
BEFORE THE TENNESSEE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

IN RE:)
ROCKETSHIP NASHVILLE #3) State Board of Education Meeting
Charter School Appeal) October 23, 2015
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)
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FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATION REPORT
OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Pursuant to Tenn. Code Ann. (T.C.A.) § 49-13-108, sponsors proposing to open new charter schools may appeal the denial of their amended application by a local board of education to the State Board of Education (“State Board”). On August 21, 2015, Rocketship Education (“Sponsor”), the Sponsor of the proposed Rocketship Nashville #3 elementary school (“Rocketship #3”), appealed the denial of their amended replication application by Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools (“MNPS”) Board of Education to the State Board.

Based on the following procedural history, findings of fact, and Review Committee Report attached hereto, I believe that the decision to deny the Rocketship #3 application was not “contrary to the best interests of the pupils, school district, or community.”¹ Therefore, I recommend that the State Board affirm the decision of MNPS.

STANDARD OF REVIEW

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

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

¹ T.C.A. § 49-13-108.

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

³ T.C.A. § 49-13-108.

school district or community.⁴ Because Rocketship #3 is proposed to locate in an LEA that contains a school on the current or last preceding priority school list, the State Board has the ability to approve the application or to affirm the local board's decision to deny.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

1. On February 2, 2015, the Sponsor submitted a letter of intent to MNPS expressing its intention to file a charter school application for Rocketship #3.
2. The Sponsor submitted its initial application for Rocketship #3 to MNPS on April 1, 2015.
3. MNPS assembled a review team to review and score the Rocketship #3 application. The review team recommended denial of the Rocketship #3 initial application.
4. On June 23, 2015, MNPS Board of Education voted to deny the Rocketship #3 initial application based upon the review team's recommendation.
5. The Sponsor amended and resubmitted its application for Rocketship #3 to MNPS on July 23, 2015.
6. MNPS' review team reviewed and scored the amended application of Rocketship #3 and again recommended denial.
7. On August 11, 2015, based on the review team's recommendation, MNPS Board of Education voted to deny the amended application of Rocketship #3.
8. The Sponsor appealed the denial of the Rocketship #3 amended application in writing to the State Board on August 21, 2015, including all required documents per State Board policy 2.500.
9. At the time of appeal to the State Board, the Sponsor did not submit corrections to the amended application as allowed under T.C.A. § 49-13-108(a)(4)(C).
10. On August 24, 2015, the State Board sent a letter requesting that MNPS provide information regarding its denial of the Rocketship #3 amended replication application. This letter also included a deadline extension request to allow the State Board to extend the 60 day statutory deadline to allow the State Board to hear the appeal at their regularly-scheduled October 23 meeting.
11. Both the Sponsor and MNPS signed and returned the deadline extension request.
12. The State Board's Review Committee analyzed and scored the Rocketship #3 amended replication application using the Tennessee Department of Education's charter application scoring rubric.
13. The Review Committee conducted a capacity interview with the proposed governing board of Rocketship #3 along with key members of the leadership team on September 22, 2015 in Nashville.

⁴ Id.

14. After the capacity interview, the Review Committee completed a final rating of the Rocketship #3 amended application and provided the Review Committee Recommendation Report.
15. On September 30, 2015, the Executive Director of the State Board and staff held a public hearing in Nashville. At the public hearing, the Executive Director heard presentations from the Sponsor and MNPS and took public comment regarding the Rocketship #3 application.

FINDINGS OF FACT

- **District Denial of Application.**

The review team assembled by MNPS to review and score the Rocketship #3 initial and amended replication applications consisted of the following individuals:

Name	Title
Mary Laurens Seely	Coordinator of Data Coaches, MNPS
John Thomas	School Improvement Program Facilitator, MNPS
Diane Chumley	Coordinator ELD Curriculum, MNPS
Sharon Wright	Executive Lead Principal, MNPS
Rick Caldwell	Exceptional Education Coach, MNPS
Kate Ezell	Principal, Ezell Education Consulting
Lovette Curry	Executive Director, Nashville Community Education
Adrienne Useted	COO, LEAD Public Schools
Jill Peeples	Coordinator of Magnet Marketing and Recruiting, MNPS
Dr. Sudhir Sinha	Data Coach, MNPS
Manny Ehiemua	Community Outreach Specialist, MNPS
Amy Hunter	Director of Math Instruction, LEAD Public Schools

The Rocketship #3 initial application received the following ratings from the MNPS review team:

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

After the MNPS review team completed its review and scoring of the initial application, its recommendation was presented to MNPS Board of Education on June 23, 2015. Based on the review team's recommendation, MNPS Board of Education voted to deny the initial replication application of Rocketship #3.

Upon resubmission, the amended replication application received the following ratings from the MNPS review team:⁵

⁵ Please see EXHIBIT B for a copy of the MNPS review team report.

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

After the MNPS review team completed its review and scoring of the amended application, its recommendation was presented to MNPS Board of Education on August 11, 2015. Based on the review team's recommendation, MNPS Board of Education voted to deny the amended replication application of Rocketship #3.

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

Following the denial of the Rocketship #3 amended application and their subsequent appeal to the State Board of Education, State Board staff assembled a diverse Review Committee of experts to evaluate and score the Rocketship #3 amended application using the Tennessee Department of Education's charter replication application scoring rubric. This Review Committee consisted of the following individuals:⁶

Name	Title
Rich Haglund	General Counsel and Chief Operating Officer, Achievement School District
Samuel L. Jackson	Shareholder, Education Practice Group, Lewis Thomason
Lin Johnson	Director of Special Projects in the Office of Chief Financial Officer, Tennessee Department of Education
Stephanie Mason	Assistant Superintendent, Robertson County Schools
Angela Sanders	General Counsel, State Board of Education
Hillary Sims	Dean of Culture and Managing Director of Support Services, STEM Preparatory Academy
Tess Stovall	Director of Charter Schools, State Board of Education

The Review Committee conducted an initial review and scoring of Rocketship #3's amended replication 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 of the application. The Review Committee's consensus rating of Rocketship #3's amended replication application was as follows:

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

⁶ Please see EXHIBIT A for detailed bios of each review committee member.

The Review Committee recommended that the amended replication application for Rocketship #3 be denied because the application lacked clear and compelling evidence in the Portfolio Review and Performance Record section to support that the network's schools provide successful outcomes for students and are high-performing on state assessments. While there was strong evidence in the academic, operational, and financial plans of a sound and comprehensive academic model supported by detailed implementation plans, the committee determined that the Portfolio Review section only partially met the standard of the required criteria.

