



Executive Director's Findings and Recommendation

Charter School Application for Lester Prep

Pursuant to Tennessee Code Annotated (T.C.A.) § 49-1-614, if, at any time, an Achievement School District (ASD)-authorized charter school meets the priority exit criteria set forth in the state's accountability model, then the school may apply to the LEA or the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission ("Commission") for a new charter agreement with a term not to exceed the term of the initial ASD charter agreement. On November 15, 2021, having earned priority exit status on the state's accountability system, the Governing Board of Lester Prep applied to the Commission for continued authorization under the Commission.

Based on the procedural history, findings of fact, analysis, and Review Committee Report, attached hereto, I believe that approval of the Lester Prep application is in the best interests of the students, local education agency (LEA), or community. Therefore, I recommend that the Commission approve the application for Lester Prep.

STANDARD OF REVIEW

Pursuant to T.C.A. § 49-1-614(k)(4) and Commission Rule 1185-01-03, Commission staff and an independent charter application committee conducted a review of Lester Prep's application. The Commission's charter application scoring rubric "[r]equires all applicants to present a clear and compelling mission, a quality educational program, a demonstration of community support, a solvent and sustainable budget and contingency financial plans, a clear demonstration of the effectiveness of the model for the target student population, effective governance and management structures and systems, founding team members demonstrating diverse and necessary capabilities in all phases of the school's development, and clear evidence of the applicant's capacity to execute its plan successfully."¹ In addition, the Commission is required to hold a public hearing in the district where the charter school is located.²

The Commission has the ability to approve the application, with authorization to continue under the Commission, or deny the application.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

1. On October 15, 2021, the Governing Board of Lester Prep submitted a letter of intent to the Commission expressing its intention to file a charter school application.
2. The Governing Board submitted the charter application in writing to the Commission on November 15, 2021, including submission of all required documents per Commission Rule 1185-01-03.
3. The Commission's review committee independently analyzed and scored the Lester Prep application using the Commission's charter application scoring rubric.

¹ Commission Charter Application Rubric, pg. 2.

² Commission Rule 1185-01-03.

4. On December 13, 2021, the Commission staff held a public hearing for Lester Prep in Memphis, Tennessee. At the public hearing, the Executive Director, sitting as the Commission's Designee, heard presentations from the school and Shelby County Schools as well as took public comment regarding the Lester Prep application.
5. The Commission's review committee conducted a capacity interview with key members of the Lester Prep leadership team on January 12, 2022 via Microsoft Teams.
6. After the capacity interview, the Commission's review committee determined a final consensus rating of the Lester Prep application, which served as the basis for the Review Committee Recommendation Report, attached hereto as **Exhibit A**.

Commission's Review Committee's Evaluation of the Application

Commission staff assembled a diverse review committee of internal and external experts to independently evaluate and score the Lester Prep application. This review committee consisted of the following individuals:

Name	Title
Maggie Lund	Review Committee Member, Deputy Director of Authorizing, Commission
Lawrence Walker	Review Committee Member, Coordinator of Data and Operations, Commission
Nancy Dinunzio	Review Committee Member, External Reviewer
Chad Fletcher	Review Committee Member, External Reviewer
Sarah Prosser	Review Committee Member, External Reviewer

The review committee conducted an initial review and scoring of the Lester Prep application, a capacity interview with the Lester Prep leadership team, and a final evaluation and scoring of the application resulting in a consensus rating for each major section. The review committee's consensus rating of the Lester Prep application was as follows:

Sections	Ratings
Academic Plan Design and Capacity	Meets Standard
Operations Plan and Capacity	Meets Standard
Financial Plan and Capacity	Meets Standard
Performance Record	Meets Standard

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

Public Hearing

Pursuant to Commission Rule 1185-01-03 and Commission policy 2.000, a public hearing chaired by the Executive Director was held on December 13, 2021. This public hearing began with public comments to accommodate parent schedules, and two parents spoke in support of Lester Prep.



