

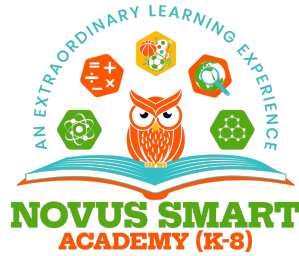
To: Tess Stovall, Executive Director  
Tennessee Public Charter School Commission  
Charter Application Review Committee

Thank you for your time and effort in reviewing the appeal of Rutherford County Schools' denial of Novus SMART Academy (K-8)'s amended charter application. Novus SMART Academy (K-8) is a proposed single-site, public charter school seeking to establish a high-performing charter school option for scholars and families in the La Vergne and Smyrna community of Rutherford County, Tennessee. I believe the denial of our amended charter application is not in the best interests of our scholars, the LEA, or the Rutherford County, Tennessee community.

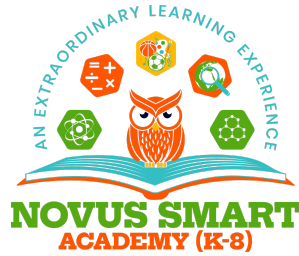
**College and career begin in Kindergarten!** Our mission is to provide all scholars access to rigorous curricula and high-quality academic instruction that fosters a love for learning, embraces innovation and creativity, and encourages personal growth to thrive in their chosen college and career paths, making a positive impact on society. We based our school model on extensive research and community input to set a high standard for academic excellence. With overcrowded schools in Rutherford County and limited access to magnet schools, Novus SMART Academy (K-8) offers an additional option, ensuring all scholars are college ready, career ready, community ready, and character steady. We are committed to serving the best interest of Rutherford County scholars in our growing community. Novus SMART Academy (K-8) achieves this through three key elements: asset-based learning in arts/electives and character education, inquiry-based learning in science and research, and project-based learning in math and technology. Our mission aligns with T.C.A. § 49-13-104, aiming to improve learning in Science, Math, Arts/Electives, Research, and Technology for all scholars and close the achievement gap.

Novus SMART Academy (K-8) submits our appeal based on the following:

1. **The Rutherford County Schools denial of Novus SMART Academy's (K-8) amended charter application was not based on the capacity ratings of the rubric.** Novus SMART Academy's amended charter application received ratings of "Meets or Exceeds Standard" in all three capacity sections with a recommendation for approval from Rutherford County Schools' charter application review committee. Some strengths identified in the amended charter application recommendation report are as follows:
  - a. Academic Capacity



- i. Plans to provide for special populations of students have been strengthened per the mandated stipulations. The application and budget are reflective of the provision to utilize contract service providers to ensure compliance with all support plans and provisions.
    - ii. Service plans for ELL students have been revised to reflect the new ELPA21 mandates, additional staff have been added, and plans are detailed for the monitoring of T1-T4 ELL students.
  - b. Operations Plan and Capacity
    - i. Novus has taken significant steps to address the plan for safety and security at the school. Provisions for a School Resource Officer (SRO) have been added along with an accompanying grant application to fund the position. A safety inspection has been conducted by a contracted service provider with recommendations made for security upgrades that are now included in the plan.
    - ii. The timeline for renovating the proposed facilities has been accelerated to ensure it is ready in time for opening in August 2025. An architect and construction firm have been secured to assist with necessary renovations, as reflected in the amended application.
  - c. Financial Plan and Capacity
    - i. Novus SMART Academy has secured an additional board member with budgeting experience and financial acumen to support the financial plan and capacity of the school.
    - ii. The “New Neighbor Group” has been identified as the source for the indicated \$1M line of credit and has been re-authorized as a Limited Liability Company (LLC) by the State of TN to function in that capacity.
- 2. **The denial was not in the best interest of the community and families based on identified need and community support.** Rutherford County Schools face land shortages and financial constraints, leading to enrollment caps and rezoning. Collaborating with Novus SMART Academy and other charter schools could alleviate overcrowding. With rapid community growth, including an 11% increase in Middle Eastern families in La Vergne alone, there is a need for more school capacity. While some may suggest that there is a potential charter school saturation problem, we see an overcrowded, quality-control problem. Overcrowded classrooms diminish educational quality, highlighting the need for strategic placement of new schools.



Community engagement shaped Novus SMART Academy (K-8)'s design, with input from over 350 stakeholders, 15+ early childhood facilities, 20+ events, 200+ interviews, zoom calls and family surveys, 280+ support petitions, and 75+ letters of support. This feedback informed the school's grade levels, core values, beliefs, and SMART-integrated model with character education and two teachers per classroom.

3. **The reason for denial of the Novus SMART Academy's application was due to its potential negative fiscal impact on the district, not the quality of the application.** We understand that the proof of this impact is on the district. However, we would like to highlight the following:
  - a. Despite the removal of the NewSchools Venture Fund grant, our conservative budget ensures we can meet necessary improvements. We plan to reapply for this grant in the fall and are being considered for the Louis Calder Foundation Seed Funding Opportunity through BES.
  - b. There are also concerns by nature of our organization being a "true" start-up, which should not hold merit on a new start charter application. This implies fear of the unknown since we are not a part of a CMO. Despite being a start-up, Dr. Jeremy Sager, the CEO/Lead Founder, has led a charter school in MNPS improving the TVAAS score of Level I to Level V with Reward School Status in one year. He also has the financial backing of national organizations such as Build. Excel. Sustain. (BES), Charter School Growth Fund (CSGF), and is a recipient of the Tennessee Department of Education's Charter School Programs (CSP) Grant.

In conclusion, Novus SMART Academy (K-8)'s team knows that we have met the standards of the rubric as reported by the Rutherford County Schools' charter application review committee. We genuinely appreciate your thoughtful consideration and eagerly look forward to engaging with you throughout the appeals process.

With gratitude,

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