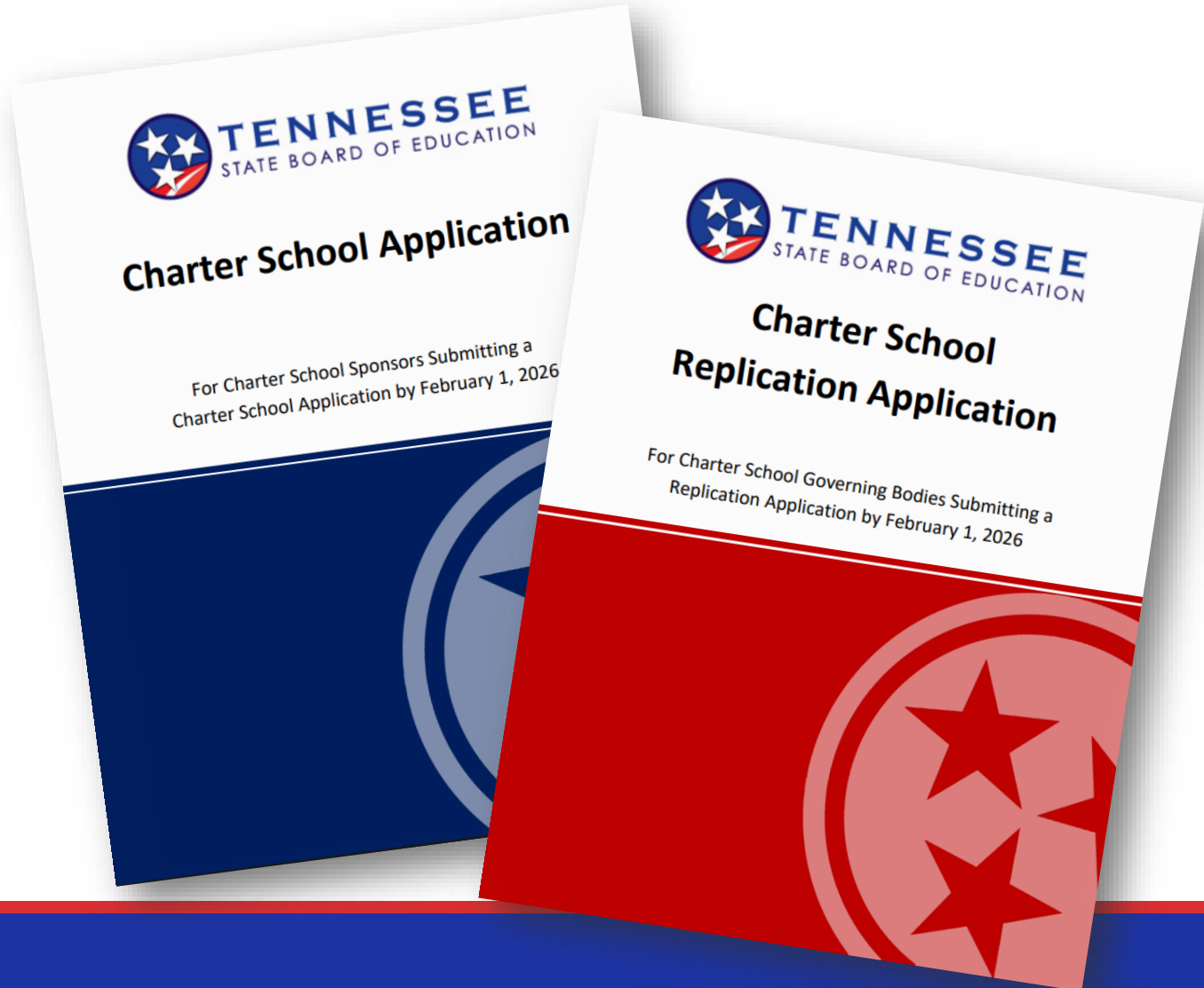
1. Electronic copy of the written application and its required attachments using the state's application form
2. Up to 5 paper copies of the written application, if requested by the authorizer
3. The application fee, if required by the authorizer



Written Application Components

Using the correct version, sponsors will complete the following:

- General Information, Waivers & Assurances
- Replication Overview and Existing School(s) History (*replication only*)
- Application Narrative
- Required Attachments
- Applicable Addenda