The Review Committee found that the academic plan provided a thorough description of the academic focus and targeted population of the school as well as how the strategies and model would meet the needs of the population. Additionally, the application contained comprehensive, detailed plans for the proposed school's academic program including an extensive description of services for students with disabilities. Within the operations plan, the Review Committee found a robust organizational strategy for growth, a strong governance structure, and a compelling recruitment plan. The financial plan provided comprehensive school and network budgets, as well as a thorough description of cash-flow projections and contingency plans for the school.

Only in the Portfolio Review and Performance Record section did the Review Committee feel that there was insufficient evidence to meet or exceed the state's review standard. This determination was based on thin documentation and insufficient evidence that all schools within the existing network are high-performing and successful in meeting state or national standards. Furthermore, while student growth was above average in the Sponsor's first Tennessee school, student achievement levels were very low in the first year of operation. The lack of strong evidence of high performance from the network's existing schools, as well as the inconclusive results on state assessments from year one of the first Tennessee school resulted in the committee's rating of 'partially meets standard' for the Portfolio Review/Performance Record category.

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

- **Public Hearing**

Pursuant to Statute,⁷ and State Board policy 2.500, a public hearing chaired by the Executive Director was held in Nashville on September 30, 2015. MNPS' presentation at the public hearing focused on the argument that denial of the Rocketship #3 amended replication application was in the best interests of the students, school district and community. MNPS grounded its argument in the achievement data of the Sponsor's current Nashville school. Specifically, MNPS noted that "Rocketship's achievement results fell below the results of all other charter schools in the Davidson County portfolio" and that "[s]imple comparison of math scores with other Maplewood cluster elementary schools shows that all had higher achievement and most had the same or greater growth [than Rocketship Nashville Northeast]."⁸ While recognizing the TVAAS growth scores of the Sponsor's current school may be promising signs of future success, MNPS argued that the proficiency rates were well below state standards and the goals that the Sponsor set for itself in its initial application.⁹ Further, MNPS argued that while replication was previously

⁷ T.C.A. § 49-13-109.

⁸ MNPS Public Hearing Presentation.

⁹ Id.

granted to the Sponsor based on the strength of its network, now that the Sponsor has Tennessee data, it must be considered in the review and approval determination.

In response, the Sponsor's presentation focused on the level 5 composite TVAAS score achieved by their current Nashville school, as well as the national data for their California schools. They highlighted MAP scores from their current California schools, arguing that these scores reflect steady student growth despite a large increase in the number of students.¹⁰ When asked about challenges that the Sponsor has encountered in opening schools in Tennessee, they noted that students in Nashville were much further behind grade level than the students they have encountered in their California and Wisconsin schools. As a result, they recognized certain modifications were needed to adapt to this different population, but expressed confidence in their ability to make such changes.

A portion of the public hearing was dedicated to taking public comment. A total of nine people made verbal comments at the hearing, including a number of parents, and a number of community members from Nashville. In addition, State Board staff accepted public comments in writing via e-mail.¹¹

ANALYSIS

State law requires the State Board to review the decision of the local board of education and determine whether the denial of the proposed charter school was in the "best interests of the pupils, school district, or community."¹² T.C.A. § 49-13-108 requires the State Board to adopt national standards of authorizing. One such standard is to maintain high standards for approving charter applications. Given the great responsibility of educating students and the amount of taxpayer dollars entrusted to a charter school that is approved by a local district, the State Board expects that only those schools that demonstrate a high likelihood of success and meet or exceed the required criteria will be authorized.

In making my recommendation to the Board, I have considered the Review Committee Report, the arguments made by both the Sponsor and MNPS at the Public Hearing, and the public comments received by State Board staff, and conclude as follows:

The Review Committee's report and recommendations are sound and grounded in evidence contained in the application and gained at the capacity interview. For the reasons detailed in the Review Committee Report and further explicated here, I agree that the Rocketship #3 amended replication application did not fully meet or exceed the standards required for approval in all areas considered.

Tennessee Code grants districts the authority to take past performance into account when reviewing a charter school application. T.C.A. § 49-13-107(e) specifically states, "In reviewing an application, a chartering authority may take into consideration the past and current performance, or lack thereof, of any charter school operated by the sponsor." In addition, when submitting a Tennessee replication application, the applicant must provide student performance data from state assessments and answer questions in the application regarding the performance of the schools in their portfolio.¹³

While the Rocketship #3 amended application met or exceeded the standard in the Academic, Operational, and Financial sections of the application, there was simply not enough compelling student

¹⁰ Rocketship Public Hearing Presentation.

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

¹² T.C.A. § 49-13-108.

¹³ 2015 Replication Application, p. 2, 11-12.

success data in Tennessee and across the network provided in the Portfolio Review/Performance Record section of the application to merit a meets standard rating. As an example, the Sponsor only provided one year of 2013-14 MAP data from California in this section of the application. This data did not include any Nashville schools since the first school in Nashville did not open until 2014-15. While the TVAAS growth of the Sponsor's Nashville school shows great promise, I agree with MNPS that though "growth is important . . . it does not meet the standard of evidence of student success in the replication rubric."¹⁴ Tennessee data shows that on the 2015 TCAP assessment only 29.1% of the students enrolled in Rocketship Nashville Northeast scored proficient or advanced in Math and 17.7% scored proficient or advanced in Reading.¹⁵ This is well below the state average and below or on par with the performance of many of the priority schools located within MNPS.¹⁶ While taking on the laudable challenge of serving all grades in its first year of operation, the data also places Rocketship Nashville Northeast elementary school as the lowest performing charter school in all of Davidson County on TCAP proficiency in Reading and Math.

Further, data provided at the Public Hearing shows that the Sponsor has yet to meet many of the goals that it set for itself in its initial application to MNPS, including the goals to "ensure grade-level proficiency in literacy and math by second grade . . ." and "meet or exceed the average achievement for schools in the same geographic areas on TCAP achievement tests and the TVAAS."¹⁷ Given this data, I cannot recommend that the State Board approve an additional elementary school at this time. While there is promising evidence of growth, there is not yet enough objective evidence of achievement from the Sponsor's current Nashville school to merit approval of an additional school. Given that the Sponsor acknowledged that the students in Tennessee were much further behind grade level than the students they encountered in their California schools, it appears that the Sponsor merely needs additional time to adapt their model to best serve Tennessee's student population and to achieve the promises that it made in its initial application to MNPS. From the evidence considered in this review, I have confidence in their ability to do just that and will be eager to observe Rocketship's results and evolving work with Tennessee students in coming years.

