



Nurses Middle College Nashville Brief Statement

On July 23, 2024, the Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) Board voted to deny the Nurses Middle College Nashville new-start charter application, which proposes to open a high school in the Downtown area of Nashville, TN. The Board's decision to deny our charter application is contrary to the best interests of Nashville students, families, and the larger community because of the clear need and robust demand and support for our school, as well as the founding group's experience and expertise to ensure the effective operation of our school.

Clear Need for Nurses Middle College Nashville. MNPS cites our school's single pathway – nursing – as a key reason for denial, asserting that MNPS academy schools offer multiple pathways, with some also having a healthcare focus (although none focus specifically on nursing). However, this assertion does not consider the dire nursing shortage across the nation, state, and city of Nashville. More specifically, according to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics, there are 2 million open jobs in the U.S. healthcare industry today, and an additional 2 million jobs are predicted to be vacant by 2031. Projections specific to nurses predict that more than 275,000 additional nurses will be needed by 2030, with employment opportunities anticipated to grow at a faster rate (9%) than all other occupations through 2026. Tennessee hospital leaders have identified nursing and allied health workforce shortages as the number one issue currently affecting their hospitals and expect that these shortages will continue to be a challenge in the future. According to a healthcare workforce report commissioned by the Tennessee Hospital Association, overall growth in the Tennessee population will contribute to a growing demand for healthcare services. However, the report also projects a significant gap in the supply of key healthcare providers to meet this growing demand of services such as registered nurses, emergency medical technicians, physician assistants, and respiratory therapists. HCA Healthcare's Tristar division, which includes the city of Nashville, reports a current massive shortage of 1,017 registered nurses and 342 certified nursing assistants/patient care technicians in their own workforce. To this end, our model is anchored in the single pathway of nursing as our mission and model were born out of the urgent need to contribute to a solution to the current nursing shortage that will only continue to worsen if not proactively addressed with innovative solutions.

Further, this reason for denial also does not consider the urgent need to diversify the nursing workforce as it currently overwhelmingly lacks diversity, as the majority of nurses in the US are White. A 2020 study found that while 40% of the US population identify as people of color, only 19.4% registered nurses have minority backgrounds. The disparities in health care and health outcomes between majority and racial/ethnic minority and underserved populations are well documented. Multiple reports and other sources of evidence support the urgent need to reduce and, ultimately, eliminate health disparities. To illustrate, findings from the 2012 Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality's "National Healthcare Disparities Report" showed that health-care quality and access for minority groups and low-income populations continues to lag behind other groups. Further, demographic trends predict a rapid growth in racial/ethnic minority populations by 2060. This projected growth in minority populations, coupled with the growing disparities in health care and health outcomes, underscores the need to recruit and retain a diverse nursing workforce that mirrors the nation's culturally diverse population. Accordingly, our singular nursing pathway offers a proactive solution to both the lack of nurses and lack of diversity in the nursing profession.

To expound, the NursesMC Charter Management Organization (CMO) created our proposed model in 2011 to alleviate the critical nursing shortage and to ensure a diverse nursing and healthcare workforce to improve health equity outcomes. The NursesMC model and mission, which is anchored in research-based best practices to prepare a diverse group of students to become the highly educated professional nursing workforce of the future, is designed to enable students to gain a comprehensive understanding of concepts essential to nursing, achieve competency in foundational nursing skills, complete work-based learning experiences in clinical settings, earn industry credentials, complete college-level dual enrollment courses, and develop college and career readiness skills while in high school, all of which

will spur students to pursue nursing in college and as a career. While MNPS raises questions about alignment to state standards and school day requirements, our focus on equipping students with the skills needed to be successful in nursing college and career works in concert with our core curricula and courses, all of which will be fully aligned to Tennessee State Standards, will allow students to satisfy all graduation requirements, and complies with the criteria around the length of the school day. We will apply for all needed waivers and provide all applicable crosswalks (most of which we have already provided to MNPS) and make any needed adjustments to our programming in alignment with Tennessee regulations. To this end, the NursesMC academic plan encompasses the following key characteristics:

- **Key Characteristic 1 – Nursing College and Career Preparation:** To ensure that students leave us equipped with foundational knowledge and skills related to nursing, ready to navigate the complexities and rigor of college, and primed to succeed in the nursing workforce, our academic plan is anchored in systems, structures, and practices that prepare students specifically to pursue nursing in college and as a career. To this end, we will implement rigorous, Tennessee State Standards-aligned core curricula, teach proprietary nursing and college and career readiness courses that align to Tennessee requirements, offer dual-enrollment courses through postsecondary partnerships, employ specialized staff equipped to carry out our specific model, provide robust postsecondary supports, and implement response to instruction and intervention programming to close gaps.
- **Key Characteristic 2 – Applied Learning:** Working in tandem with all the above Nursing College and Career Preparation programming, we will provide our students with an array of Applied Learning opportunities that will enable them to use the knowledge and skills they learn in the classroom in real-world nursing environments and scenarios. Our Applied Learning programming will provide students with early work-based learning opportunities and career experience through our robust partnerships with local healthcare organizations, hospitals, and clinics, as well as will enable them to earn relevant workforce credentials while in high school.
- **Key Characteristic 3 – Personal Development:** A myriad of research shows the symbiotic relationship between academic performance and indicators related to students' personal development. As such, in addition to preparing students to become the professional nursing workforce of the future through the Nursing College and Career Preparation and Applied Learning programming described above, we will focus on students' personal development to ensure that they acquire the social-emotional competence and soft skills needed to be successful in nursing college and career. To this end, we will implement culturally responsive teaching practices, uphold a set of core values as defined by our Pillars of Nursing, implement an advisory program, and provide students with social-emotional learning opportunities.

