



TO: Tennessee Public Charter School Commission

FROM: Tess Stovall, Executive Director

DATE: January 23, 2026

SUBJECT: LEAD Neely's Bend Amendment Petition

Background

LEAD Public Schools, Inc. ("Governing Board") entered into a charter agreement with the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission ("Commission") on April 4, 2023, to establish and operate LEAD Neely's Bend ("LNB") in the Hunter's Lane neighborhood of Madison in Nashville, TN. This transition followed the school's successful exit from the Achievement School District due to its sustained academic performance and priority exit status. Following a comprehensive renewal process, the Commission granted a new ten-year charter agreement on January 24, 2025, which became effective for the 2025–26 school year. The school currently serves approximately 220 students in grades 5–8, with a maximum enrollment threshold of 300 students. LNB is now petitioning to amend its charter agreement to phase out the fifth-grade level and expand to a grades 6–12 model, while simultaneously increasing its enrollment cap to 525 students to accommodate the additional high school grades.

Pursuant to T.C.A. § 49-13-110(d), the governing board of a public charter school may petition the authorizer to amend the charter agreement. Under Commission Rules 1185-01-01-.04(1)(c)2. and 3., a public charter school may request for the addition or removal of a grade level or levels as well as changes in student enrollment, both of which are identified as material modifications to the charter agreement. The Commission is responsible for reviewing and scoring the amendment application in accordance with the state's scoring rubric, within sixty calendar days of the due date.¹ On October 1, 2025, the Commission's Executive Director, as its designee, and the LNB Governing Board came to a mutual agreement to extend the date for ruling on the amendment petition to the Commission's meeting scheduled for January 23, 2026.

The proposed amendment is designed to address a lack of high-quality secondary education options within the Madison community and the Hunter's Lane cluster of Nashville. By transitioning to a grades 6–12 configuration, LNB aims to provide its students with a seamless, college-preparatory pathway that avoids the academic and social disruption typically associated

¹ Tenn. Comp. R. & Regs. 1185-01-01-.04(1)(h).

with transitioning to local high schools that have historically underperformed. If approved, the expansion will begin in the 2026–27 school year with ninety ninth-grade seats and will scale annually until the high school is fully built out by the 2029–30 school year. The amendment application proposes leveraging the school's existing 107,762-square-foot facility to accommodate this expanded enrollment and new grade levels. Spanning 30.85 acres, the campus offers ample capacity to house the high school within the dedicated west wing, effectively separating it from middle school operations.

Commission staff independently reviewed the amendment petition, attachments, budgets, and contingency plan submitted by LEAD Neely's Bend. In accordance with Commission Policy 3.900, following the filing of the amendment petition, Commission staff and LNB engaged in supplemental discussions to further clarify the school's plan for supporting students transitioning into the expanded high school grades, the targeted recruitment and marketing strategies used to stabilize enrollment in the Madison area, the long term facility plan, and the Governing Board's contingency planning to ensure fiscal solvency. The analysis below is based on materials submitted by the school and the supplemental responses to Commission staff that were provided by school representatives.

Analysis

The Commission strives to be a first-in-class authorizer, and we desire to support the charter schools in our portfolio to best set them up for success. Recommendations for approval or denial of each amendment requested in an amendment application will be based on the materials submitted as well as the authorizer's due diligence in accordance with Commission Policy 3.900.

The amendment petition for LEAD Neely's Bend demonstrates intentional pre-planning and preparation in all critical areas including academics, operations, and finance. The proposed grades 6–12 model aligns with the school's mission to foster a community of belonging where students and educators grow and achieve excellence together. By phasing out fifth grade to align with the Metro Nashville Public Schools ("MNPS") "ReImaginED" grade reconfigurations, LNB will concentrate its academic programming on a continuous secondary pathway. The academic plan is supported by LNB's remarkable academic trajectory, maintaining a Level 5 TVAAS rating for five consecutive years (2020-21 through 2024-25) and significantly increasing math success rates to an estimated 25.4% in SY2024-25. The Governing Board has outlined a plan to replicate the success of its existing high schools, LEAD Southeast ("LSE") and LEAD Academy High School ("LAHS"), both of which have outperformed local zoned options like Hunter's Lane High School in graduation rates and TVAAS growth. The academic plan is further

strengthened using the network's Student Needs Analysis Protocol ("SNAP"), which provides an internal early warning system to support students transitioning into high school academics.

