

Dear Tennessee Public Charter School Commission,

Thank you for taking the time to review our appeal for LEAD Cameron Elementary, a proposed elementary school in the Glencliff cluster. LEAD Cameron Elementary was denied approval by Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) on July 23, 2024.

At LEAD Cameron Elementary, our mission is the same as our network's: To equip every student with the knowledge and skills necessary for success in both college and life. We firmly assert that all students, regardless of their zip code, deserve access to a high-quality education that prepares them for a robust future. While this overarching mission is the same at all of our schools, we are cascading our purpose in ensuring students are prepared for both life and college down to the elementary level with the opening of LEAD Cameron Elementary.

As an elementary school, LEAD Cameron Elementary assumes a pivotal role in shaping the fundamental educational experience of LEAD students. Beyond the establishment of essential foundational skills, our school will be the nurturing ground where LEAD students foster their innate love for learning and exploration. It is here that they begin to form a sense of themselves as learners, embarking on a transformative journey towards fulfilling the overarching LEAD mission of being Ready for College and Ready for Life.

While the MNPS Board voted to deny the application, their report highlighted several strengths including our academic plan, the quality of the elementary team we have assembled, and the overall success and leadership of our organization. In this letter, you will find an explanation for why the denial of the application is not in the best interest of students, the community, and the LEA.

The Impact on Students

Our team has canvassed across the targeted enrollment zone for LEAD Cameron Elementary, and we continue to hear the same thing: Families want better options for their students. There is a strong desire for students to have another elementary school option in this geographic area.

Elementary schools in the Glencliff clusters are underperforming other district and state schools in terms of proficiency results on the 22-23 TNReady Assessment. Last year, not a single elementary school in this cluster scored above the Grades 3-5 district average in ELA and only one of these schools scored above district average in Math. In comparing results to the state Grades 3-5 results, elementary school performance looks even worse, with the vast majority of elementary schools almost 20 percentage points behind the state average.

Incoming students to LEAD Cameron Middle, the majority of which are matriculating from local elementary schools, are typically entering one to three grade levels behind. Fifth graders entering LEAD Cameron are twice as likely to be in the bottom 20th percentile on MAP than expected, with 52% of students scoring in the bottom 20th percentile of performance in NWEA MAP in Reading and

60% in Math. LEAD Cameron Elementary aims to address this challenge by providing a high-quality local choice.

LEAD Cameron Elementary would not only provide another elementary school option to students, it would also allow them the opportunity to have a consistent K-12 experience at LEAD Public Schools. LEAD Cameron Elementary feeds into LEAD Cameron Middle, which leads its neighborhood cluster in student growth and significantly outperforms the other cluster middle schools. During the 2023-24 school year, LEAD Cameron Middle had 57% more students proficient in ELA and 74% more students proficient in math on TCAP¹.

The Impact on the Community

Opening LEAD Cameron Elementary will have a tremendous impact on the community in which it resides. All of our schools have a robust family and community support program, and LEAD Cameron Elementary will have the same support structure, including a full-time dedicated family and community engagement coordinator (FACE). This role is critical in supporting families through our LEAD Serve Others Stations and Family Exchange, two innovative programs our schools use to provide wraparound services tailored specifically to the individual school community.

To get a strong understanding of the needs and desires of this community, our team has spent the last year engaging in conversations with prospective families and other community members. Those conversations have generated a large amount of interest and support for the opening of this school, which only continues to grow. At the time of writing this letter, over 200 families have expressed support for our elementary schools, with over 100 families expressing interest in enrolling their children in a future LEAD elementary school for a K-12 continuum.

The Impact on Metro Nashville Public Schools

The establishment of LEAD Cameron Elementary is in alignment with MNPS' strategic plan. In the MNPS Charter Authorizer Handbook (2022), it states, "MNPS seeks charter school applications to cultivate strong school capacity in order to provide high quality academic instruction for all students. The purpose of MNPS charter schools is to advance the district's vision for excellence and diversity while meeting the needs of a growing city for new school capacity." LEAD Cameron Elementary will provide more K-5 seats as other elementary facilities attempt to accommodate the addition of 5th grade.

LEAD Public Schools has a demonstrated history of running successful charter schools focused on the belief that any student can achieve at high academic levels if given the opportunity to do so. Using the lessons learned in our existing schools, and with strong emphasis on foundational literacy and numeracy skills, LEAD Cameron Elementary School will provide an excellent elementary school option to students and families in central Nashville.

Responding to the Motion to Deny

The MNPS board voted to deny our application because they did not believe it met or exceeded standards on the scoring rubric, and we strongly disagree with this decision. Their reasoning for

¹ Based on 2024 TCAP Results from TNDOE, in comparison to other cluster middle schools.

denial was based on a set of minor issues, some of which were not an appropriate reason to deny the application or accurate. We have listed the reasons for denial below and provided an explanation to address why these were not valid reasons for denial of our application. We are confident that when the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission reviews our application on appeal, the Commission will conclude our application met or exceeded the standards for approval.

- **Successful measurement for English Language Learners:** Our plan is to measure the success of English Learners language acquisition by utilizing the English Language Proficiency Assessment (ELPA), which aligns with the state's annual standard goals, ensuring we have a consistent and state-approved evaluation. We will use our Interim Assessment benchmarks to provide a comprehensive assessment of our English Learners' progress towards the state's grade level standards. Additionally, robust ILPs will be developed for each English learner and academic and English language proficiency growth will be monitored at least quarterly per Tennessee State Board Rule 0520-01-19-.03(6) e. Finally, while this reasoning was used by the MNPS board in denying the application, it should be noted that the review committee rated our application as "Meets Standards" in this area.
- **No significant population growth in the area:** In terms of enrollment, K-5 district enrollment in our primary cluster, Glenclyff, has been stable emerging out of the pandemic. Antioch, our secondary cluster, is experiencing significant increases in K-5 enrollment with a more than 7% increase in K-5 enrollment since the 2019-20 school year. Of particular note is the shift of 5th grade enrollment from local middle schools to local elementary schools. This shift of enrollment is putting particular pressure on elementary capacity throughout this area. Unlike the majority of clusters in Davidson County, Glenclyff has no facilities listed on the most recently publicly released vacant and underutilized property list, indicating that both these clusters both have enough enrollment demand to fully fill the existing school facilities located in the region.
- **Financial plan has a potential net deficit based on the information provided:** MNPS cited concerns that our application did not include capital investments, which could lead to a negative net cash position and potentially create a net deficit for our network. LEAD Public Schools included all capital investments related to furniture and fixtures in the debt service amount, as well as accounting for tech purchases in the tech line item, both of which were clearly outlined in the budget narrative. In addition, we fully addressed our process for contingency planning for any variance in our budget narrative and at no point do we project a deficit at the schools or at our network.

LEAD Public Schools believes with the reasoning above that it is in the best interest of students, the community, and MNPS to open LEAD Cameron Elementary, and that the application meets standards in all areas. We thank you for your consideration in the appeal process.

Sincerely,
LEAD Cameron Elementary Founding Team