



TENNESSEE

PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL COMMISSION

**NEW START
APPLICATION PROCESS
AND PUBLIC CHAPTER
275**

JANUARY 23, 2026

LEGISLATIVE REFRESHER

KEY IMPACTS OF PUBLIC CHAPTER 275



STREAMLINING

- Applications and scoring rubrics are now created by the State Board of Education in consultation with the Commission.
- All letters of intent are filed with the Commission. We are responsible for posting LOIs on our [website](#) for public access.
- LEAs must notify the Commission of the receipt of applications, all application decisions, and file a copy of their resolutions.



DIRECT APPLICATION PATHWAY

- Higher Education
 - Cannot authorize, only sponsor a charter school
 - Can apply directly to the Commission or local LEA
 - Follows existing new start application process and timeline
- Three denials overturned - Not Applicable during the 2026 Cycle
 - If the Commission overturns three new start decisions by an LEA in a three-consecutive-year period, then sponsors may apply directly for a five-year period
 - Only applies to applications within the geographic bounds of that LEA
 - Not retrospective; timeline begins July 1, 2025



REPLICATION PATHWAY

- A dedicated pathway, application, and rubric for replicating proven high-quality models.
 - This is intended to replicate schools with the same academic focus.
 - Available to sponsors with one school open for 1+ years.
 - Must apply to open in the geographic LEA they currently operate in.
 - Replicating schools can apply to the local LEA or directly to the Commission.
 - The Commission has specific rulemaking authority related to the replication pathway.



STATEWIDE LETTER OF INTENT RECAP

Authorizer	New Start Application	Replication Application	Opportunity Charter School
Dyer County Schools	1	0	0
Hamilton County Schools	1	0	0
Jackson-Madison County School System	5	0	0
Knox County Schools	1	0	0
Memphis-Shelby County Schools	7	0	5
Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools	7	0	0
Rutherford County Schools	1	0	0
Tennessee Public Charter School Commission	0	1	0
Total Statewide	23	1	5



**Recap of the 29 Letters filed for the upcoming cycle as of January 2026.*

OVERVIEW OF COMMISSION'S PROCESS



APPLICATION PROCESS OVERVIEW

- Direct application to the Commission became possible under specific circumstances beginning in the 2025-26 cycle.
- T.C.A. § 49-13-108 defines the mandatory timeline for processing new start applications.
- All authorizers use the same State Board application and scoring rubrics.
- Staff has conducted training for potential applicants and created specific FAQs for direct authorization.



PRINCIPLES OF QUALITY AUTHORIZER

- In line with State Board Policy 6.111, a quality authorizer:
 - Grants charters only to applicants demonstrating high capacity for success.
 - Conducts rigorous due diligence by evaluating written proposals and conducts substantive interview with the applicant.
 - Compiles highly competent teams of internal and external evaluators with an understanding of the essential principals of charter school autonomy and accountability to conduct a review of the application.



STANDARD OF REVIEW CRITERIA

- Using the state's rubric, key criteria include:
 - Clear and compelling mission
 - Quality educational program
 - Demonstrated community support
 - Solvent and sustainable budget
 - Qualified founding team and leadership
 - Effectiveness for target student population
 - Effective governance and management
 - Capacity to execute the plan
- Applications must meet or exceed the standards in the State Board of Education's scoring rubric to be recommended for approval.



SUBMITTING AN INITIAL APPLICATION

- Initial applications are due by February 1 of the year preceding opening.
- Required materials:
 - Application narrative
 - Required attachments
 - Applicable addenda
 - Operating budget template
- Staff is responsible for confirming receipt and incomplete notifications.



REVIEW COMMITTEE

- Comprised of internal and external experts with diverse backgrounds (academics, operations, finance, legal, etc.).
- Conducts a capacity interview with school leaders and governing board.
- Develops a consensus rating for each application section.
- Drafts a recommendation report, which is included within the Executive Director's Recommendation.

