



TO: Tennessee Public Charter School Commission

FROM: Tess Stovall, Executive Director

DATE: January 24, 2025

SUBJECT: Madison Classical Academy Petition to Delay One Academic Year

Background

Madison Classical Academy ("MCA"), formerly known as American Classical Academy Jackson-Madison ("ACAJM"), operated by the governing board, American Classical Education Tennessee ("ACE-TN"), was approved by the Commission in the fall of 2023 to open in the 2024-25 school year. Following the approval, ACE-TN entered into a charter agreement with the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission ("Commission") on January 26, 2024. The agreement allowed the governing board to establish and operate MCA in Jackson, Tennessee serving kindergarten through twelfth grade with a maximum enrollment of 690 students. In addition to Madison Classical Academy, ACE-TN also received approval in 2023 to open American Classical Academy Rutherford ("ACAR") under Rutherford County Schools for a 2024-25 school year opening.

After receiving the approvals to open Madison Classical Academy and American Classical Academy Rutherford, ACE-TN commenced work on the opening of two charter schools in Tennessee. Shortly after the initial approvals, the governing board determined that the most effective course of action was to prioritize the opening of its Rutherford campus in school year 2024-25, followed by the opening of the Madison campus in school year 2025-26. Therefore, MCA exercised the option allowed under Tennessee Code Annotated ("T.C.A.") § 49-13-110 to delay opening by one year, setting the opening for the school to the 2025-26 school year.¹

American Classical Academy Rutherford opened in August 2024, but the governing board noted implementation challenges that they faced while opening the school. This included facility renovation timelines and student information system implementation. Based on the lessons learned from American Classical Academy Rutherford, ACE-TN decided to request an additional one-year delay in the opening of MCA. The board believes this delay will provide the school with the necessary time to achieve the milestones and benchmarks required for a successful opening. The board has identified several key activities that need to be completed before the school can open, such as recruiting and developing a head of school, identifying and acquiring a facility, and generating community support. To assist with these efforts, ACE-TN has contracted with the ACE Foundation to provide school incubation and facility development services.

The ACE Foundation will lead or facilitate most of the key activities in the planning year, such as:

- Recruiting board members
- Identifying and acquiring a facility
- Building community support
- Hiring a school leader

The ACE Foundation has experience and capacity to support the opening of the MCA campus in line with the requested opening timeline of the 2026-27 school year. This experience will be invaluable to the success of MCA and

¹ See T.C.A. § 49-13-110(b).

expanding the capacity of ACE-TN. In accordance with T.C.A. 49-13-110(b), schools may delay opening for one academic year, but any additional delays require approval from the authorizer. Commission staff independently reviewed the proposed plan for delay, materials submitted by the school, the prepared timeline submitted by the school and held numerous calls with ACE-TN. The analysis below is based on these items.

Analysis

The proposed request to delay the opening of MCA to the fall of 2026 demonstrates the governing board's commitment to opening successfully within the Jackson-Madison community. This will allow the operator to avoid some of the challenges faced during the opening of their first campus within Rutherford County. Through their own reflection, the governing board has recognized the need for increased skills and capacity during the pre-opening process and has contracted with the ACE Foundation to directly lead the pre-opening process. Through the following pre-opening plan and timeline, the governing board believes it can open MCA successfully, serving the community and students as intended.

The request demonstrates a commitment to ensuring a successful launch and providing a high-quality classical education to students. By deferring the opening, MCA gains additional time to refine its operational strategies based on the experiences of its other network school, ACAR. This includes strengthening community engagement initiatives, solidifying school leadership recruitment and development, and ensuring a robust facility plan is in place. Furthermore, the delay allows MCA to focus on attracting and retaining a diverse student body representative of the East Jackson community. By investing more time in student recruitment and enrollment strategies, MCA can ensure it meets its enrollment targets and builds a strong foundation for long-term sustainability.

The timeline for key deliverables presented by ACE-TN as part of the formal request to delay reflects an understanding of the key deliverables necessary to demonstrate readiness to open. Additionally, the operator has identified the responsible party with whom Commission staff will meet regularly to hold the school and its governing board accountable for the deliverables specified within the timeline below.

Deliverable	Date	Responsible Party
Recruit two additional board members	January - March 2025	ACE Tennessee
Refine school's mission and vision	January - March 2025	ACE Tennessee
Develop policies to account for two non-geographically adjacent schools	January - March 2025	ACE Tennessee
Host board retreat and build out board committee structure	January - March 2025	ACE Tennessee
Identify and acquire facility	April - October 2025	ACE Foundation
Conduct feasibility study on potential sites	April - October 2025	ACE Foundation
Negotiate lease or purchase agreement	April - October 2025	ACE Foundation
Build community engagement and awareness	Ongoing from April 2025	ACE Foundation
Hire school leader	April - July 2025	ACE Foundation
Develop community support	Ongoing from July 2025	School Leader
Recruit and enroll students	Ongoing from October 2025	School Leader
Prepare facility	January - August 2026	ACE Foundation
Recruit and train staff	January - August 2026	School Leader
Implement curriculum	May - August 2026	School Leader
Orient community	May - August 2026	School Leader
Open school	May - August 2026	School Leader



Recommendation

Commission staff's review of MCA's request to delay opening until the fall of 2026 found a sufficient plan and timeline for meeting the key metrics necessary to demonstrate preparedness to open. The request also identifies the responsible parties and deliverables, enabling staff to hold ACE-TN accountable through the Commission's robust pre-opening process, policies, and protocols. ACE-TN has taken the necessary steps to increase its capacity by contracting with the ACE Foundation, which has the experience and understanding of key deliverables needed to open a school successfully. This approach prioritizes the essential elements for establishing a school including naming a school leader, securing a suitable facility to accommodate students, and robust community engagement sufficient to ensure enrollment targets are met. Commission staff recommends approval of the request to delay opening to the fall 2026 with the strict understanding that the school will be held accountable for the outlined deliverables. Should the school fail to make adequate progress and meet the benchmarks outlined in the submitted timeline, that corrective action will be pursued in line with Commission Policy. Upon Commission approval, the school will be permitted to open in the 2026-27 school year.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tess Stovall". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tess Stovall, Executive Director
Tennessee Public Charter School Commission

January 24, 2025
Date