Latasha Harris, Principal of Lester Prep, then gave the opening statement describing how Lester Prep has a long history of growing kids through academics and building character. Three years in a row, Lester Prep has achieved a Level 5 TVAAS score. In addition, Lester Prep is a historical staple within the community, and most of the parents of current Lester Prep students attended Lester Prep themselves. The school's goal is to make students good stewards and be a place of hope within the Binghampton community.

Brittany Monda, Assistant Superintendent of Charter Schools for Shelby County Schools, made a statement on behalf of Shelby County Schools stating that Shelby County is here as a partner to charter schools. Shelby County aims to be a transformational district providing opportunities for all students within the county, and they want to help celebrate historical moments. Education is Shelby County Schools' top priority no matter who authorizes their schools, and they will continue to support students long-term.

In response to questions from the Executive Director of the Commission, Drew Sippel, Executive Director of Capstone Education Group, spoke about the importance of enacting a school action plan that encompasses naming problems and creating strategies and solutions to move the needle more towards alignment with the Commission's School Performance Framework. Ms. Harris elaborated stating that, while their students have shown growth, they still have students not on grade level, so the main goals are to increase mastery and number of students on track. Lester Prep plans to lead crucial professional development around planning for teachers and filling any content gaps that may exist. In regard to communication and engagement with families, Lester Prep staff communicate broadly to families using weekly newsletters and parent conferences. They also conduct staff surveys which solicit feedback in which they then turn into opportunities for improvement. Drew Sippel believes that enrollment will remain stable, if authorized by the Commission, as this school has been an integral part of the Binghampton community for a long time. The school team is excited to continue serving the neighborhood, and they will continue with the efforts they have previously made in terms of outreach and service.

Lastly, in a concluding statement, Mr. Sippel and Ms. Harris reiterated that their families have a deep connection to and satisfaction with the school. The school has grown its connection to the community and its students over the last ten years with some of the highest middle school math scores of all charter schools in Memphis. Lester Prep wants to continue serving the Binghampton neighborhood as part of the Commission. Two parents spoke in support of the school, and one written comment was received sharing praise for Lester Prep.

ANALYSIS

Under T.C.A. § 49-1-614, the Commission is charged with determining if a charter school currently operating under the Achievement School District will continue its authorization under the Commission or remain within the Achievement School District. Pursuant to T.C.A. § 49-13-108, the Commission adopted the State Board of Education's quality public charter schools authorizing standards and utilizes these standards to review all charter applications received. In making my recommendation to the Commission, I have considered the Review Committee's Recommendation



Report, the presentations at the public hearing, and the public comments received by Commission staff and conclude as follows:

In consideration of the Review Committee's report and recommendation, I find that they have cited specific examples in the application and referenced information gained at the capacity interview in support of its findings. For the reasons delineated in the report, I agree that the Lester Prep application has met all requirements for approval as outlined in the scoring rubric for the academic, operational, financial, and past performance sections of the application. The academic plan presented by the applicant includes a clear mission and vision for the school and a blueprint that drives high quality instruction. Lester Prep is an institution that is driven by data, and the results of their assessments inform teacher instruction, intervention, and ultimately their blueprint which is evaluated each year based on student data. The school has an extended school day allowing for longer class periods and more specialized intervention time. As a result of learning loss from the pandemic, Lester Prep has made critical adjustments to its blueprint to ensure that they are able to continue growth and proficiency in high-stakes subjects such as math and ELA for students at a higher rate than pre-pandemic.

Additionally, the operations plan met the standard as they demonstrated plans to address issues with teacher retention and student attrition as a result of the fluidity of the neighborhood. Lester Prep is knowledgeable about the community it serves and plans to continue to operate as a neighborhood school serving both the Binghampton and Frayser neighborhoods of Memphis. Lester Prep acknowledges the challenges faced with staffing a middle school in comparison to an elementary school and has developed a plan to increase teacher retention. They also plan to stay in their facility until their charter agreement expires in 2024, which at that time, they will work with Shelby County to acquire the building, if possible. Moreover, the financial plan met the standard as Capstone Education Group presented adequate budgets and three-year financial projections, while demonstrating a positive cash flow. Their overall net position is strong, and their budgeting process is conservative in order to ensure all base-level expenses are covered outside of any additional funding or grants they may receive.

