



Save Every Child

Transforming Urban America through Education and Policy Reform

December 3, 2021

Tennessee Public Charter School Commission Office

Although Smithson Craighead Academy appreciates our authorizer's decision to include charter elementary schools in MNPS's ReimaginED plan to serve 5th grade, we are disappointed at the Board's decision to not allow for the expansion of maximum enrollment (e.g., 250 to 360 students) needed to serve our current students as fifth graders. We are appealing this decision before the State Commission because granting us 5th grade without additional seat capacity is contrary to the best interest of the school community, the larger Madison community, and families across Nashville who seek high quality education opportunities for their children.

Per our current charter, SCA's maximum enrollment is 250 students and we currently have 238 k-4 grade students enrolled. With the addition of fifth grade in SY2022-23, we will only have space for an incoming cohort of 12 kindergarten students. This will impact our **school community** in numerous ways in SY22-23 and beyond:

- **Limit kindergarten enrollment and impact current families.** Kindergarteners are the heartbeat of our school. This year, we quickly realized that we had a kindergarten cohort (53 students in three classrooms) with many challenges, including several children with extensive developmental and learning needs and many other children who had not attended pre-K or any school/childcare programming due to the pandemic. Our leadership team was immediately able to pivot, recognize where we were at, and begin staffing accordingly. We hired two additional paraprofessionals to support our kindergarten cohort. We have seen tremendous growth in these high need students, and they are fully integrated into our kindergarten community. That's what makes SCA special. We meet the individual needs of our students, as well as their families. If we provide 5th grade in SY22-23, our enrollment would be 238 students--*without kindergarten*, which would leave 12 available charter seats for K for the 22-23SY. This would not be enough seats for Project Reflect rising Pre-K students and/or siblings for existing students. Families will be forced to send their younger children to other schools. Not all students currently enrolled in our Pre-K program (Project Reflect) will be able to attend SCA. Additionally, we would be forced to shift our amazing master kindergarten teachers to other grades.

OR

- **Limit our ability to serve our current students in 5th grade.** As MNPS, our authorizer, has stated, 5th grade students are better served in their elementary schools. SCA stakeholders (e.g., students, families, staff, Board members) firmly agree that this is what is best for all MNPS students. Our families have collectively spoken and rallied around this issue. Please deeply consider their +70 letters of support. Moms, dads, and grandparents have given hundreds of hours of their time to attend school board public comment on November 9th, and then the Board vote on November 23rd. They have met with six board members via zoom calls to plead their case. They will be at the appeals hearing. These are families that are deeply committed to supporting SCA because they believe that SCA is the right school for their children.

Project Reflect Inc. | 730 Neely's Bend Rd | Madison, TN 37115 | 615.228.9886

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Our families' feel their voices were not heard by the MNPS Board. There were some Board members who said they would absolutely not vote for an amendment to increase charter school seats, despite what is best for SCA families, students, and future cohorts of students, especially SY22-23 kindergarten students.

Secondly, this decision by the MNPS Board is contrary to the best interests of the **Entire Madison Community**. Smithson Craighead Academy, with very little recruitment beyond word-of-mouth among our families and community partners, has shown solid enrollment at the lower grade levels year over year, and in order to continue serving our existing families we must grow our upper grades to meet our current cohort.

As the demographics of Madison have shifted, so has our school community. 48% of our students are Hispanic, and we have a growing EL community, primarily through our partnership with Casa de Dios, a large church in Madison serving many immigrant Spanish-speaking families. We are excited at the collective movements of families in North Nashville, Madison, and others zoned for priority schools who demand accountability and systemic change within the educational system in Nashville. To our knowledge, we are one of the few schools in the state to increase reading proficiency during the pandemic. This year, we are doubling down on intensive math instruction. As in 2018 when we were designated a Reward School, our school community wants to show tremendous student growth, not only through test scores, but also through our student's behavior, confidence, and feelings of connectedness to their school community. As noted in the application, our academic performance has exceeded schools in our surrounding cluster:

School	Reading			Math		
	2018	2019	2021	2018	2019	2021
Amqui	8.8%	10.4%	6%	9.3%	15.2%	<5%
Bellshire	8.8%	7.3%	5.2%	8.8%	15.3%	<5%
Neely's Bend	18%	15.7%	17.3%	17.3%	20.9%	8%
Stratton	18.4%	14.8%	8.8%	31.8%	22.5%	<5%
<b>Smithson Craighead Academy</b>	<b>21.1%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>23.5%</b>	<b>21.1%</b>	<b>25.6%</b>	<b>10.3%</b>

We feel confident that our academic model is working for all of our students- including our ELL population, exceptional education and gifted learners, and families from diverse backgrounds.

Additionally, our ability to serve our families, first after the devastating March tornado, and then throughout the pandemic, has proved an asset for the entire Madison community. By providing wraparound support to families through Project Reflect, the sponsoring organization for SCA, we gave much needed support to SCA families in crisis, as well as for the larger Davidson county area.

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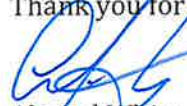
- Open longer/ sooner to serve students (number of instructional in-person weeks vs. other area schools)
- Robust summer programming
- Year-round breakfast and lunch using our food vendor
- Rapid COVID testing for our families, as well as the Madison community
- Diaper pantry (community wide)
- Second Harvest Food Pantry (community wide)
- Uniform and coat distribution for families
- Fresh fruits and vegetables home weekly
- Housing assistance
- Reliable bus transportation for 100+ students
- PREP Program: Free before and after school care for # of students

As documented in our application, in Spring of 2021, we reached out to our authorizer's Charter School Office to inquire about adding 5th grade without expanding our charter cap. We were advised to apply at the appropriate time as outlined by Tennessee Code Annotated (T.C.A.) § 49-13-110(d) (e.g., the current application cycle). We also collaborated with the MNPS Charter School Office who recommended that we consider our amendment over the course of the remaining charter term (present to SY2028-29).

The enrollment chart provided in application provides a projection over the next 6 years. We anticipate between 300-310 students in SY22-23, given our current enrollment (which is larger in k-2 than in grades 3-4). We are applying to amend our maximum enrollment from 250 to 360 students, for an addition of 110 total seats. Given our enrollment growth over the past five years, and an uptick of enrollment despite obstacles of the pandemic, we project that we will need these additional seats to continue to serve our current families and their siblings. Currently, our kindergarten, 1st and 2nd grade classes are 52, 48, and 59 students respectively. We anticipate consistent enrollment at the earlier grades, especially given Project Reflect's 3-star Pre-K feeder program. As our current 2nd grade cohort rises, we plan to hire an additional classroom teacher each year (e.g., additional 3rd grade teacher in 22-23, 4th grade teacher in 23-24). While we do not anticipate needing all of these seats next year, we want to ensure that we are planning across the term of the charter term ending in 2029.

We were disappointed that we followed the proper channels and are now facing this appeal; however, we look forward to continuing to partner with MNPS to share best practices to support all students in Nashville. We thank you for your consideration of our amendment to expand maximum enrollment in order to serve our current students and their families.

Thank you for your time and consideration during this review.



Ahmed White, Executive Director



Olivia Lahann, Charter Appeal Coordinator