CONCLUSION

For these reasons, and for the reasons stated in the Review Committee Report attached hereto, I do not believe that the decision to deny Rocketship #3's amended replication application was contrary to the best interests of the students, the school district, or the community. Therefore, I recommend that the State Board of Education affirm the decision of the MNPS Board of Education.

¹⁴ MNPS Public Hearing Presentation.

¹⁵ Rocketship Public Hearing Presentation.

¹⁶ MNPS Public Hearing Presentation and Data Slides; Priority Schools are the lowest-performing 5 percent of schools in Tennessee in terms of academic achievement.

¹⁷ MNPS Public Hearing Presentation.



Dr. Sara Heyburn, Executive Director
State Board of Education

10/20/2015

Date

EXHIBITS

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



EXHIBIT A

Charter Application Review Committee Recommendation Report

October 23, 2015

School Name: Rocketship Nashville #3

Sponsor: Rocketship Education

Proposed Location of School: Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools

Evaluation Team:

Rich Haglund
Samuel L. Jackson
Lin Johnson
Stephanie Mason
Angela Sanders
Hillary Sims
Tess Stovall

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



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Introduction

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

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

Overview of the Evaluation Process

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

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

This recommendation report includes the following information:

1. **Summary of the application**: A brief description of the applicant's proposed academic, operation, 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: executive summary; targeted population; performance management; and the capacity to implement the proposed plan.
 - b. Operations Plan and Capacity: network vision, growth plan, and capacity; management; governance; charter management contracts (if applicable); personnel/human capital; professional development; and the capacity to implement the proposed plan.
 - c. Financial Plan and Capacity: budget narrative; budgets of network and schools; 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 State Board’s charter replication application review committee utilized the Tennessee Department of Education’s Charter School Replication Application Evaluation Ratings and Sample Scoring Criteria (“the rubric”), which is used by all LEAs when evaluating an application. The rubric states:

[A]n application that merits a recommendation for approval should present a clear, realistic picture of how the school expects to operate; be detailed in how all schools in the network expect to operate and include solid evidence that their organization has the capacity and ability to grow while sustaining financial and operational viability and expanding academic outcomes for students.

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

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



Summary of the Application

School Name: Rocketship Nashville #3

Sponsor: Rocketship Education

Proposed Location of School: Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools

Mission:¹

The mission of Rocketship Nashville #3 is to eliminate the achievement gap by graduating our students at or above grade level in Literacy and Math.

Number of Schools Currently in Operation by Sponsor:

- California: 10
- Milwaukee: 1
- Nashville: 2

Proposed Enrollment:²

Grade Level	Year 1 (2016)	Year 2 (2017)	Year 3 (2018)	Year 4 (2019)	Year 5 (2020)	At Capacity (2018)
K	112	112	112	112	112	112
1	112	112	112	112	112	112
2	112	112	112	112	112	112
3	56	112	112	112	112	112
4	56	56	112	112	112	112
Total	448	504	560	560	560	560

Brief Description of the Application:

Rocketship Nashville #3 is an elementary school proposing to locate in Nashville, Tennessee and serve students in grades Kindergarten through 4th grade. The school is a replication of the Rocketship Education model, and it would be the third Rocketship Education school in Nashville and, as a whole, Tennessee. The core instructional model for the school is a teacher-led, technology supported approach to personalized learning.³

Rocketship Nashville #3 will be organized under the existing non-profit entity of Rocketship Education. The existing Rocketship Education Governing Board of Directors will govern the school in addition to the operator’s other schools. Rocketship Education will satisfy the Tennessee statutory requirements with a local advisory board composed of local community members and parents of children in the school. The school proposes to locate in southeast Davidson County.

Rocketship Nashville #3 projects to have \$4,927,850 in revenue in Year 1 and \$5,090,188 in expenses in Year 1, resulting in a negative fund balance of (\$117,964). In Year 5, the school projects to

¹ Rocketship Nashville #3 Replication Application, pg. 5.

² Ibid, pg. 6.

³ Ibid, pg. 1.



have \$5,917,006 in revenue and \$5,641,233 in expenses, resulting in a positive fund balance of \$275,772. The school assumes that 70% of the student population will qualify for Free and Reduced Price Lunch and 14% of the student population will be students with disabilities.



Summary of the Evaluation

The review committee recommends that the application for Rocketship Nashville #3 be denied because the applicant lacked clear and compelling evidence in the application’s Portfolio Review and Performance Record section that the network’s schools provide successful outcomes for students and are high performing on state assessments. While the review committee found that the Portfolio Review section partially met the standard of the required criteria, the committee did find strong evidence in the academic, operational, and financial plans of a sound and comprehensive academic model supported by detailed implementation plans.

The academic plan provided a thorough description of the academic focus and targeted population of the school as well as how the strategies and model would meet the needs of the population. Additionally, the application contained a thorough description of the academic plan including a detailed plan to serve students with disabilities. Within the operations plan, the review committee found a robust organizational strategy for growth, a strong governance structure, and a compelling recruitment plan. The financial plan provided comprehensive school and network budgets as well as a thorough description of cash-flow projections and contingency plans for the school.

In the Portfolio Review and Performance Record section, there was insufficient evidence of clear, compelling documentation of successful student outcomes for each school in the network and strong evidence that schools within the network are high performing and successful in meeting state or national standards. For example, the applicant’s first Tennessee schools showed low achievement results in the first year of operation which did not provide the committee with evidence of a high performing school on state assessments.

Summary of Section Ratings

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

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

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

Analysis of the Academic Plan Design and Capacity

Rating: Meets or Exceeds the Standard

Strengths Identified by the Committee:

The applicant's Academic Plan Design and Capacity meets or exceeds the standard because it presented a realistic, comprehensive, and detailed description of the proposed academic plan for the school as well as how it would be adjusted to meet the needs of the targeted population. The application included a clear explanation for the core purpose of the new school and a thorough description of the academic plan, including a detailed plan to serve students with disabilities. The sponsor included a clear and compelling explanation of academic goals and interventions for students and schools that fall below academic expectations and an organizational plan to delay or modify growth if academic targets are not met.

The review committee found evidence that the executive summary subsection met all of the required criteria by clearly providing the operator's mission and defining the key features of the school's academic plan. In the application and during the interview, the sponsor clearly defined the purpose of Rocketship Nashville #3 and the key features of the academic plan which include a double block of literacy and social studies instruction, a blended learning model through the learning lab, and an integrated special education program. During the capacity interview, members of the leadership team provided a detailed description of how the special education program served students through an inclusion program based on the student's needs, and they have projected employing two special education teachers and paraprofessionals as needed to serve all students.