The operations and facility plans outlined within the amendment petition are robust, utilizing the school's existing 107,762-square-foot facility at 1251 Neely's Bend Road. The facility plan is thoughtful in its use of the "West Wing" to provide physical and cultural separation between middle and high school students, while allowing shared access to high-value assets like the campus gymnasium and athletic fields. Operationally, LNB has established an adaptive staffing model and a distributive leadership structure that includes an Executive Principal and tier-specific assistant principals. Recruitment efforts are supported by a clear community demand, with evidence demonstrating that current eighth-grade families prefer to matriculate into the proposed LNB high school. This internal demand is complemented by external growth in local feeders like Neely's Bend Elementary and Amqui Elementary, which have seen enrollment increases of 61% and 35% respectively. Additionally, the school's commitment to teacher development through its "Employee Value Proposition" and a 1:6 instructional coaching ratio ensures that the expansion will be staffed by high-quality educators aligned with the LEAD mission.

Lastly, LNB has established a clear financial plan that enables the school to expand enrollment and grade levels without negatively impacting its financial position. The school has a history of operational stability and currently meets staff licensure and compliance requirements. The financial projections indicate fiscal solvency based on TISA per-pupil funding, with start-up costs for the 2026-27 high school launch offset by philanthropic support and network resources. The Governing Board has secured long-term facility stability through a ten-year lease with MNPS through 2035, with the network committed to offsetting up to one-third of the rent. Even with the addition of high school grades, the school's break-even threshold of 250 students provides a realistic contingency plan.

The state's amendment petition scoring rubric lays out the characteristics of a strong amendment petition, and it is on these characteristics that this recommendation is based.

1. Alignment of proposed amendment with the school's mission and goals.

The mission of LEAD Public Schools is to foster a community of belonging where students, families, and educators are empowered to "grow and achieve excellence together."² LNB's specific goal is to ensure that all students leave on grade level, prepared for life, and ready to advocate for themselves and their community. The proposed amendment to phase out fifth grade and expand LNB's configuration to grades 6-12, increasing maximum enrollment to 525 students, directly supports this mission by extending the strong academic and social-emotional

² LEAD Neely's Bend Amendment Application, pg. 7

foundations built in middle school through graduation. This ensures a continuous, high-quality, college-preparatory pathway for LNB students, preventing the academic and social disruption typically associated with transitioning to lower-performing high schools. The expansion will enable cohorts of 85 students in middle school grades and establish a high school, beginning with ninety seats in 2026, scaling annually until the high school is fully built out by the 2029-30 school year.

The removal of the fifth grade is strategic and aligns with the MNPS "ReImaginED" initiative, which reconfigured elementary grades to include fifth grade. This adjustment allows LNB to streamline its resources and focus entirely on the secondary continuum. The high school curriculum, featuring rigorous core academics, College Preparatory Seminars, and the "Crew" advisory system, mirrors the successful programming at LEAD's existing high schools, ensuring that this expansion replicates a proven model. The zoned high school, Hunter's Lane, has significantly lower graduation rates and State Report Card ratings compared to LEAD high schools, which consistently maintain graduation rates exceeding 90%. LEAD's capacity for successful expansion is further evidenced by its network's track record of matriculation. At LSE, for example, 91% of eligible rising ninth-grade students successfully transitioned from the middle to the high school program. This expansion directly addresses the lack of high-quality secondary options in the Madison area, providing families with a consistent academic environment they can access through graduation.

2. Academic results provide compelling support for the proposed amendment.

LNB opened in the 2015-16 school year and has demonstrated a trajectory of consistent growth since 2017. The school's historical academic performance and longitudinal growth data provide compelling support for the proposed amendment, demonstrating LNB's capacity for sustained academic performance and its ability to move the needle for students who enter behind grade level. LNB has maintained a Level 5 TVAAS rating for academic growth for five consecutive years (2020-21 through 2024-25). Currently, the school boasts overall proficiency rates of 17% in English language arts and 26.5% in math. While work continues to increase absolute proficiency, this level of achievement and growth indicates that LNB is driving academic progress at a faster rate than neighboring schools in the Madison community. Since joining the Commission portfolio in the 2023-24 school year, LNB has met standards on the Commission's academic and operational performance frameworks.