Application Narrative

Charter School Application

Educational Program Design & Capacity

School Overview

School Mission and Model

Anticipated Student Population

Family and Community Engagement and Support

School Culture and Discipline

Curriculum and Instruction

Special Populations

Student Assessment and Evaluation

Educational Program Capacity

Operations Plan & Capacity

Governance

Staffing

Facilities

Transportation

Health and Safety

Insurance

Food Service

Start-up Plan

Operations Capacity

Budget and Finance

Operating Budget

Budget and Finance Capacity

Charter School Replication Application

Replication Overview and Existing School(s) History

Replication Explanation and Rationale

Existing School(s) History

Educational Program Design & Capacity

School Mission and Model

Anticipated Student Population

Family and Community Engagement and Support

School Culture and Discipline

Curriculum and Instruction

Special Populations

Student Assessment and Evaluation

Educational Program Capacity

Operations Plan & Capacity

Governance

Network Capacity

Staffing

Facilities

Transportation

Health and Safety

Insurance

Food Service

Start-up Plan

Operations Capacity

Budget and Finance



Required Attachments

- Required attachments can include a variety of documents such as:
 - Evidence of Community Engagement
 - Resumes and Organizational Charts
 - Articles of Incorporation, Proof of Nonprofit and Tax-Exempt Status, and Insurance
 - Governing Bylaws
 - Operating Budget and Network Budget (if applicable)
- The Operating Budget must be completed using the state's [budget template](#) and attached as a separate Excel file.
- Network Budgets may be uploaded on your own template, as applicable.



Developing an Operating Budget

- Public schools in Tennessee are funding by Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement, or TISA.
- Authorizers will provide sponsors with up-to-date TISA funding amounts upon receipt of the letter of intent.
- More information about TISA can be found on the TN Department of Education's [website](#).

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Attachment: School Operating Budget Template

Directions: Sponsors are required to complete this Operating Budget Template and submit the completed version as Attachment 9 when submitting their Charter School Application. Sponsors should file this attachment as a separate file (do not convert it to a PDF), using the following file naming structure: "School Name -- Attachment 9: Operating Budget".

Sponsors are expected to create a Year 0 start-up budget and TWO versions of their Years 1-5 operating budget. Sponsors should use the green tab for their Year 0 budget. Sponsors should use the orange tabs labeled **_MIN** to indicate the minimum student and staff counts, revenues, and expenditures needed to open on time. Information in the blue tabs labeled **_PLAN** should indicate the sponsor's planned or anticipated student and staff counts, revenues, and expenditures.

Sponsors must complete all sheets in this Operating Budget template. Sponsors should only input data into the white cells, adding line items for additional revenues, expenses, etc. as needed. Grey cells are formula-driven and will auto populate once the necessary white cells are complete. Sponsors should use the cells labeled Notes and Assumptions to describe anything immediately relevant to interpreting the numbers included in this template, but should save longer or more nuanced explanations for the accompanying budget narrative.

 Sponsors should input information into white cells.

 Grey cells are formula-driven; sponsors should NOT edit information in these cells.



Applicable Addenda

Addenda are required for the following sponsors:

- A. Sponsors that currently have or have ever had any relationship to a charter school anywhere in the United States, including but not limited to opening, operating, or managing a charter school
- B. Sponsors proposing to open a new school that will create a network or as part of an existing network/CMO
- C. Sponsors seeking to contract with a third-party education service provider (ESP), including a management organization
- D. Sponsors seeking approval of multiple schools during this application cycle
- E. Sponsors seeking to convert a traditional public school to a charter school
- F. Sponsors seeking to open an Opportunity Public Charter School (see next page for more information)
- G. Higher education institutions seeking to open a charter school



Note: Addenda may differ for replication applications.

Initial Application Vote

Deadline: 90 calendar days after receipt of application

- The authorizer shall rule by resolution on the approval or denial of the application within 90 calendar days of receipt of the completed application.
- If denied, the authorizer must vote on the objective reasons for denial and provide the sponsor written notification of its decision within 10 calendar days, specifying the objective reasons for denial and the deadline to submit an amended application.
- If the authorizer fails to approve or deny the initial application within the 90 calendar day time limit, **the application shall be deemed approved.**



Amended Application

Deadline: 30 calendar days after receipt of written denial notification

- After receiving written notification of the denial, sponsors may choose to submit an amended application using the same application form to correct the deficiencies identified by the authorizer.