The targeted population subsection provided evidence of a clear understanding of the student demographics that the leadership team expects to have enrolled in the school. They expect to enroll a majority of students who are economically disadvantaged and racial/ethnic minorities, which is similar to the demographics of the other schools within Tennessee. They plan to enroll grades Kindergarten through 4th in Year 1 with capacity being reached at Year 3. During the capacity interview, the applicant described how the academic plan met the needs of this population including a fully robust RTI² program, additional intervention to 4th graders who are significantly behind, and adding additional members of the leadership team in order to provide additional support to the school.

The review committee found strong evidence of the organization's clear and compelling plan to monitor the academic progress of individual schools as well as the network as a whole. The application contained clear and measurable school-specific goals including goals for student attendance, student attainment, student academic growth, and goals for performance on interim assessments. Within the application and the interview, the sponsor described how the organization approaches students or schools that are not meeting expectations. The applicant described providing additional coaching sessions for leadership or teachers who are struggling, additional professional development sessions on specific topics, and additional and highly specific intervention blocks for students who are struggling. The representatives of the governing board spoke candidly about how the network has used its organizational dashboard to make decisions to modify or delay expansion plans, and the challenges that the organization faced in making those decisions. In totality, the review committee found strong evidence that the Academic Plan Design and Capacity met or exceeded the standards required in the rubric.

Analysis of the Operations Plan and Capacity

Rating: Meets or Exceeds the Standard

Strengths Identified by the Committee:

The Operations Plan and Capacity meets or exceeds the standard because it presented a clear and comprehensive overview of the network and school operations, a strong governance structure of an expanding network, and a realistic and viable human capital pipeline. The review committee found evidence of a detailed vision for network growth and a thorough description of the potential challenges for the organization as well as how the sponsor was attempting to mitigate those issues. There was evidence of strong network support for the school and a clear delineation of the roles and responsibilities between the network and the school. The description of the governance structure of the proposed school was clear and concise and provided for a robust plan of local stakeholder engagement. The application provided a viable recruitment and hiring strategy and the development of a school leadership pipeline. The review committee found sufficient evidence throughout the operations section that the components met or exceeded the standard based upon the required criteria.

The review committee found strong evidence of a clear and compelling vision for network growth within the organization as well as a thorough understanding of the potential challenges of expansion. Within the application and the interview, Rocketship Education presented a clear picture of the strategic vision for both the Tennessee region as well as the whole network including the proposed opening years, number of schools, and number of students that will be served. During the capacity interview, the leadership team and representatives of the governing board described in greater detail the potential challenges that the organization faces with expansion, particularly around the human capital pipeline and facilities, and what Rocketship Education is doing to proactively mitigate those issues. The applicant stated that they have a viable facilities plan for a school to open in August 2016, and the leadership team provided evidence of a sound financing and renovation plan for a proposed facility.

The application presented a clear and thorough management structure between the network and the school as well as a complete description of the governance of the school such as interactions between the local school and the national governing board. The application and subsequent capacity interview provided a detailed description of the network support provided to the school as well as a description of network-level and school-level decisions. Specifically, the leadership team described the autonomy afforded at the school-level to make building decisions around staffing and the support provided on a network-level to facilitate meeting specific needs. The review team found evidence of a strong governance model for the proposed school, which includes a regional advisory board and consistent communication between local stakeholders and the national governing board through the Tennessee-based governing board member. The governing board representatives at the capacity interview demonstrated compelling knowledge of the Tennessee region, and the leadership team described clear avenues of communication between the region and the national organization.

The review committee found sufficient evidence of a compelling recruitment and hiring strategy as well as the development of a talent pipeline for the region. The applicant identified in the application two potential school leaders who are participating in the Rocketship Education leadership program and described a plan to hire an additional regional team member to focus on staff recruitment in Nashville. During the capacity interview, the applicant discussed the recruitment of individuals from the community surrounding the schools and a program created by Rocketship Education to subsidize the credentialing of these individuals if they are interested in the teaching profession. Overall, the review committee found



compelling evidence within the Operations Plan and Capacity section that the components met or exceeded the required criteria of the rubric.

Analysis of the Financial Plan and Capacity

Rating: Meets or Exceeds the Standard

Strengths Identified by the Committee:

The Financial Plan and Capacity meets or exceeds the standard because it presented compelling evidence of viable network and school-level budgets, detailed descriptions of financial procedures, and sufficient cash-flow projections and contingency plans. The financial plan presented within the application included sound budgets that are conservative and realistic based on enrolling a full school in Year 1. The budget narrative contains a full and detailed description of cost assumptions including staffing costs, cost-of-living and inflation adjustments, and facilities costs. The review committee found evidence of thorough financial procedures such as the relationship between the network and the school on budget processes and fiscal processes. Additionally, as mentioned in the operations plan section, the leadership team spoke of the building level autonomy available in regards to the budget, and how the network supports a school leader in making adjustments to fulfill the specific needs of the school.

The financial plan provides for sufficient cash-flow projections for the school and the network. During the capacity interview, the leadership team discussed the organization's financing and fundraising plan in significant detail. The network-level financial documents provided within the application demonstrated sufficient capital available to ensure organization-wide viability. Additionally, during the interview, the leadership discussed an analysis of the available capital and fundraising as a part of the green lighting process for new schools and provided additional detail regarding the use of the Charter School Growth Fund to support the school during the start-up years.

The school will be required to pay a 15% CMO fee to the Rocketship Education network on an annual basis, and the narrative includes a detailed description of the use of the fee on the network-level. Additionally, the CMO fee may be waived by the network as a contingency plan if revenues come in below expectations. For additional contingency planning, the network sets an internal benchmark of 15% positive fund balance for each school. The school begins to contribute toward this fund balance beginning in Year 3. Overall, the review committee found sufficient evidence of a strong financial plan, procedures, and cash flow for the proposed school that met or exceeded the required criteria of the rubric.

Analysis of the Portfolio Review and Performance Record

Rating: Partially Meets Standard

Weaknesses Identified by the Committee:

The Portfolio Review and Performance Record partially meets standard because there was insufficient evidence of clear and compelling documentation of successful student outcomes for each network school as well as a lack of strong evidence that the network schools are high performing and successful in meeting state or national standards. The application only includes network-wide NWEA MAP Assessment results from one year (2013-2014) in Attachment 7 (which requires the applicant to document student achievement and growth results for each school in the network). In addition, this data did not include the results of any of the applicant's Nashville schools since the first Nashville school did not begin operation until 2014-15. The review committee did not find that one year of MAP data was sufficient to meet or exceed the standard for clear and compelling evidence of successful student outcomes. While the network's first school has been in operation since 2007, the application lacked any detailed state assessment data from California or Wisconsin, where the operator has had schools in operation for more than one year, or NWEA MAP assessment data for more than one year.