Finally, the school's past performance plan also met the standard. Lester Prep has shown a trajectory of student growth earning Level 4 and 5 TVAAS scores for the three consecutive years prior to the pandemic ultimately resulting in earning priority exit status on the state's accountability system. Lester Prep has adjusted their blueprint and created plans to address learning loss as a result of the pandemic, and they are working to grow students in math and ELA at an even higher rate to meet the Commission's performance framework academic standards.

Lester Prep has demonstrated clear, strong, and sustained academic growth while operating in the turnaround setting of the Achievement School District. While the school acknowledges that they still have work to do in order to meet the state's accountability expectations and the Commission's performance standards, I have determined that the school has met the academic and operational achievement to earn an exit from the Achievement School District and to continue the remainder of its charter agreement under the Commission. The Commission holds high expectations for its schools, and this will not change for schools entering this Commission portfolio from the Achievement School



District. The Commission will need to monitor and provide regular oversight, support, and feedback for any school to be successful, and this will be even more important for a school moving from a turnaround school district. Nevertheless, I have determined that based on the performance record of the school and the application materials, it is in the best interest to allow Lester Prep to continue its authorization under the Commission.

CONCLUSION

For these reasons, and for the reasons stated in the Review Committee Report attached hereto as Exhibit A, I do believe that the decision to approve the application for Lester Prep is in the best interests of the students, the LEA, or community. Therefore, I recommend that the Commission approve the application for Lester Prep.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tess Stovall". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Tess Stovall, Executive Director
Tennessee Public Charter School Commission

1/28/22

Date



EXHIBIT A

Charter Application Review Committee Recommendation Report

January 28, 2022

School Name: Lester Prep

Charter Management Organization: Capstone Education Group

Location of School: Memphis, Tennessee

Evaluation Team:

Nancy Dickson
Chad Fletcher
Maggie Lund
Sarah Prosser
Lawrence Walker

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



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Introduction

Pursuant to Tennessee Code Annotated (T.C.A.) § 49-1-614, if, at any time, an Achievement School District (ASD)-authorized charter school meets the priority exit criteria set forth in the state's accountability model, then the school may apply to the LEA or the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission ("Commission") for a new charter agreement with a term not to exceed the term of the initial ASD charter agreement. On November 15, 2021, having earned priority exit status on the state's accountability system, the Governing Board of Lester Prep applied to the Commission for continued authorization of Lester Prep under the Commission. As laid out in Charter Commission Policy 3.000 – Core Authorizing Principles, the Charter Commission is committed to implementing these authorizing standards that are aligned with the core principles of charter school authorizing, including setting high standards for the approval of charter schools in its portfolio.

The Charter Commission's charter application review process is outlined in Commission Rule 1185-01-03, Charter Commission Policy 2.000 – Charter School Appeals, and Charter Commission Policy 2.100 – Application Review. The Charter Commission assembled a charter application review committee comprised of highly qualified internal and external evaluators with relevant and diverse expertise to evaluate each application. The Charter Commission provided training to all review committee members to ensure consistent standards and fair treatment of all applications.

Overview of the Evaluation Process

The Tennessee Public Charter School Commission's charter application review committee developed this recommendation report based on three key stages of review:

1. Evaluation of the Proposal: The review committee independently reviewed the 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, Operations Plan, Financial Plan, and Past Performance.
2. Capacity Interview: Based on the independent and collective review of the application, the review committee conducted a 90-minute interview with members of the governing board and school leadership to address the concerns, weaknesses, and questions identified in the application, and to assess the capacity to execute the application's overall plan.
3. Consensus Judgment: At the conclusion of the review of the application and the capacity interview, the committee submitted a final rubric and developed a consensus regarding a rating for each section of the application.