The expansion of LNB to serve grades 9-12 is further supported by analyzing comparative data across the LEAD network and local zoned options. Data from SY2023-24 and SY2024-25 highlights a significant performance gap between the LEAD model and existing local options. For example, LSE achieved a Level 5 TVAAS rating and a "B" letter grade, while LAHS maintained a Level 5 TVAAS rating for its lowest 25% of students. In contrast, Hunter's Lane High School, the

primary high school serving the Madison area, earned a "D" letter grade and struggled with a 79.4% graduation rate in 2025, compared to LSE's 95.2%. Furthermore, LNB's proficiency growth in math (increasing from 11% to 25.4% estimated in SY2024-25) significantly outpaces Hunter's Lane, which reported math success rates below 5% in previous years. This comparative analysis indicates that the LEAD network has the proven capacity to provide a significantly higher quality high school option for students in the Madison area than current zoned alternatives.

During its first two years within the Commission's portfolio, LNB has established itself as a strong and responsive partner. The operator has successfully adjusted its academic plan and delivery to meet the standards set forth by the Commission, remains compliant with all applicable laws, and is highly responsive to authorizer requests. The implementation of SNAP and the refinement of vertical alignment with existing LEAD high schools provide the Commission with confidence in LNB's ability to successfully expand to high school and offer a high-quality, college-preparatory option for families in Madison.

3. Realistic and detailed budget that explains the financial impact of the proposed amendment and clear evidence that the financial outlook of the school supports the costs associated with the proposed amendment.

LNB has provided a multi-year financial plan that demonstrates the expansion is sustainable and fiscally responsible. Because the school already operates out of a 107,762-square-foot facility that it leases from MNPS, the capital requirements for expansion are minimal compared to a new-start school. The projected budgets show a positive net position through the full build-out of the high school, with revenues primarily derived from TISA per-pupil funding. Start-up costs for technology, instructional materials, and initial staffing will be offset by philanthropic commitments and the reallocation of resources previously dedicated to the fifth-grade cohort.

The school's financial history supports this outlook, as LNB has consistently met all financial reporting requirements and maintained a healthy cash position. In the event that enrollment does not meet the targeted projections, LNB has identified a break-even threshold of approximately 250 students, which allows the school to maintain the integrity of its academic model while remaining solvent. Additionally, the Governing Board has negotiated a long-term lease with MNPS through 2035, with the network committed to offsetting up to one-third of the rent to help lower the school's effective facilities cost. This fiscal stability ensures that LNB can focus its resources on student outcomes rather than facility or debt management.

4. Thoughtful and realistic facility plans that accommodate the proposed amendment.

The amendment petition outlines a thoughtful and realistic facility plan that leverages the current LNB site at 1251 Neely's Bend Road to accommodate the proposed growth. The facility is

in excellent condition and includes 107,762 square feet on a 30.85-acre campus. With a projected maturation enrollment of 525 students, the facility provides approximately 205 square feet per student, which exceeds educational industry standards and ensures ample room for high-quality instructional delivery. One of the highlighted aspects of the plan is the ability to separate the middle and high school populations within the existing building. The Governing Board has designated the West Wing, a three-story section with independent stairwell and elevator access, as the high school instructional space, providing the necessary physical and cultural separation required for a grades 6–12 model.

While instructional spaces are distinct, the high school program will benefit from shared access to the campus' existing spaces, including a full-sized gymnasium, a library, a cafeteria, and a football field. Transportation and nutrition services currently in place are already scaled to support growth with LNB operating as its own School Food Authority with a fully functioning kitchen capable of managing the increased volume. Furthermore, the Governing Board has negotiated and secured a ten-year lease with MNPS through June 30, 2035, ensuring long-term site control. This facility plan establishes a stable and secure environment that fully accommodates the operational and programmatic needs of an expanding secondary model.

5. Detailed implementation plan with a realistic timeline that addresses the operational impact of the proposed amendment.

LNB has provided a comprehensive implementation plan that ensures operational readiness for a high school launch in the 2026-27 school year. Beginning in school year 2026-27, the school will expand year over year until reaching full enrollment, with the staffing model adapting to meet student needs, compliance requirements, and expanding enrollment thresholds. Key implementation milestones include the recruitment of the founding high school instructional team, the procurement of high-school-specific curricula vetted via internal protocols, and the finalization of the grades 6-12 vertical alignment blueprint. The school will utilize a distributive leadership model where the principal oversees operations from a systems level, supported by separate assistant principals of instruction beginning in the 2026-27 school year and assistant principals of students beginning in the 2027-28 school year.

