



Binghampton Community School Appeal Statement

Introduction

Memphis-Shelby County School (MSCS) Board's denial of Binghampton Community School (BCS) was contrary to the best interest of the Binghampton community, students, and families and as the school's sponsor, Maslow Development Inc. (Maslow) is requesting that the decision be overturned. BCS would fill a vital need in the Binghampton neighborhood, providing holistic education and family support through an innovative school model. Denying BCS would be denying local families a unique educational opportunity: a school that focuses on the whole family while providing an international education that mirrors the diversity of the community. BCS would be part of a ground-breaking community working in concert with affordable housing, healthcare, and workforce providers to ensure that students and families have their basic needs met alongside a high-quality education. BCS is intentionally designed to be the anchor of Maslow's Lighthouse Project, a unique ecosystem designed to give families the resources they need to thrive.

First, given the diverse nature of the Binghampton neighborhood where a myriad of cultures are represented, BCS plans to provide the only open enrollment elementary IB program in Memphis, giving all students access to an acclaimed and internationally recognized educational program. Second, the school plans to address community challenges head-on by offering whole-family resources through innovative programs to address food insecurity, mental health, and physical education. Through extensive community engagement, BCS has tailored its program to best serve the needs of Binghampton residents, which is why it is in the best interest of the Binghampton community that the school denial be overturned.

Need for Quality Seats

The Binghampton neighborhood sits in the geographic center of Memphis, has a rich past and deep community roots, and contains strong community organizations. Yet, it has been consistently underserved in many ways. BCS is an opportunity to bring together a proud community and to serve a neighborhood that has often been neglected. First, the area has an extraordinarily high poverty rate and child poverty rate. Redlining practices dating back to the early 20th century have suppressed wealth in Binghampton, laying the groundwork for the majority-minority neighborhood to be underserved decades later. Second, because of its central location, Binghampton has been the recipient of recent investments along Broad Avenue and Sam Cooper Boulevard, creating promising opportunities while also threatening displacement for long-time residents. Third, Binghampton is an internationally diverse community, with a substantial refugee population. Given this context, Binghampton needs a high-quality neighborhood school to provide a world-class education to students, establishing a new foundation of resources to turn back historic practices that have marginalized the community for decades.



While there currently exists a small variety of school options, Binghampton has a clear need for a higher-quality education option. Current schools in Binghampton are producing ELA TCAP scores of less than 15% from year-to-year, which indicates a need for high-quality school seats for children in the area. Moreover, according to Memphis-Shelby County School's Fall 2021 educational priorities document, the Central City East District, where BCS would reside, has a need for 7,258 quality elementary school seats. The schools in the area are not providing the level of education that Binghampton students deserve. In part, this is due to many students and families needing additional support to succeed academically, as students living in poverty often struggle academically because of factors outside of their control. BCS seeks to help fill this education gap.

Global Education

BCS plans to offer an International Baccalaureate (IB) education, the only open enrollment school in Shelby County offering the IB Primary Years Program (PYP). BCS believes that this world-renowned program should not be limited to private or optional schools. While studies have shown that the PYP program is particularly effective for economically disadvantaged students, only two other public elementary schools in Shelby County offer this program¹. Moreover, both programs are optional schools over 7 miles away. BCS believes that all students deserve a global education to prepare them for the 21st century.

The IB programs are a holistic framework for schools to adopt in order to focus on student academics, social-emotional needs, and physical well-being while simultaneously teaching students how to be productive and positive participants in their own lives and beyond. The IB program provides extensive professional development to support teachers to ensure that they can leverage the PYP transdisciplinary model to focus on the whole child and to address students' well-being, which fits seamlessly into the mission and vision of BCS. BCS also plans to ensure that students have a strong literacy foundation, emphasizing it across all disciplines. Denying BCS would remove the option of receiving a top-tier IB elementary education for many local students, limiting parental choice for a high-quality school.

Unique and Innovative Programs

BCS seeks to tackle the most pressing issues local families face including food insecurity, shelter, and mental health needs. Because of BCS's partnership with Maslow, BCS will be the anchor of the Lighthouse Project, an innovative neighborhood development designed to comprehensively support families. The Lighthouse Project plans to bring together affordable housing, community healthcare, and workforce development opportunities in an effort to create an ecosystem where families can thrive. Maslow and BCS understand that Binghampton families need these supportive services in order for children to perform better in school. Maslow and BCS believe that when all these services work together, they can create an environment that truly uplifts both students and families.

¹ Hemelt, SW. 2015. The impact of the International Baccalaureate's Primary Years Programme on student performance: Evidence from Michigan and North Carolina. Bethesda, MD, USA. International Baccalaureate Organization



BCS also plans to directly support the whole family including, but not limited to, using a food distribution partner, providing counseling services for all students—exceeding MSCS’s current counselor capacity, and emphasizing the importance of exercise during the school day as well as opening the facility on Saturdays for community health and fitness classes. Through all of these programs, BCS will take care to build the services in a way that includes English language learners and students with special needs, an essential step in supporting the diverse Binghampton neighborhood. Given this unique and holistic education model as well as the sponsor’s fundraising track record, Maslow is confident in supporting the school leader to raise a sustainable yearly operating budget that supports this model.

Track Record and Community Support

BCS’s sponsor has a track record of educational success. Maslow’s co-founder helped to establish Gestalt Community Schools, including Power Center Academy. Power Center Academy was featured in the Wall Street Journal, honored by the White House and the U.S. Department of Education, and continues to be one of the highest performing public schools in Tennessee. Maslow’s leadership understands first-hand how to run a successful charter school in Memphis.

Maslow and BCS have undertaken several community engagement initiatives in the previous years to ensure that the project and school fit the neighborhood and fill a need. Although MSCS’s reviewers of the BCS charter application mentioned a lack of community support, BCS has been overwhelmed with community enthusiasm. Nearly 100 community members expressed support via petition, and local businesses shared verbal and written support for the charter application. In June 2022, 70 more community members filled out an interest form about the school at a BCS community summer cook-out. Maslow would not be pursuing the development of BCS without community support, and even the most recent conversations with community members have affirmed the need for a high-quality school in the area.

Conclusion

Binghampton Community School represents an opportunity to invest in a new type of education model: a school and community built from the ground up to uplift and support families. BCS and Maslow are working together to create a school that is globally focused but rooted in its community. BCS is committed to providing families the resources they need for their students to succeed, extending its influence from outside the schoolhouse. Through extensive community engagement, BCS has tailored its approach to the neighborhood, recognizing the unique needs of the students and community. A denial of BCS would deny many students and families the opportunity for a holistic, high-quality education in a neighborhood with limited school options.