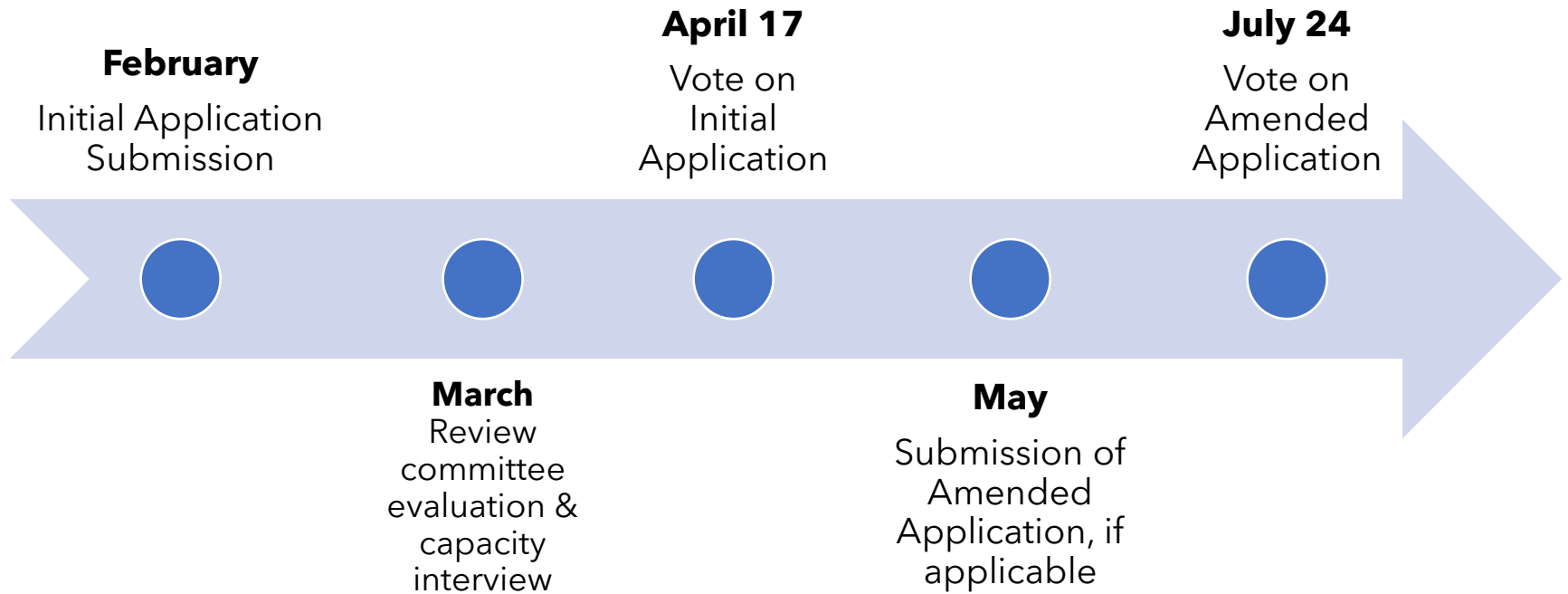


PUBLIC HEARING

- A public hearing for proposed schools will occur within their respective districts.
- During hearing, sponsors present information and demonstrate community support for the proposed school.
- The Executive Director will pose questions based on staff's initial review.
- Public comment allows for community members to voice support or opposition.
- Hearing dates and times will be shared with Commissioners interested in attending.
- All hearing dates, times, and attendance details are available on the Commission's website once confirmed.



UPCOMING MILESTONES



PREPARING FOR THE APRIL COMMISSION MEETING

- The Commission will take action on any application received in February at our next meeting scheduled for April 17, 2026.
- Prior to the meeting, you will receive all application materials and a recording of the capacity interview and public hearing.
- As you review, start with the Executive Director's recommendation which summarizes the material and information gleaned through the application review process.
- This will also provide an overview of the public hearing and the resources used to determine whether the application is recommended for approval or denial.
- The review committee report will focus on the evaluation of the application against the state's scoring rubric and incorporates findings from the capacity interview.



GUIDING QUESTIONS DURING REVIEW

- In your review, focus on:
 - Does the school have a developed, quality academic program?
 - Can the school serve all students?
 - Is the school likely to meet enrollment projections?
 - Does the school have an effective governance structure?
 - Are the proposed governing board members capable of strong oversight?
 - Can the school recruit staff to support the program?
 - Are the revenue projections confirmed and reasonable?
 - Does the school/network's performance merit expansion?
 - What is the preparedness of the operator to open successfully and on-time?



APPLICATION DENIAL & AMENDMENT PROCESS

Notification of Denial

- The Commission must provide objective reasons for any initial denial.
- This feedback ensures transparency and identifies specific areas for improvement.

The Amendment Process, if necessary

- Sponsors have thirty calendar days from receipt of denial to submit an amended application.
- Applicants must address all identified deficiencies using tracked changes (or a similar method) to show resolutions.
- This phase does not require a capacity interview or public hearing.

Final Determination

- The Commission will take action on amended applications at the July 2026 meeting.
- The Commission's decision on an amended application is final and not subject to appeal.





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