Further, the review committee did not find sufficient evidence that the network's Tennessee school produced high performing and successful results on state assessments. Since Rocketship Tennessee, the operator's first school in Nashville, was in its first year of operations in 2014-2015, TCAP assessment data was not available when the application was originally submitted. However, the TCAP and TVAAS data became public prior to the operator's appeal to the State Board of Education and was included as a part of the amended application. On the 2015 TCAP, 17.7% of students at Rocketship Tennessee achieved proficient or advanced in Reading/Language Arts and 29.1% of students achieved proficient or advanced in math. The school received a One-Year Overall Composite Score on TVAAS of a Level 5, and a One-Year Overall Literacy Composite Score and Numeracy Composite Score of a Level 4. The review committee found the school's student achievement data to be extremely low, especially in Reading/Language Arts, and the one-year of growth data. While the review committee found evidence of above average student growth in the one year of available data, it did not find clear and compelling evidence that Rocketship Tennessee was high performing and producing successful results on the TCAP assessment.

During the interview, the leadership team stated that Rocketship Tennessee was seeing a lot of improvement in the students in the current school year compared to last school year. On internal assessments they have seen a twenty point drop in the number of students in the bottom quartile. The operator stated that since they enrolled all grade levels from Year 1, Kindergarten through 4th grade, they expect that demonstrated high performance on state assessments will be achieved after a multi-year process. The leadership team and governing board were very candid about the significant difference in Tennessee's student population compared to California and Wisconsin's student populations, such as how far behind academically the incoming students are compared to other schools. However, the review committee did not find compelling and strong evidence that the operator's current performance within Tennessee demonstrates a highly successful school and one with compelling evidence of successful student outcomes, nor did it find clear and compelling evidence that replication of this model with Tennessee's student population demonstrated a high likelihood of success based upon the provided student achievement data.

Strengths Identified by the Committee:

The review committee found evidence of strong portions in the Portfolio Review and Performance Record section. The application states that Rocketship is in the top 5% of school districts in California serving low-income students, and the average student grew 1.5 years in math and 1.3 years in reading on the NWEA MAP assessment. In the interview, the leadership team provided additional details regarding the performance of the California schools on the 2015 California state assessment, stating that the students were outperforming comparable students. The applicant provided compelling descriptions of a high performing school, Mateo Sheedy, and a low-performing school, Los Suenos, within the network, and particularly in the capacity interview, the leadership team spoke with candor about the challenges that the organization had faced and what changes they had made to improve academic outcomes. Specifically, the leadership team detailed the additional professional development and hands-on support given to the struggling school. Rocketship Education included the latest audit of the network, which detailed some findings regarding the National School Lunch Program eligibility verification in some of its schools outside of Tennessee. When asked about these findings in the interview, the leadership team was forthcoming regarding the learning curve that they faced going into new regions and learning a new state's systems as well as strategies they are implementing to prevent further challenges. The operator is in good standing with its current authorizers and disclosed pending litigation involving the network. However, the litigation does not impact any of the current schools within the Rocketship network.



Evaluation Team

Rich Haglund is General Counsel and Chief Operating Officer for the Achievement School District (ASD). Rich ensures that the ASD, and its portfolio of schools, has excellent operational services and legal guidance to realize their mission of turning around many of the state's lowest performing schools. Rich previously served as the director of charter schools for the Tennessee Department of Education, general counsel to the Tennessee Board of Education, and as an assistant attorney general. Rich has a B.A. in Philosophy and Political Science from Boston University. Prior to earning his J.D. at Vanderbilt, Rich worked in marketing for a manufacturer of network security and management devices. Rich and his wife Jen have four children. Rich was co-captain of the Ultimate Frisbee team at BU, and hopes to be commissioner of Major League Baseball in 20 years.

Samuel L. Jackson is a shareholder at Lewis, Thomason, King, Krieg & Waldrop who practices in the area of Education Law in a variety of legal matters, including employment of licensed and classified employees, employee contracts, employee and student discipline, employee and student rights, special education and disability accommodation, First Amendment issues, sexual harassment and civil rights matters, desegregation, tort liability, school finance and taxation, and school construction. Mr. Jackson is also experienced in general defense litigation, product liability, labor and employment law, transportation, and workers' compensation law. Mr. Jackson has represented boards of education and other business entities and individuals in various federal and state actions and administrative actions across Tennessee. Mr. Jackson's current clients are boards of education, transportation companies, national, regional, and local employers, insurance companies, and independent insurance agencies. Mr. Jackson resides in Nashville with his wife and daughters.

Lin Johnson is the Director of Special Projects in the Office of the Chief Financial Officer at the TN Department of Education. Prior to joining the Department, he worked at DC Public Charter School Board as the Director of Finance & Operations and Standard & Poor's as a Public Finance Associate. He holds a MBA from MIT Sloan, a MPA from Harvard Kennedy School, and a BA from Reed College.

Stephanie Mason is a 27-year veteran educator who has served as a teacher, school administrator, and district level supervisor. She currently serves as the assistant director of schools for Robertson County. Prior to her current role, Stephanie served as the federal programs supervisor and the co-assistant director of schools in Robertson County. She was responsible for developing and evaluating federal project budgets and master schedules. Stephanie also planned and implemented district-wide professional development for over 800 educators in Robertson County. Stephanie received her B.S. in Elementary and Special Education from Middle Tennessee State University. She earned a Master's in Administration and Supervision from Austin Peay State University as well as a Master's in Early Childhood Special Education from Vanderbilt University consecutively. In 2005, Stephanie became an Education Specialist with a degree from Tennessee State University.



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

Hillary Sims served as the STEM Prep Middle School Director in 2014-15 following almost three years of service to STEM Prep students and families as Founding Dean of Students and Support Services. She is currently supporting STEM Preparatory Academy and STEM Preparatory High School faculty, staff, students and families in the role of Dean of Culture and Managing Director of Support Services. Hillary has been educating youth and leading high-performing organizations for nearly two decades. A graduate from both East Tennessee State University and The University of Tennessee-Knoxville, Ms. Sims aspires to be a life-long learner. Having served as a school administrator for more than 10 years as well as actively supporting the charter school movement, state and nation-wide, since 2005, Ms. Sims enthusiastically leads faculty and staff in achieving ambitious outcomes both in and out of the classroom. Ms. Sims was appointed by Governor Haslam to serve on the Advisory Council for Students with Disabilities and is honored to serve in that capacity.