This recommendation report includes the following information:

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



3. Analysis of each section of the application: An analysis of the 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: school mission and goals; enrollment summary; school development; academic focus and plan; academic performance standards; high school graduation standards (if applicable); assessments; school schedule; special populations and at-risk students; school culture and discipline; marketing, recruitment, and enrollment; and community involvement and parent engagement.
 - b. Operations Plan and Capacity: governance; facilities; personnel/human capital; professional development; insurance; transportation (if applicable); food service; additional operations (if applicable); and waivers.
 - c. Financial Plan and Capacity: budget narrative; budgets; and network financial plan.
 - d. Past Performance: an overview of growth and proficiency data for the last three years.

The Charter Commission’s charter application review committee utilized the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission’s Charter Application Rubric for use by Achievement School District Charter Schools applying to the TPCSC¹, which is used by The Charter Commission when evaluating an application from the Achievement School District. The rubric “[r]equires all applicants to present a clear and compelling mission, a quality educational program, a demonstration of community support, a solvent and sustainable budget and contingency financial plans, a clear demonstration of the effectiveness of the model for the target student population, effective governance and management structures and systems, founding team members demonstrating diverse and necessary capabilities in all phases of the school’s development, and clear evidence of the applicant’s capacity to execute its plan successfully.”

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

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

¹ Charter Application Rubric for Use by Achievement School District Charter Schools applying to Tennessee Public Charter School Commission p. 1



Summary of the Application

School Name: Lester Prep

Charter Management Organization: Capstone Education Group

Location of School: Memphis, Tennessee

Mission:² The mission of Lester Prep is to “Equip all students with the Wisdom and Knowledge necessary to succeed in college and to become leaders in the community.”

Number of Schools Currently in Operation by the Governing Board:

The sponsor has three (3) operating charter schools and one opening under authorization of the Commission in the 2022-2023 school year.

Proposed Enrollment:³

Grade Level	Year 1 2023	Year 2 2024	Year 3 2025	Year 4 2026	Year 5 2026	Full Enroll
6	105	100	100	100	100	100
7	100	100	100	100	100	100
8	95	100	100	100	100	100
Total	300	300	300	300	300	300

Brief Description of the Application:

Lester Prep is a charter school operated by Capstone Education Group (CEG) in Memphis, Tennessee and serves students primarily in the Binghampton neighborhood grades 6th through 8th. Lester Prep has served this neighborhood for the last seven years and is recognized in the community as providing a college preparatory education. Lester Prep primarily serves students who enter the school below grade level with a robust plan, including many stakeholders, to close achievement gaps for all students. Lester Prep’s academic model is based on a blueprint of best practices utilized within the highest performing schools around the country including components of direct instruction, guided practice, scaffolded instruction, and formative assessment. Lester Prep has seen evidence of success with this instructional model through earning overall TVAAS scores of four (4) and five (5) for three consecutive years and earning the school priority exit status on the state’s accountability system.

The governing board is comprised of eight members, offers many different skillsets, and has effectively overseen the school for the last seven years. Lester Prep plans to remain in its current facility upon the completion of their charter agreement in 2025. Lester Prep will work with Shelby County to either enter a lease agreement for the facility or purchase the building upon expiration of the charter agreement term. Lester Prep

² Lester Prep application, pg. 3.

³ Lester Prep application, pg. 16.



is operating in a strong financial position with more than \$8 million in operating reserves⁴. Capstone Education Group operates on a fiscally conservative basis, utilizes contingency planning when preparing budget projections and has sufficient reserves to fund operations.

⁴ Lester Prep Budget. Attachment K

Summary of the Evaluation

The review committee recommends approval of the application for Lester Prep because the applicant meets or exceeds the standards in the academic, operational, financial, and past performance sections of the rubric.

