

Dear Tennessee Public Charter School Commission,

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

At LEAD Southeast 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 Southeast Elementary.

As an elementary school, LEAD Southeast 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.

Our most recent 23-24 academic results makes us even more confident in our ability to drive results in this community.

The Impact on Students

Our team has canvassed across the targeted enrollment zone for LEAD Southeast 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.

LEAD Southeast 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 Southeast Elementary feeds into LEAD Southeast Middle and LEAD Southeast High, both of

which not only outperformed the district overall, but also for economically disadvantaged students and in proficiency during the 2023-24 school year.

The Impact on the Community

Opening LEAD Southeast 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 Southeast 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 Southeast 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 Southeast Elementary will provide needed capacity in the elementary grades for an area of the city that is experiencing population growth, as well as providing 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 Southeast Elementary School will provide an excellent elementary school option to students and families in southeast 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 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.

- **Track record of proven effectiveness with target population:** LEAD Southeast Elementary will serve a target population that mirrors that of LEAD Southeast Middle and High Schools. These schools consistently outperform MNPS district average in proficiency. With the exception of 2020-21, LEAD Southeast Middle and High School has been a Level 5 school for overall growth every year since assuming the charter in 2012 and was named a Reward School for top academic growth in 2014-15 and 2016-17. This provides significant evidence of a “track record of proven effectiveness with target populations”.
- **Financial plan has a potential net deficit based on the information provided:** 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 Southeast Elementary, and that the application meets standards in all areas. We thank you for your consideration in the appeal process.

Sincerely,
LEAD Southeast Elementary Founding Team