Tess Stovall serves as the Director of Charter School Accountability and Policy for the Tennessee State Board of Education. In this role, she manages the charter school application process and authorization duties of the State Board. Prior to joining the staff of the board, she served as the Transformation Facilitator at Cameron Middle School, the first district-led conversion of a traditional public school to a charter school in Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools. While in Washington, DC, Tess worked for Congressman Jim Cooper (TN-05) and a centrist think tank, Third Way, on economic and education policy. She is a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of The George Washington University earning a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Political Science and Sociology and a graduate of the London School of Economics with a Master of Science Degree in Political Sociology. Tess is a member of the National Association of Charter School Authorizers' 2015 Leaders Program.

EXHIBIT B

Rocketship #3



Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools Office of Innovation

Charter School Application Replication Recommendation Report

Rocketship Nashville #3

Submitted By: Rocketship Education

Evaluation Team

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Introduction

Charter schools are public schools operated by independent, non-profit governing bodies that must include parents. In Tennessee, public charter school students are measured against the same academic standards as students in other public schools. Charter schools are required to serve all eligible students, with the education of at-risk students being of utmost importance.

It is the responsibility of the authorizer, to apply a rigorous authorization process in order to ensure only those charter schools meeting the needs of students open. Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools is interested in charter applicants who demonstrate the capacity to educate the most at-risk students in highly diverse and personalized settings.

An existing Tennessee operator proposing to open an exact model (including focus and grade levels) of an existing school currently authorized by MNPS may submit just the replication application, along with a copy of the original application of the school to be replicated.

The replication application allows existing operators to describe their organization's structure, track record, and capacity to operate one or more schools in Tennessee and within MNPS. MNPS is allowed to look at previous academic data, operational data and financial data as found within the performance frameworks that are included as a part of each charter contract and that are used in creating the annual school report card for each charter school.

Evaluation Process

The Office of Innovation, Division of Charter Schools, has worked closely with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) to set up an evaluation process that embodies best practices from authorizers throughout the country and is rigorous and thorough.

In accordance with the NACSA Principles and Standards, three review teams were assembled to review the April, 2015 applications. Each team consisted of a team lead plus individuals who had expertise with curriculum, special education, English language learners, charter school financials, operations, management and legal. Each team was given extensive training in application review and interviewing techniques.

The Office of Innovation and one MNPS board representative exercised additional oversight of the process.

The stages of review are as follows:

Phase I - Capacity Review

Charter applications are thoroughly reviewed to insure sufficient strength in areas of Education Plan, Organization Plan and Business/Financial Plan, and Portfolio Review/Performance Record as described below:

- **Proposal Overview**

Basic information about the proposed school

- **Evaluation**

Analysis of the proposal based on the four major areas of plan development

- **Educational Plan** - Key academic features described in the original application that might differ from the operator's existing schools
- **Organizational Plan** - Includes governing body; governing board composition, management and operations; staffing and Human Resources; Professional Development; Student Recruitment and Enrollment; Growth Plan, CMO status (if applicable), and detailed management plan for governance structure at both the school and network levels
- **Business Plan** - Including budget assumptions, five year budget and first year start-up budget; Financial Management; network fiscal capacity with an emphasis on human capital expenditures, accounting, purchasing, payroll, and audits
- **Portfolio Review/Performance Record** - Summary of replicating school's performance record and network financial capacity.

Opening a successful, high-performing charter school depends on having a complete, coherent plan. It is not an endeavor for which strength in one area can compensate for

weakness in another. Therefore, in order to receive a recommendation for approval, the application must meet or exceed the criteria in all four areas of the capacity review in order to move forward to the next phases of consideration.

Phase II - Absolute Priorities

If an application meets standard in all four (4) areas of the capacity review, it then moves to Phase II. The application must meet both absolute priorities of strong academic benchmarks and diversity plan that aligns with the MNPS Board of Education diversity goals. A separate diversity plan submitted by applicants will be evaluated for recruiting plans, transportation, facility acquisition and recruitment strategies to discern whether an applicant meets diversity standards. An application that does not meet both absolute priorities in Phase II will not move forward in the application process.

Phase III - Competitive Priorities

Once applications have been ranked by tier-level according to their competitive priority ranking, and the district's annual needs assessment plan report is complete, the Office of Innovation in consultation with Student Assignment, Diversity Management, and the Director's Office will consider and make recommendation for investment in new schools matched to identified needs of the district.

Proposal Overview

School Name: Rocketship Nashville #3

Rationale for Expanding Current Network of Schools: Rocketship's mission is to eliminate the achievement gap by graduating their students at or above grade level in Literacy and Math. Furthermore, Rocketship seeks to create a future in which thousands of children from Tennessee have graduated from four-year colleges and have come back to Tennessee to eradicate the last traces of the achievement gap.

Proposed location: Southeastern Davidson County with in the Overton, Glencliff, and Antioch clusters.

Enrollment Projections (to be copied from the table in the Proposed Overview & Enrollment section)

<i>Academic Year</i>	<i>Planned # of Students</i>	<i>Maximum # of Students</i>	<i>Grades</i>
<i>Year 1</i>	448	448	K-4
<i>Year 2</i>	504	504	K-4
<i>Year 3</i>	560	560	K-4
<i>Year 4</i>	560	560	K-4
<i>Year 5</i>	560	560	K-4
<i>Year 6</i>	560	560	K-4
<i>Year 7</i>	560	560	K-4
<i>Year 8</i>	560	560	K-4
<i>Year 9</i>	560	560	K-4
<i>Year 10</i>	560	560	K-4
<i>At Capacity</i>	560	560	K-4

RECOMMENDATION

Recommendation

School Name

Deny

Summary of Section Ratings

Ratings options for each section are Exceeds the Standard; Meets the Standard; Partially Meets the Standard; Does Not Meet the Standard.

Phase I Capacity Review

Academic Plan Design and Capacity

Partially Meets

Amended Academic Plan

Partially Meets

If applicable, rationale and identified resources for any key academic features that would differ significantly from the organization's current model

Operations Plan and Capacity

Meets or Exceeds

Amended Operations Plan

Meets or Exceeds

A strong description of the network vision, growth plan, and capacity for quality school replication. Includes staffing plans, network management, governance, and school management contracts (if applicable)

Financial Plan and Capacity

Meets or Exceeds

Amended Financial Plan

Meets or Exceeds

Financial plan is aligned internally, accounts for network growth as well as individual school growth, has sufficient cash flow, revenues, and realistic budget assumptions.