The academic plan presented by the applicant includes a clear mission and vision for the school and a blueprint that drives high quality instruction. Lester Prep is an institution that is driven by data, and the results of their assessments inform teacher instruction, intervention, and ultimately their blueprint which is evaluated each year based on student data. Lester Prep employs a traditional academic model incorporating direct instruction, guided practice, and scaffolded learning. They have an extended school day allowing for longer class periods and more specialized intervention time. Lester Prep assumes that about 20% of their population will qualify for special education services, and they have specialized staff along with a Director of Special Education at Capstone Education Group to support these students. As a result of learning loss from the pandemic, Lester Prep has made critical adjustments to its blueprint to ensure that they are able to continue growth and proficiency in high-stakes subjects such as math and ELA for students at a higher rate than pre-pandemic.

The applicant's operations plan met the standard as they demonstrated plans to address issues with teacher retention and student attrition as a result of the fluidity of the neighborhood. Lester Prep is knowledgeable about the community it serves and plans to continue to operate as a neighborhood school serving both the Binghampton and Frayser neighborhoods of Memphis. Lester Prep acknowledges the challenges faced with staffing a middle school in comparison to an elementary school and has developed a plan to increase teacher retention including expanding recruitment methods and competitive teacher pay. They also plan to stay in their facility until their charter agreement expires in 2024, which at that time, they will work with Shelby County to acquire the building, if possible.

Similarly, the financial plan met the standard as Capstone Education Group presented adequate budgets and three-year financial projections, while demonstrating a positive cash flow. Their overall net position is strong, and their budgeting process is conservative in order to ensure all base-level expenses are covered outside of any additional funding or grants they may receive.

The applicant's past performance plan also met the standard. Lester Prep has shown a trajectory of student growth earning Level 4 and 5 TVAAS scores for the three consecutive years prior to the pandemic ultimately resulting in earning priority exit status on the state's accountability system. Lester Prep has adjusted their blueprint and created plans to address learning loss as a result of the pandemic, and they are working to grow students in math and ELA at an even higher rate to meet the Commission's performance framework academic standards.

Summary of Section Ratings

In accordance with the Charter Commission's charter application scoring rubric, applications that do not meet or exceed the standard in all sections will be deemed not ready for approval.⁵ The review committee's consensus ratings for each section of the application are as follows:

⁵ Charter Application Rubric for Use by Achievement School District Charter Schools applying to Tennessee Public Charter School Commission p. 1



TENNESSEE
PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL COMMISSION

Sections	Rating
Academic Plan Design and Capacity	Meets Standard
Operations Plan and Capacity	Meets Standard
Financial Plan and Capacity	Meets Standard
Past Performance	Meets Standard

Analysis of the Academic Plan Design

Rating: Meets Standard

Strengths Identified by the Committee:

The applicant's academic plan design meets the standard due to its demonstrated growth and fulfillment of its vision to move every student closer to grade level. Lester Prep demonstrates that they heavily rely on data to drive effective instruction coupled with a blueprint that specifically addresses curriculum, assessment, school culture, and teacher professional development plan. This blueprint is used across the entire school to promote positive school culture and high academic outcomes. Lester Prep also aims to be a school that is engaged with both the Binghampton and Frayser communities they serve.

Lester Prep utilizes proven academic models of direct instruction, guided practice, and scaffolded instruction along with a positive behavior intervention system outlined within its blueprint. This blueprint for instruction is utilized across Capstone Education Group schools and is adapted each year based on emerging needs discovered through data analysis. Data clearly drives instruction at Lester Prep through Tennessee State Standards-aligned quarterly Benchmark testing, quarterly MAP assessments, and formative assessments conducted on a weekly basis. Lester Prep focuses on ELA and Math as priority areas for growth and achievement and offers additional intervention time, through the use of "Learning Lab", for students to garner extra assistance as needed. Lester Prep also offers science, social studies, and enrichment courses such as physical education, arts, and computer sciences. Lester Prep has an extended school day, offering students at least 70-minute blocks of instruction per day. Learning loss as a result of the pandemic is being actively addressed through additional after school tutoring opportunities and Saturday school. Teachers and staff share a common goal that students must make two years of growth to make up for pandemic learning loss. The school leaders of Lester Prep demonstrated commitment to the students and have analyzed the data to know exactly where they are, so they can enact careful plans to ensure they get where they need to be in terms of both growth and achievement. In fact, when asked about student data broadly during the capacity interview, the principal of Lester Prep was able to easily give exact data given the complex and readily available data dashboard kept informing their academic plan.

