



## Nashville School of Excellence Brief Statement

On July 23, 2024, the Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) Office of Charter Schools voted to deny the Nashville School of Excellence (NSE) application to replicate a middle and high school in the Nolensville Road neighborhood of Nashville. The denial of NSE's charter school application is contrary to the best interests of the students and community for the following reasons:

- NSE's STEM model is more robust than most STEM models currently available to members of the community.
- Community interest indicates strong demand for the school.
- NSE will fill a need in the community for additional high-quality educational options.
- Our network of schools has a track record of academic, college & career readiness, operational, and financial success.

**Robust STEM Programming.** The MNPS review team findings indicate that it is not clear how the STEM education focus of NSE will be a more compelling model than what is already offered in MNPS schools. However, as stated in the application, while there may be MNPS schools that have STEM offerings, the quality of STEM programming at NSE, where, upon approval, we plan to seek TDOE STEM designation, is different than that of many schools that do not have this designation. There are currently only five schools in Nashville with the TDOE STEM designation; only four of these schools are middle schools and none are high schools. We have earned this designation for our Mendenhall campus in Memphis, which serves grades 6-12, and we are in the process of securing this status for our other existing schools. Applying for and earning STEM Designation status is a rigorous and robust process and requires STEM to be fully embedded across the school, namely in the areas of Infrastructure; Curriculum and Instruction; Professional Development; Achievement; and Community and Postsecondary Partnerships as outlined in detail on the TDOE STEM Designation Rubric used by the TDOE. Additionally, three of our schools have earned the ITEEA STEM School of Excellence award, which recognizes schools that have demonstrated a commitment to providing a robust integrative STEM education program. As such, STEM will be infused across our academic program, enriching our core curricular programming that is fully aligned to Tennessee State Standards. Students will have ample opportunities to apply their STEM learning through hands-on opportunities, including projects and science fairs. In addition, all students, including subpopulations of students such as students who receive specialized services, students who are English learners, and/or students who are at-risk and/or struggling, will be required to take a STEM class every year to learn about and be immersed in STEM concepts such as coding. These STEM classes will be aligned to a STEM-based career and technical education (CTE) track that will result in an Industry Certification and/or CTE Completer Status upon graduation. We also plan to have STEM-focused extracurricular activities, such as a robotics club, Science Olympiad, FIRST Lego League, FIRST Tech Challenge, and underwater robotics - and all students will have the opportunity to join. Further, we will implement Math Counts and American Math Competition as extracurricular activities, which will also serve to further reinforce and extend STEM skills and concepts learned during the school day. There is no cost to families for students to attend these STEM activities and competitions. All of this taken together demonstrates that our STEM programming differs from what is currently offered at MNPS schools.

**Demand for the School.** To calculate the demand and interest for the school within the community we have targeted for the proposed school, we have conducted ongoing community outreach efforts, including developing relationships with local organizations and engaging with community members. We have amassed 18 letters of support, including many from organizations and leaders in Nashville, where the school will be located. We have also administered a survey to parents who may be interested in enrolling their children in the school. We first began administering this survey in late 2023. To date, we have received 584 responses. This interest demonstrates our school will be able to



meet our Year 1 enrollment target of 330 students. We plan to continue to administer this survey to learn as much as possible about how to best serve the community and to document demand for the school.

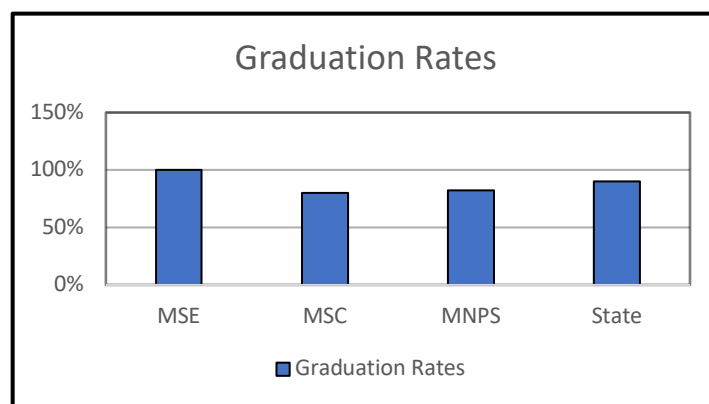
**Need for High-Quality Educational Options.** Currently, there are four MNPS district middle and high schools that operate in the area surrounding the school’s proposed location: Croft Middle Design Center, Glenclyff High School, McMurray Middle School, and Wright Middle School. The performance of these schools indicates the schools are not preparing many students in this community for success in college and careers. More specifically, three of the four schools received a D or an F for their 2022-23 School Letter Grade, as reflected on Tennessee State Report Card Data.<sup>1</sup> All four schools received a D for Achievement, and Glenclyff High School’s graduation rate was only 53.1%, nearly 30 points below the district rate (81.6%) and nearly 40 points below the state’s rate (89.8%). By opening our school in this community, we will provide families with a much-needed, new high-quality educational option for their children.