Amended Application Vote

Deadline: 60 calendar days after receipt of amended application

- The amended application is reviewed and scored against the same scoring rubric and should be evaluated by the same review committee.
- The authorizer shall rule by resolution on the approval or denial within 60 calendar days of receipt of the amended application.
- If denied, the authorizer must provide the sponsor written notification of its decision within 5 calendar days, specifying objective reasons for denial and the sponsor's right to an appeal.
- If the authorizer fails to approve or deny the amended application within the 60 calendar day time limit, **the application shall be deemed approved.**



Decision Appeal

Deadline: 10 days after the final decision to deny

- Sponsors may choose to appeal the authorizer's decision to deny its application to the state's appellate body, the TN Public Charter School Commission.
- The Charter Commission shall conduct a de novo on the record review of the amended application and hold a public meeting in the LEA in which the charter school intends to operate.
- If the Charter Commission finds that the application meets the metrics of the state's scoring rubric and that approval of the proposed school is in the best interests of the students, LEA or community, the Charter Commission may overturn the local decision and approve the application.
- The Charter Commission shall render a decision within 75 days of receipt of the sponsor's notice of appeal. The Charter Commission's decision is final and not subject to appeal.



What Happens Next?

Application or Appeal
Approved



Contracting &
Pre-Opening Year



School Opens in
2027-28 School Year

Application or Appeal
Denied



Sponsor / Governing Body
May Apply Again Next Cycle





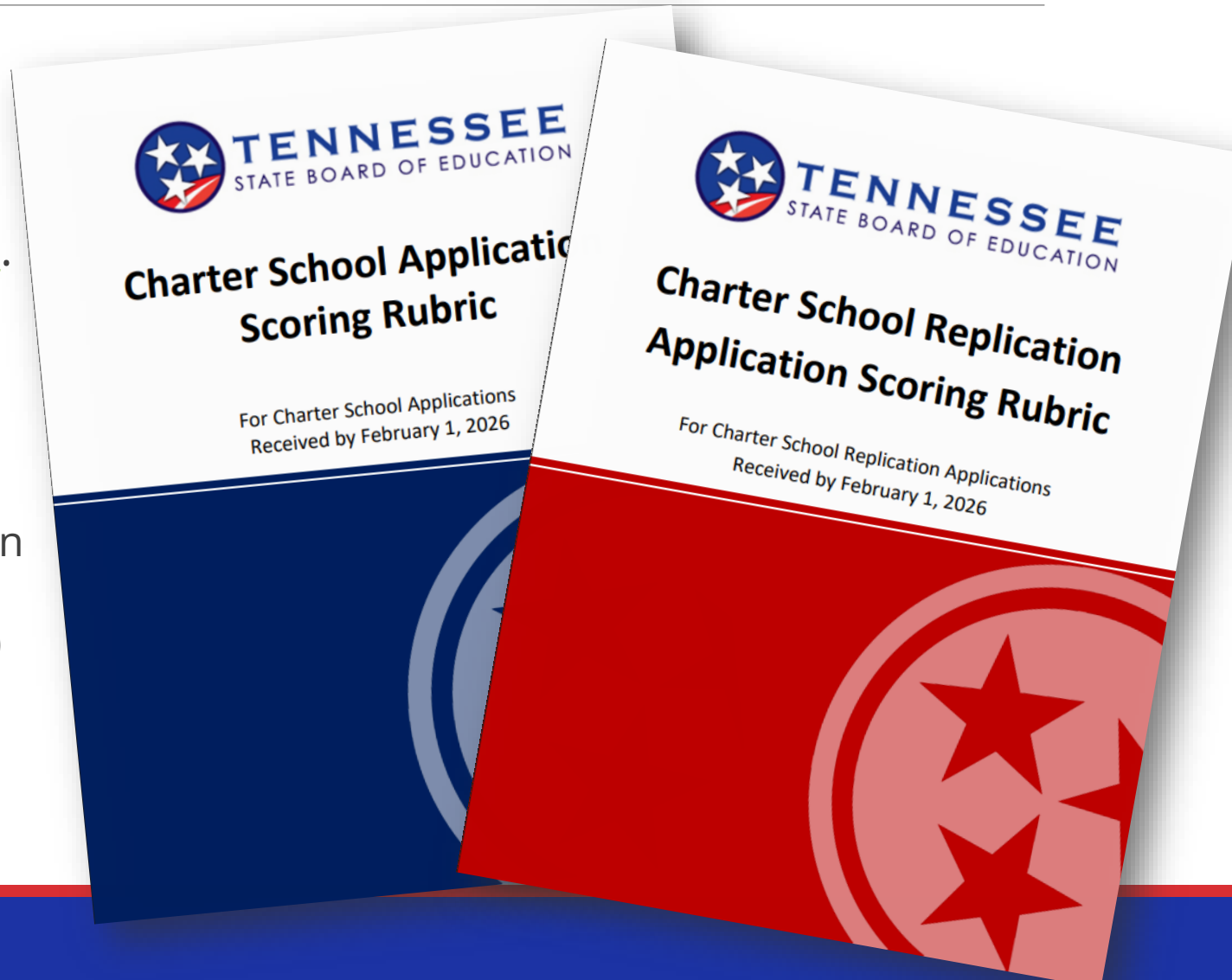
Questions?