One of the pillars of the Lester Prep blueprint is Purposeful Planning for teachers. Through data analysis done by Capstone Education Group and Lester Prep leadership, it was revealed that an increased number of students needed remediation of material. Upon consulting the blueprint, it was determined that teachers needed more ongoing training on a strong first-teach to students, proactively identifying misconceptions. Therefore, the blueprint was revised, and teachers received ongoing professional development, coaching, and training to ensure that students could access the material the first time. This was an example provided by the applicant to demonstrate how student data drives adjustments to the blueprint. As a result of the pandemic, Capstone Education Group also adjusted its positive behavior intervention system by incorporating more social-emotional learning to help students operate within the high expectations of Lester Prep. Student data is not only utilized to drive instructional shifts, but also to determine what, if any, modifications need to be made at the staff and teacher level to ensure high-quality academic instruction and a positive school culture.

Lester Prep assumes about 20% of its students will qualify as students with disabilities. Lester Prep has four certified special education teachers along with two special education assistants to serve this population in tandem with the Capstone Education Group's Director of Special Education. Lester Prep utilizes a "Child Study Team" that aims to evaluate and identify students as needing services and provide targeted support. The



application provides a detailed breakdown of role expectations when it comes to special populations to ensure compliance with all legal requirements.

Analysis of the Operations Plan

Rating: Meets Standard

Strengths Identified by the Committee:

The applicant's operations plan meets the standard due to its goals for teacher retention and community engagement. The applicant also has an effective board composition with capacity to oversee the school. Lester Prep plans to continue to occupy their current facility until their charter agreement terms expire in 2024. They will work with Shelby County to obtain the school at that time and have contingency plans if a viable agreement is not reached.

The applicant is knowledgeable about the community it serves, acknowledging the nuance of the fluidity and mobility of the Binghampton neighborhood regarding student attrition and enrollment. Cornerstone Prep Denver, a Capstone Education Group elementary school in the Frayser neighborhood, feeds into Lester Prep. Students are bussed from the Frayser neighborhood across the city to the Binghampton neighborhood for school. Lester Prep cites that, despite the challenges this community faces in terms of gentrification and movement, it continues to operate as a neighborhood school and collaborates with many community partners. Capstone Education Group plans to inform families of the shift in enrollment procedures if authorized by the Commission through the traditional ways they communicate with families along with hosting a meeting to address questions. When asked about their planned lottery process, Drew Sippel, the Executive Director of Capstone Education Group simply mentioned that they would implement a lottery plan consistent with the policy provided in the application. While little information was included regarding broader recruitment strategies to increase enrollment within the Binghampton neighborhood outside of the families they serve, it is clear that Lester Prep is dedicated to the communities they serve and will continue to provide positive outcomes for students.

Mr. Sippel mentioned that Lester Prep has encountered teacher retention challenges in the past due to some of the teacher preparation programs they have historically used to fulfill staffing needs such as Teach for America and Memphis Teacher Residency. While those programs provide high quality candidates to fill crucial positions, teachers in such programs tend to not stay for longer periods of time. During the capacity interview, the Principal of Lester Prep explained some of the actions their team is taking to increase teacher retention such as competitive teacher salaries, participation in job fairs to help with recruiting, and outreach to teachers who may leave other schools to consider Lester Prep. Leaders mentioned that it is more challenging to staff middle school than it is with elementary school due to subject specialization and licensure needs, so they are continuously looking to improve their strategies for staffing and retention at Lester Prep.

