



## **American Classical Academy Maury - Commission Appeal Statement**

Pursuant to Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-13-105 and 49-13-108, we, the board members of American Classical Education (ACE), ask the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission (Commission) to overturn the decision by the Maury County Board of Education (Board) to deny the application of American Classical Academy Maury (ACAM) and approve the charter.

In addition, we ask the Commission to act in a way that encourages quality authorizing practices. The State Board of Education, through its review of authorizers, has the authority to take action against districts falling short of quality authorizing standards established in the law. But the Commission can send a clear message through its decisions. The Commission's review should reflect the district's failure to meet its obligation to conduct a review sufficient to determine what is in the best interests of the students and community the district is established to serve.

ACAM's application includes detailed plans and demonstrates the capacity needed to meet the standards required in each area for approval: academic, operational, and financial. And approving the application is in the best interests of the students, district, *and* the community.

### ACAM will meet the needs of Maury County.

ACAM's educational philosophy and academic program will help Maury County meet the needs of all its students and make the school an attractive place for teachers to work. ACAM would provide a high-quality Classical Education option for students and families throughout Maury County. The school is intended to help Maury County provide options to meet its growing population of school aged children. The county's overall population growth has exceeded the physical capacity of the current public schools at a time when the district is short of teachers.

### ACAM can deliver a quality academic program that serves all students.

ACAM's proposed academic plan is robust and supports the growth of all students. It is built on research-based curricular materials. The academic plan relies on an instructional model that has been used by and is constantly being updated based on learnings from many schools across the country. ACAM has an effective governance structure and an operational plan to effectively recruit students and staff. ACE's board, which would oversee the school, includes members from across Tennessee, including one Maury County resident. These board members have the breadth and depth of expertise needed for strong school governance. ACAM's revenue projections are reasonable and bolstered by strong contingency plans.

The Board's actions during the application process make its decisions illegitimate.

The review process in Maury County was plagued with unethical behavior and did not include a legitimate review of the application on the merits. Thus, any denial and the stated reasons for denial should be ignored by the Commission in its de novo review of the application.

The reasons published for denying ACAM's initial application were largely plagiarized from reviews published by other Tennessee school districts. In copying and pasting reasons for denial, the reviewers demonstrated their predisposition to denial, called into question whether or not they had even read the application, and showed an unwillingness to pursue what might be in the best interests of students, the community, *and* the school district itself.

The slides presented to the Board served as the written reasons for denial of the initial application. Those slides include verbatim quotes from recommendation reports from other Tennessee school districts.

- The first nine pages of the committee's report are taken verbatim from the report presented to the Clarksville-Montgomery County School System's (CMCSS) presentation.
- The report copied the "Brief Description of the Application" from the recommendation report from Rutherford County Schools (RCS) and failed to change the name of the school from ACAR to ACAM.
- The Board's recommendations included multiple instances where strengths and deficiencies in each area of the application were copied from CMCSS and RCS review materials.
- The copying included inaccuracies that would have been evident from reading ACAM's application. For example, the Maury report stated that there was not sufficient evidence "there will be sufficient transparency and local influence with a statewide board to the degree that parents can have their voices heard." In fact, ACAM's board includes a Maury County resident, parents and grandparents of current and former K-12 students, and individuals with experience as elected officials, volunteers, and leaders in organizations serving K-12 students.

In denying the amended application, the Board ignored the amended application materials.

Following the initial review, the Board disbanded the MCPS review committee and asked ACAM to respond to questions generated by the Board, rather than submit a fully amended application. Per this request, ACAM answered all questions in detail. But, the Board acted without considering the additional information. The Board voted at its July 27, 2023 meeting in response to the questions that formed the Board's reasons for denying the *initial* application. There was no evidence that the Board members considered or even read the responses ACAM submitted.

ACAM provided comprehensive responses to the Board's questions. These are included in ACAM's appeal materials being submitted to the Commission. Some examples are summarized below.

- ACAM's plans for serving students with disabilities were tailored to ACAM's academic program and based on approaches in use by other public charter schools, including one operator specifically praised by the Commission for its program.
- ACAM's application meets the facility requirements by, as stated in the application, "describ[ing] the process for identifying and securing a facility" and "present[ing] a timeline with reasonable assumptions for facility selection, requisition, renovation, . . . inspections, and occupation." The level of detail ACAM provided met or exceeded a facility plan deemed as meeting the standard by the Commission last year.

- ACAM’s approach to student transportation mirrors the approach by another charter operator found to have met the standard by the Commission last year.
- ACAM meets the standard by outlining plans to select third-party providers for services like food services. Actual selections or MOUs are not necessary.
- ACAM requested fewer waivers than most charter schools applicants across Tennessee and every waiver requested by ACAM has been previously requested by other charter applicants.

### Conclusion

There is a clear need for increasing and enhancing the educational opportunities for families and school-aged children in Maury County, Tennessee. The establishment of a classical charter school accessible to all – regardless of wealth, status, or other advantages – would benefit all of Maury County’s families.

There is also a clear need for the Commission not to excuse districts that fail to conduct serious reviews of applications to determine whether they are in the best interests of the students and community the district is established to serve. The Commission’s review of ACAM’s application should not be affected by the limited effort and arguably unethical behavior of the district.

Our model of education is tried and true. It has produced encouraging results wherever it has been applied. It is supported by a growing network of schools, administrators, faculties, and communities. And most importantly, its establishment in Maury County aligns with the worthy purpose of the Commission’s championing of human equality and dignity through the expansion of educational opportunity. Thank you for considering our appeal. We look forward to working with you in the coming months.

Sincerely,

Dolores Gresham, Chair