**Track Record of Academic Success.** Year after year, our schools have maintained a strong track record that demonstrates the success of our educational program across many academic indicators. For example, our schools have graduated nearly 100% of our seniors each year since our first graduating class in 2014. The table below shows our exceptional graduation rates over the past 10 years.

**Network Graduation Rates**

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Graduation Rate	100%	100%	100%	98%	100%	98%	100%	100%	100%	97%	100%

Additionally, our graduation rates have consistently exceeded the rates of Memphis-Shelby County Schools, Metro Nashville Public Schools, and the state, as shown by the chart below.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.tn.gov/education/families/report-card.html>

<sup>2</sup> Based on currently available data from the Tennessee Department of Education. <https://www.tn.gov/education/families/report-card.html>



We provide robust early post-secondary opportunities at our schools. For example, during the 2023–24 school year, students completed 106 Advanced Placement courses and as part of partnerships with Bethel University and University of Memphis, students completed 163 dual enrollment courses.

**College Acceptances and Scholarships.** In addition to our impressive graduation rates, students at our existing schools have earned college acceptances and scholarships each year. For example, in 2024, 100% of the graduating class earned college acceptances and the graduating class of 2024 was awarded over \$41,000 in college scholarships per student.

The MNPS denial indicated that we did not provide strategies to address low achievement proficiencies and ACT scores that underperform the MNPS average. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our schools, like schools across the country, faced significant disruptions to student learning and as a result our students experienced learning loss. However, as stated in our application, since 2021, our schools have demonstrated growth in student achievement, as shown by our improving performance on state ELA and math assessments over the past several years. Additionally, our schools have continued to improve our ACT score average, and this average typically ranks in the top 10% of all Memphis-Shelby County Schools (MSCS) high schools, where our existing schools are located. To ensure that our ACT average score continues to grow, we provide the following supports: pre-ACT practice for all students in grades 9 and 10, ACT preparation classes for students in grade 11, and ACT test preparation for students in grade 12, including mock tests and tutoring. Additionally, we hold “ACT Blitzes” on Saturdays, where students sign up for sessions that target their weakest areas and receive targeted support, all of which will be offered at our Nashville campus.

**Academic Recognition and Awards.** Our schools have been recognized by numerous entities for their academic achievements. Some of these recognitions include:

- Tennessee STEM School Designation: In 2022, our high school in Hickory Hill (Mendenhall campus) earned the Tennessee STEM School Designation in recognition of our outstanding STEM programming.
- ITEEA STEM School of Excellence: in 2023, three of our campuses earned the ITEEA STEM School of Excellence award, which recognizes schools that have demonstrated a commitment to providing a robust integrative STEM education program.
- US News and World Report Rankings: Our schools frequently rank highly on the US News and World Report rankings, which are based on students’ performance on state assessments and academic readiness. For example, in Spring 2022, we were ranked the #5 charter school in Tennessee and #3 among all MSCS high schools.

**Track Record of Operational and Financial Success.** NSE will be a part of the Read Foundation, which has established a long, successful track record in managing its financial resources, consistently achieving budget surpluses each year, maintaining healthy cash reserves, obtaining clean audits, and achieving high scores on its charter authorizer’s annual financial performance framework. NSE will have access to a healthy cash reserve (approximately \$8M as of the submission of its charter application). While the school will pursue partnerships with local and national philanthropists -- as well as apply for the Charter School Planning (CSP) Grant from the TN Department of Education -- to help fund expenditures in the startup year and early years of operations -- it has developed a conservative budget (including conservative facility operational expenditures) that can operate on public revenues. NSE has budgeted up to \$1M from the network’s reserves to fund startup operations in the event the school does not secure private funds or CSP funds.

Taken together, the above reasons, supporting evidence, and data provide a compelling case for the need for the Nashville School of Excellence. Our experienced team is prepared and committed to opening a high-quality school for students and families in Nashville. We appreciate your time and consideration.