Lester Prep plans to remain in their current facility until 2024 when the terms of their charter agreement expire. Lester Prep intends to work with Shelby County to acquire the facility, and if they are unable to do so in a cost-effective fashion, the application states they have begun contingency planning to relocate to another facility, if needed. Capstone Education Group has a board comprising of eight individuals that have experience in education, finance, and operations. This board has effectively overseen the organization encompassing three (soon to be four) schools as demonstrated by continued educational and operational success of the schools operated by the network. While the board has demonstrated its capacity and ability to operate schools effectively, there were not any board members present for the capacity interview or the public hearing. While this raised questions for the review committee regarding the board's involvement in this authorization process and day-to-day operations of the school, the review committee still evaluated the section as meeting standard.

Analysis of the Financial Plan

Rating: Meets Standard

Strengths Identified by the Committee:

The applicant's financial plan meets the standard because the budget and projections are complete, with minimal errors and the documentation provided demonstrates a strong overall financial position. Lester Prep provided conservative estimations within their three-year projections and reflected positive cash flow.

During the capacity interview, the Executive Director, Drew Sippel, walked the review committee through the budgeting process Capstone Education Group utilizes when forecasting and developing operating budgets. This process was relatively broad but included determining what enrollment would be and how much BEP funding would be received for each school site. Network leadership then determines appropriate staffing, as that is the largest expense. They then employ a zero-based budget approach and work with the remaining funds to determine what additional supports and expenses are feasible based on the remaining allocation. It was mentioned that if current data determined that additional curricula or support was needed beyond annual revenue totals, the Executive Director would go to the board to discuss alternative ways to finance the necessary instructional expenses. The review committee inquired as to why the budget reflected less budgeted funds toward teacher salaries for the 22-23 school year. The Executive Director answered that at the time they were unsure if they would receive ESSER III funds to cover those positions, so they reflected conservatively what they would cover without the ESSER III funds. This raised questions within the review committee as to what would happen to those teacher positions if ESSER III funds were not allocated as forecasted within the budget. However, Capstone Education Group budgeted and forecasted conservatively through this process by not including any potential grant funds in the budgets to ensure financial success of the organization outside of additional funds.

The review committee also received clarity surrounding the charter management organization (CMO) fee allocated each year from the school sites to Capstone Education Group. This CMO fee is 10% of revenue per the school site. This CMO fee directly funds the director-level positions for Capstone Education Group which support teachers and leaders at the school site, such as the Director of Special Education and Director of Curriculum and Academics. Finally, the issue of missing transportation funds for the 22-23 school year was addressed as an oversight error within the budget, and the network demonstrated that it has the funds available to cover these expenses once added back in. Lester Prep will continue providing transportation to students in the same way they have been in the past, and if they determine there is significant need within a new cluster of students, they will cover the cost of a bus to provide transportation to students in the new cluster.

Analysis of Past Performance

Rating: Meets Standard

Strengths Identified by the Committee:

Lester Prep acknowledges and is familiar with the differences in academic standards within the performance framework if authorized by the Commission and has adjusted their blueprint to ensure they are continuously improving to meet the standards. Lester Prep has worked to continuously grow their students toward proficiency at a rate of one and a half years per year to ensure they are able to learn at or above grade level. Lester Prep earned a TVAAS level 4 or 5 in all accountability subjects for three full years prior to the pandemic, earning them priority exit status on the state's accountability system. In the 2018-19 school year, Lester Prep had the highest proficiency rate in math on TNReady than any other Achievement School District School. The trajectory of growth and achievement prior to the pandemic was strong, and Lester Prep acknowledges that they have unfortunately lost some momentum in this trajectory due to learning loss during the pandemic.

Lester Prep has adjusted their blueprint to reflect new growth and achievement goals as a result of potentially being authorized by the Commission. Their new blueprint reflects the Commission's framework, and they are aware of their current data and the growth they need to make to be successful under the Commission. To address the learning loss due to the pandemic, Lester Prep has adjusted their plan to aim for two full years of growth for students. They have also analyzed intervention data to shift teacher training to reflect a stronger first teach. They are incorporating Saturday school, after school tutoring, and more targeted intervention for additional opportunities for students to grow. Lester Prep is data-driven and has put in place ambitious goals to not only improve student performance post-pandemic, but also to meet the Commission's School Performance Framework standards.