Robust Demand and Support for Nurses Middle College Nashville. As outlined above, there is a great need for our school. This profound need has, in turn, garnered great demand, and we have robust documented support for our school. While MNPS indicates that compelling evidence from interested parents was not sufficiently provided, we assert otherwise. Specifically, we have amassed a total of 750 signatures of support from Nashville parents and community members. Additionally, 211 supporters indicated interest in enrolling a child in our school, which well exceeds our Year 1 enrollment target of 125 students. Further, we asked supporters to provide the zip code in which they reside. Of the 750 signatures collected, 679 people also provided their zip code. In all, we collected signatures of support from people who reside in over 30 zip codes, demonstrating widespread support of our school across Nashville.

In addition to marked support from families and community members, we have established robust partnerships with numerous organizations that support our mission and model. Specifically, Bloomberg Philanthropies is serving as a funding partner as our mission and model align to the organization's Healthcare Career Connected Learning Initiative. To this end, the organization has committed to providing philanthropic support, totaling ~\$2.8M for start-up, with an additional ~\$16.9M allocated over the first three years of operation, for a total of ~\$19.7M in committed philanthropic funds. We have also established partnerships with healthcare organizations and postsecondary institutions that will be integral to realizing our mission through implementation of our model. These partnerships include the following:

- **Ascension:** This partnership will allow students to take hospital tours, shadow nurses and other healthcare workers, and complete their work-based learning experience in a hospital setting, as well as allow students to make robust professional connections in the nursing industry that they can leverage in the future for employment.

- **HCA Healthcare:** Through this partnership, we will have access to clinical settings for our students to complete their work-based learning experiences. Additionally, our school will serve as a feeder for this organization, allowing our students to make professional connections in high school that can lead to future employment.
- **National Healthcare Corporation (NHC):** This partnership will provide us with access to high-quality clinical space, specifically, within the four skilled nursing centers NHC operates in the Nashville area. This organization also operates a foundation, and advanced educational funding opportunities will be available for our students to pursue their postsecondary nursing education after graduation.
- **Vanderbilt University Medical Center:** The partnership will provide us with access to nurse mentors and nurse adjunct faculty and enable students to complete dual-enrollment courses, as well as provide our students with access to clinical rotations in addition to other work-based experiences.
- **Belmont University:** This university's postsecondary nursing program is focused on expanding its pipeline of highly prepared, diverse candidates for its program. Our school will serve as a future feeder for the university as our diverse student body will graduate with the foundational knowledge and skills needed to thrive in rigorous nursing programs. The College of Nursing will also provide access to dual-enrollment courses and mentors.
- **Tennessee State University (TSU):** This university is focused on recruiting, retaining, and graduating candidates for its School of Nursing in light of the current critical nursing shortage. TSU will look to us to provide them with a pipeline of candidates who are prepared to meet the rigorous demands of their nursing program. Additionally, this partnership will give us access to TSU adjunct nursing clinical and didactic faculty, allow students to complete dual-enrollment courses, and provide us with simulation and classroom space.

Founding Group's Expertise and Experience. The Board currently consists of six members who possess the relevant educational and healthcare expertise to effectively govern our specialized school. While MNPS asserts that our founding group lacks educational experience in Tennessee, one of our members was the founding Director of Operations of a charter school in Nashville. Another member holds deep expertise in supporting the founding and operation of charter schools in Tennessee. Additionally, another member also founded a charter school but did so in East Palo Alto, CA. Our other three board members bring the specialized nursing experience needed to effectively govern our nursing-focused school. The Board recently hired our Executive Director (ED), Andrea Poynter, Ph.D., who possesses the leadership skills, educational experience, and nursing expertise to effectively lead our school. Our CMO will also ensure that our school successfully opens and then operates effectively. Working with the Board and the ED, CMO leadership will lend support around critical pre-opening tasks, including recruiting building-level certified administrators, and will provide comprehensive training to the school's key leaders to ensure a successful launch. Our CMO currently contracts with two other schools, one of which just opened this past school year (SY 2023-24). The other school has been operation since 2011 and has consistently been in the top performance of the state for college success metrics, and, for the past five years, has been the top school in RI for students earning college credits and workforce credentials. The school's charter has been renewed twice, receiving full-term renewals with no conditions both times. Further, the flagship school has been so successful in improving educational outcomes for Rhode Island students that the Rhode Island Commissioner of Education, Angelica Infante Green, provided Nurses Middle College Nashville with a letter of support that whole heartily endorses our school's mission and model. Taken together, the capacity of the Board, Executive Director, and CMO will ensure that Nurses Middle College Nashville successfully opens and succeeds in preparing a diverse group of students to be the professional nursing workforce of the future.

In sum, the clear need and robust demand for our school, as well as the experience and expertise of our school's founding group, demonstrate that the MNPS Board's vote to deny our new start charter application to open Nurses Middle College Nashville is not in the best interest of the prospective students and families we seek to serve and to the city of Nashville at large. To this end, we thank you for your time and appreciate your consideration when reviewing our application, which we assert outlines a clear and compelling case for our school, as well as satisfies all the criteria outlined in the Tennessee Department of Education's scoring rubric for new start charter applications.