Application Scoring Criteria

The Scoring Rubric

- Authorizers will establish application review teams to review and score each application using the state's required scoring rubric.
- There are THREE versions of the scoring rubric:
 - Charter School Application Scoring Rubric
 - Charter School Replication Application Scoring Rubric
 - Version A (applying to a new authorizer)
 - Version B (applying to the current authorizer)



Reviewers will independently read and score each question's response as "Meets", "Partially Meets" or "Does Not Meet" the standard.

The scoring rubric includes the specific criteria that define each score.



Educational Program Design and Capacity Scoring			
School Overview			
1	School Overview	Not evaluated for quality.	☐ Included ☐ Missing
School Mission and Model			
2	Mission and Features	Meets Standard: - The mission statement is clear, concise, and measurable. Partially Meets Standard: - The mission statement is clear and concise but not measurable. Does Not Meet Standard: - The mission statement lacks clarity and is not measurable.	☐ Meets ☐ Partially Meets ☐ Does Not Meet
3	Mission-Specific Goals and Targets	Meets Standard: - Clearly defines specific, measurable, mission-aligned short- and/or long-term educational goals and targets. - Defines a robust, clear plan for assessing the extent to which the school is achieving its mission and for communicating progress on goals to internal and external stakeholders. Partially Meets Standard: - Includes some mission-specific goals but some areas are vague, not measurable, or loosely aligned to mission and model. - Evaluation and communication plans are underdeveloped or missing one or more key details. Does Not Meet Standard: - Fails to identify mission-specific goals or provides goals that are not measurable, overly broad, or misaligned with mission. - Lacks a coherent or credible plan for assessing and communicating goal attainment.	☐ Meets ☐ Partially Meets ☐ Does Not Meet
4	Assessment of Need	Meets Standard: Provides a clear explanation of the governing body's needs assessment, addressing school choice availability, capacity, and seat quality in the community.	☐ Meets ☐ Partially Meets ☐ Does Not Meet

Reviewers will complete a summary rating for each major section and an overall application summary and recommendation.

For an application to be recommended for the authorizer’s approval, the summary rating for each of the major sections must meet the standard.

Educational Program Design and Capacity Summary			
Subsection Ratings	Meets	Partially Meets	Does Not Meet
School Overview			
School Mission and Model			
Anticipated Student Population			
Family and Community Engagement and Support			
School Culture and Discipline			
Curriculum and Instruction			
Special Populations			
Student Assessment and Evaluation			
Educational Program Capacity			
Educational Program Design and Capacity Section Rating	___ Meets	___ Partially Meets	___ Does Not Meet
Summary of Section Strengths:			
Summary of Section Weaknesses:			
Outstanding Questions:			





Questions?



Training Wrap-Up



Submission Reminders

- The Letter of Intent is due by December 3, 2025 to the proposed authorizer and the TN Public Charter School Commission.
- The Application is due by February 2, 2026* to the proposed authorizer.
- Authorizers may also require submission of up to five paper copies of the application and may charge an application fee of up to \$2,500 for each charter school application.
- Charter school sponsors should consult with the proposed authorizer to determine if paper copies and/or application fees are required.



*due to February 1 falling on a Sunday

Tennessee Charter Resources

- [TN State Board of Education](#) → application materials
- [TN Department of Education](#) → grants, TISA funding formula
- [TN Public Charter School Commission](#) → application decision appeals
- [TN Charter School Center](#) → charter supports and trainings
- [SCORE](#) → advocacy and research
- [Authorizers and Agency Contacts](#)



Virtual Table Talk

Using the chat box, please respond to one of the following:

1. What is one piece of information or insight you learned today that will help you in completing your application?
2. What is one action item you have added to your to-do list or re-prioritized after attending this webinar?
3. If you are a returning sponsor, authorizer or support organization, what is one piece of advice to first time applicants you can share?



State Agency Contact Information

Application Questions:

TN State Board of Education

Charter.Applications@tn.gov

Appeal Questions:

TN Public Charter School Commission

CharterSchool.Appeals@tn.gov

Charter Funding & State Reporting Questions:

TN Department of Education

Charter.Schools@tn.gov





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