Portfolio Review/Performance Record

Partially Meets

Amended Portfolio Review

Partially Meets

Review of previous performance management reports - academic, operational, and financial

Phase II Absolute Priorities

Recommendation

N/A

Academic Benchmarks

[Redacted]

New school will increase number of Achieving or Excelling schools on an annual and three year rolling basis; new school will serve students currently not served in Achieving or Excelling schools; new school will establish annual performance targets and benchmarks aligned with the Academic Performance Framework (APF)

Diversity Management

[Redacted]

New school will meet diversity definitions in the MNPS Diversity Management Strategy; new school will adopt a diversity plan supportive of and similar in kind to the MNPS Diversity Strategy; new school will not reduce the number of diverse schools (district-run or charter) currently operating in Nashville

Phase III Competitive Priorities (one or more of three)

Recommendation

Growth/Demand

[Redacted]

N/A

New school will assist in serving students currently attending schools that are overcrowded or likely to become overcrowded; new school will offer opportunities to serve students at schools with enrollments that are rapidly declining or below a reasonable threshold; new school will expand district capacity to respond to population growth consistent with its goals for academic excellence and diversity; new school will recruit, retain, locate and offer transportation plans that will add unique and/or new options for access to educational opportunities; new school will expand opportunities for families who are unable to access similar options at present

Management Conversion

[Redacted]

New school will serve all students residing in the current school zone of an MNPS school with a three year status of Target on the Academic Performance Framework as of fall 2015; sponsor organization offers experience and planning demonstrating expertise in school turnaround and building schools with readiness to teach, readiness to learn, and readiness to act; new school proposal addresses transition challenges and costs associated with serving all students well who reside in the current school zone of an MNPS school with three year status of Target on the Academic Performance Framework; new school will recruit, retain, locate, and offer transportation plans that will add unique and/or new options for access to educational opportunities; new school will expand options for families who are unable to access similar options at present

Continuation/Addition of Grades for Existing Operators



New school will open a school pathway with priority enrollment for all students matriculating from an existing elementary/middle school managed by the same operator; existing school will be in Achieving or Excelling status on the Academic Performance Framework; review of the criteria for replication applications offers great confidence that the new school will continue to serve students well

Applications that pass the capacity review and meet the absolute priorities in Phases I and II may be considered for their ability to serve the competitive priority of management conversion. All applications found to have the capacity to serve this priority will be then ranked by tier-level according to the relative quality of the plan and the strength of the stated commitments.

Academic Plan Design and Capacity

Plan Summary – Rocketship Nashville proposes to open their third elementary school with grades K-4. The academic plan will not differ significantly from the original Rocketship model. Rocketship’s instructional model is a teacher-led, technology-supported approach to personalized learning. Teachers leverage frequent assessment and learning lab data to group students for targeted instruction. Rocketship utilizes a unique integrated special education program, with special education teachers pushing into the classrooms to provide support and co-teaching. Teachers collaborate to provide greater differentiation for all learning. Rocketship provides a positive behavior intervention and support culture that promotes character development and offers social emotional curriculum to all students. Blended learning initiatives increase access to technology, self-paced curriculum and on-going real time data.

Analysis – The academic plan partially meets the criteria for approval because there is considerable concern that the organization does not have a proven record of success in Tennessee. The first Nashville Rocketship school has not yet been in existence a full school year; thus, they do not have TCAP scores to enable reviewers to explore accountability data. Additionally, the state replication application and guidance (issued prior to the 2015 application cycle) specifically indicate a replication application is appropriate only if a school is in at least year two (2) of operation so there is academic data to support expansion and to assist in evaluating the capacity of an organization to expand.

The review team found many areas of the academic plan to be strengths, including:

- Strong academic plan with double literacy blocks. Further explanation history of effectiveness of this approach further outlined in the review session.
- The plan for social-emotional learning was thoroughly and thoughtfully developed, including the intentional application of SEL practices throughout the day. Recess was defined as an avenue for authentic application of practices, with teachers required to be present at their recess periods to monitor opportunities of collaborative interactions and conflict resolution.
- Use of a learning lab was outlined within the application, and its use appears to supplement education rather than drive it completely.
- Review team felt the Professional Development Plan to be strong, including GLADE Training for social emotional development. There were, however, remaining questions related to how 250 hours of PD are incorporated into the school year.
- Rocketship’s approach to cases where there is a lack of parental involvement was outstanding. Data related to the number of hours parent volunteered at the school, participated in activities, etc. was viewed not as a hammer with which to threaten parents, but as a yardstick by which to measure the school’s ability to effectively engage families. The importance of parent involvement and well developed strategies were clearly communicated and included: Parent/Teacher Conferences occur 3 times per year. Utilizing parents for outreach, and strategies to foster increased parent

participation such as meeting families in their homes or community centers as opposed to the school when schedules and/or transportation pose issues for the family.

Amended Application Academic Plan Analysis

At the time of the first submission, state assessment data was not available for the review team to consider. Since that time, the data has been released and the review team, after very thorough consideration of Rocketship's mission, vision, and capacity, still has very serious concerns.

On the scoring rubric, one of the standards the team has to consider with a replication is the performance record of an existing school: If operator has existing schools within the district, previous compliance/performance reports show evidence of student academic success, organizational efficiency, and financial sustainability. Plainly, the results that Rocketship's Nashville school achieved in 2014-15 do not meet this standard.

Rocketship's achievement results showed fewer than 1 in 5 students proficient or advanced in reading/language arts (17.7%) and fewer than 1 in 3 proficient or advanced in math (29.1%). These results were the lowest of any charter school in Nashville's portfolio and lower than schools that have previously requested to expand their student numbers and been denied that opportunity because of poor results. It is the policy of MNPS not to expand seats or replicate schools whose performance is substandard, and the results that Rocketship demonstrated this year were significantly substandard.

Rocketship used its resubmission to make the case that strong TVAAS results (5) justified replication of the school model, but the application did not address, nor did it even reveal, the extremely low achievement scores. In fact, reviewers had to obtain the academic achievement data from state resources rather than the charter applicant. Growth is important, and the results from 2014-15 convey optimism that student achievement will eventually improve. When it does, we fully anticipate that Rocketship will be able to reapply for replication, but growth without achievement does not justify replication at this time, and the application's failure to address the achievement reality suggests that the applicant understands that reality.

The achievement scores for 2014-15 did not significantly outperform schools with similar demographics or schools with similar prior achievement, nor did it positively compare in any achievement category with other charter schools. In math, 5 of Nashville's Priority Schools were within $\pm 5\%$ of Rocketship's score with 3 Priority Schools scoring higher than Rocketship. In reading/language arts, 9 of Nashville's Priority Schools were within $\pm 5\%$ of Rocketship's score with 5 Priority Schools scoring higher than Rocketship.