To drive enrollment stability, LNB's implementation plan features a multi-tiered recruitment and marketing strategy designed to capture both internal matriculation and external interest. The school intends to leverage high school eligible students from local feeders, including Neely's Bend Elementary, Amqui Elementary, Madison Middle, and Goodlettsville Middle, all of which serve as traditional feeders to the zoned high school of Hunter's Lane. Operational efforts include robust phone-banking, community outreach, and neighborhood canvassing, which have already been initiated to build the 2026-27 cohort. Additionally, the school has identified new geographic areas for student recruitment and adjusted compensation

for Family Engagement staff to better reflect the urgency of hiring and enrollment at the LNB campus. These targeted activities, combined with a commitment to backfilling seats throughout the school year, provide a realistic framework for achieving the enrollment targets necessary for fiscal solvency.

The timeline for expansion is intentionally phased to ensure quality, established on a realistic operational runway that mitigates scaling risks. LNB demonstrates a commitment to teacher development to ensure instructional quality, including dedicated instructional coaches for each teacher, performance-based compensation, and a robust leadership development pipeline. Additionally, the school will provide internal transfer opportunities for existing LEAD high school teachers to serve as founding members of the LNB high school. The Commission recognizes the importance of ensuring schools are fully staffed and compliant with all licensure requirements. During the first performance monitoring period for the 2025-26 school year, LNB was found to be fully staffed and up to date on all staff licenses. The operator's proactive awareness of licensure requirements and its ability to meet standards over two years of operation further support the likelihood of continued operational success and stability throughout this expansion.

6. Clear evidence of support for the proposed amendment from parents, staff, and community partners.

Throughout the petition process, LNB has demonstrated evidence of demand from all major stakeholders. Direct family outreach and internal interest forms revealed a commitment to the grades 6–12 model, with families identifying the proposed high school as their preferred matriculation choice. Parents emphasized a desire for their children to remain in a setting where they are known, seen, and supported. This sentiment is echoed by the LEAD Parent Advocacy Council, which represents parents across the network and has formally demonstrated support within the amendment petition for the Madison expansion. Outreach efforts have also targeted community partners, resulting in letters of support from local organizations like Global Outreach Developments International and advocacy managers from the Nashville Charter Collaborative, all citing LNB's record of performance as a primary reason for their endorsement.

The staffing plan further reflects this internal support and demonstrates a high capacity for implementation. LNB will utilize a distributive leadership model, appointing an executive principal to oversee the full grades 6–12 continuum, supported by tier-specific assistant principals and instructional managers. To ensure stability during the transition, the school leverages LEAD's "Employee Value Proposition," which focuses on intensive development through a 1:6 instructional coaching ratio and competitive performance-based compensation. Staff retention strategies are grounded in talent calibration and internal leadership development, ensuring that founding high school teachers are deeply aligned with the LNB



mission. This unified support from staff, combined with clear community demand, underscored by a 61% growth in enrollment at Neely's Bend Elementary and 35% at Amqui Elementary since 2019, provides compelling evidence that LNB is well-positioned to serve as a high-quality anchor for families in the Madison neighborhood.

Recommendation

Throughout the review of LEAD Neely's Bend's amendment application, Commission staff focused on the characteristics of a strong response as defined by the state's rubric. LNB has demonstrated a decade of academic growth, transforming from a priority school into a high-performing TVAAS Level 5 institution with a proven capacity for operational excellence. The Governing Board has presented a realistic and thoughtful plan to phase out the fifth grade and expand into a grades 6–12 model that replicates the verified success of its existing high schools. Based on the school's sustained growth, fiscal stability, and the confirmed need for quality secondary seats in the Madison community, Commission staff recommends approval of the amendment petition for LEAD Neely's Bend.

If approved, the Commission will permit LNB to increase enrollment annually through the expansion of one grade level per year starting in the 2026-27 school year until reaching a fully built-out model serving grades 6 through 12. Additionally, the school will increase enrollment year-over-year to a total maximum enrollment of 525 students. It is important to note that an amended charter agreement will reflect these changes, applicable to the current active agreement set to expire on June 30, 2035.

Upon Commission approval of the amendment petition and the amended charter agreement, LNB will be authorized to provide a continuous, high-quality college-preparatory pathway for students in the Madison area through the twelfth grade.

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

January 23, 2026

Date