Evaluation Team

Nancy Dickson - Nancy DiNunzio Dickson is currently the Program Director for the Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program, a Fulbright exchange program for educational leaders from around the globe at Vanderbilt's Peabody College. Nancy also teaches in the college's Department of Leadership, Policy and Organizations (LPO). She has also served as the director of the Abu Dhabi Leadership Induction Program as well as the program manager for the Tennessee/Shanghai Leadership Collaborative at Peabody. Prior to working at Vanderbilt, she was the Director of Operations and a founding team member of LEAD Academy, a public charter school in Nashville. While teaching 4th grade in Washington, D.C. public schools, Nancy collaborated with National Geographic, Meridian International, and George Washington University to provide citywide professional development and teacher preparation programming. As an active member in the community, Nancy has served as the board chair of Nashville International Center of Empowerment (NICE) and All About Women as well as the co-chair for Alignment Nashville's Parent Engagement Team. She holds a Doctorate of Educational Leadership and a Master of Public Policy degree from Vanderbilt University, and a Bachelor of Art degree in Elementary Education from Penn State University.

Chad Fletcher - Chad J. Fletcher is the Federal Programs Director for Bedford County Schools. Additionally, he serves as the Safe Schools and District Testing Coordinator. Fletcher began his career as a High School teacher in the Metro-Nashville/Davidson County School System before serving as an Elementary and Middle School Administrator in Murfreesboro City, Knox County, and Manchester City Schools. Additionally, Fletcher currently serves as a member of the DOE's Community of Practitioners for Federal Programs and was a member of the Tennessee Department of Education's Personalized Learning Task Force from 2015-16.

Maggie Lund - Maggie Lund is currently the Deputy Director of Authorizing at the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission. Additionally, she serves as an adjunct professor in the Lipscomb College of Education Master's Program, teaching Planning, Instruction, and Assessment. Prior to her role at the Charter Commission, Maggie served as the Director of Family Engagement at STEM Prep Academy where she led all community engagement efforts for two schools along with enrollment, school culture, and operations pieces. Maggie holds a BA in Business Administration and Marketing from Loyola University New Orleans, a Doctor of Education degree, and a Master of Education degree with a specialization in English Language Learning from Lipscomb University. Her dissertation research focused on Restorative Justice Practices and school culture. Most recently, her research article, *Mindsets Matter for Equitable Discipline* was published in the Middle School Journal. Maggie is a teacher at heart and has a passion for ensuring the most vulnerable populations in Nashville receive a high-quality education.

Sarah Prosser - Sarah Prosser worked as an attorney for FedEx Express for 32 years, retiring May 2019. Her main focus area was regulatory both domestic U.S. and international. She traveled extensively for FedEx including international locations. Sarah served on several industry association boards and committees during her tenure at FedEx and spoke frequently at conferences. Sarah has also served as a Board member for the Wolf River Conservancy, is an Elder at Idlewild Presbyterian Church and is a consultant for Give Back Memphis. She is married to Niel Prosser, an attorney in Memphis, and has 2 grown children, Jennifer Karnes a veterinarian in Memphis and Nathan Prosser who lives in New Orleans and works in commercial real estate.



Lawrence Walker - Lawrence Walker serves as the Coordinator of Data and Operations for the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission. He holds a B.S. in Business Administration from Alcorn State University (Lorman, MS) and an MBA from Union University (Germantown, TN). In addition to a professional background in insurance and financial services, Lawrence is a former High School Instructor and School-based Operations Leader who specialized in daily operations, assessments, data, and student information system management. As a proud native of Memphis, TN and successful product of Memphis City Schools, he takes pride in working with the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission, both as a Staff Member and as a Review Committee Member. It is his goal to provide outstanding educational experiences to students in Tennessee.