The committee sincerely hopes that results at Rocketship's first to schools will improve in the year ahead and points to positive growth as the basis for that hope. However, hoping for better results in the future does not meet the standards for further replication of existing schools. Rocketship was already awarded a second school based on the perceived strengths of the model, and further replication is now subject to the clear wording of the standard in the replication application that is stated above. Now that "the operator has existing schools within the district," it is the track record of those schools that determines whether or not the schools can replicate. It is clear that the current achievement of the applicant's school does not "show evidence of student academic success." Rocketship's current track record is not better than the record of the lowest performing schools (Priority Schools) in the district. While we hope for improvement in those schools, we would not recommend replication of our Priority Schools until AFTER their achievement increases. Likewise, we cannot recommend replication of this charter school until AFTER its achievement increases.

Operational Plan and Capacity

Plan Summary – Rocketship Tennessee schools are governed by Rocketship Education’s (RSED) Board of Directors and will benefit from the support of the Rocketship Education Network Support Team (NEST). The governance structure will not change significantly with the addition of a conversion school. Rocketship has a local advisory board comprised of community members and parents of students attending the school.

The Rocketship model includes all grades beginning at the same time, with year 1 of the conversion estimated at 448 students. At capacity, Rocketship #3 will have 560 students.

The leadership team consists of a principal, two assistant principals, and a business operations manager. This is consistent with all Rocketship schools, including their first Nashville school which opened for the 2014-15 school year.

Staffing plans include salaries that average 20% above the local district and Rocketship will provide transportation and food service. Rocketship anticipates a 15% special needs population and the budgetary assumptions reflect these needs.

Organizational charts, start-up plans and job descriptions are included and recruitment and hiring plans are also presented. Rocketship outlines extensive professional development opportunities throughout the year.

Analysis - The Operational Plan meets the standard for approval because their operations model is well thought out and proven successful throughout the country. Additionally, the review team found these outstanding characteristics:

- Rocketship has a robust and well-developed talent pipeline. Applicants explained during the interview that not only do they have access to teachers trained in Rocketship’s methods here in Nashville, but they also have access to talent within the larger organization. Both the application and the interview indicated intentional development of staff as leaders
- The national Rocketship Education network is supportive to local schools
- The local advisory board has input into all aspects of the Nashville schools
- There is a well thought-out accountability system in place, with the use of a network health dashboard that monitors the health across a number of metrics including student achievement, staff satisfaction and staff retention
- Growth plans are viewed through the lens of a process called the Greenlight Process, which assesses Rocketship’s readiness to expand. Metrics include overall network

health, the network's capacity to support growth, political and community support, financial commitments, affordable and safe school facilities, and an identified school leader capable of founding a new school and region

- Well thought out plans exist for choosing areas where school are low-performing and overcrowded.
- Both the written application and interview revealed the organization's commitment to the principals as the instructional leaders at the school. A robust plan for operations provides support for school leaders so they can dedicate their full focus to instructional leadership

Financial Plan and Capacity

Plan Summary – Rocketship’s strategy is to achieve educational outcomes while becoming self-sufficient on the allotted public dollars once its schools are fully operational. This financial requirement allows Rocketship to achieve its impact objectives while also providing a replicable and affordable blueprint for other district or charter schools who seek to adopt its approach.

The replication application indicates a consolidated budget and a fee schedule to schools that support the regional office. These fees are between 3% and 5% and amount to approximately \$100,000 per school at full enrollment.

The network budget presents a positive cash flow and extensive assistance from the national and regional staff for start-up schools. Additionally, contingency plans to meet financial needs if anticipated revenues are not received or are lower than normal are listed.

Analysis - The Financial Plan meets the standard for approval because the applicant presents viable and realistic budgets for both their current network, a five-year growth plan, and for each school. The budget assumptions align with the proposed budget with reasonable, well-supported revenues and cost assumptions, including the amount and sources of all anticipated funds, property, and other resources.

Additionally, Rocketship has already secured \$2.5 million from the Charter School Growth Fund to support replication in Nashville.

Both the budget and assumptions are aligned with the educational and operational goals outlined in the application and the review team has great confidence that Rocketship can successfully replicate their model and provide excellent educational outcomes for students.

Portfolio Review/Performance Record

Summary of Performance - Rocketship Education is in its first year of operation with its Rocketship Nashville Northeast Elementary school. Thus, there is no academic data available to the review teams, and the first school report card concerning Rocketship will not be complete until later in 2015. National data presented indicates Rocketship is in the top 5% of California districts serving low-income students. The average Rocketship student showed 1.5 years' growth in math and 1.3 years' growth in reading according to NWEA MAP assessments.

Analysis - The Portfolio review indicates a school that has a sound academic, operational and financial plan, and the review team is impressed with their very thorough, well-thought out approach to achieving high academic gains with their students.

However, the review team has a few concerns about the organization that prompt a partially meets standard rating. They are:

- Rocketship has a very aggressive growth plan that also includes several schools through the Achievement School District. Although Rocketship itself has a very robust Greenlighting process to assess its growth capacity, the team is concerned that such rapid growth will dilute both the leadership and teacher pipelines.
- The review team did not see financials for the additional ASD schools should Rocketship be approved through them, and thus could not make a determination of how those schools might stretch financial capacity of the organization.
- It is important to note that while the review team is convinced overall that Rocketship has a strong school model, there is considerable concern that the organization does not have a proven record of success in Tennessee. The first Nashville Rocketship school has not yet been in existence a full school year; thus, there is no reliable academic data available to explore accountability and growth. A prudent investment strategy that is in the best interests of the students who will attend the schools is to wait to approve a third or fourth school until after evidence of how well the organization is meeting its robust achievement goals is available. Once approved, it becomes very difficult to stop the extra schools from opening even if the results of the first schools appear substandard, so the best interests of the students, the district, and the community are served by waiting until future years to consider approving this application.

Amended Application Portfolio Analysis

Rocketship showed growth numbers, but their academic achievement percentages placed them in the lower quadrant of schools, which leads the review team to the recommendation that Rocketship is not ready to expand their network at this time. The application does not meet the standard in the replication rubric that states: If operator has existing schools within the district, previous compliance/performance reports show evidence of student academic success, organizational efficiency, and financial sustainability. Nor, did the applicant use the application or resubmission process to make the case that growth ought to be considered to the exclusion of achievement data in meeting this standard. By identifying success not growth, this standard is plainly about achievement data, and there is no question that the achievement data for Rocketship's existing schools in the district does not show evidence of student academic success.

The best interests of the students, district and community would be served by denying this application and allowing Rocketship the time needed to achieve success with the students they already have.