



## **Executive Director's Recommendation**

### **Nurses Middle College Nashville Appeal**

Pursuant to Tennessee Code Annotated ("T.C.A.") § 49-13-108, sponsors proposing to open a new charter school may appeal the denial of its amended application by a local board of education to the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission ("Commission"). On August 1, 2024, the sponsor of Nurses Middle College Nashville ("Nurses" or "sponsor") appealed the denial of its amended application by the Metro Nashville Public Schools ("MNPS") Board of Education to the Commission.

Based on the procedural history, findings of fact, analysis, and Review Committee Recommendation Report, attached hereto, I believe that the decision to deny the Nurses Middle College Nashville amended application was contrary to the best interests of the students, local education agency ("LEA"), or community.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, I recommend that the Commission overturn the decision of MNPS Board of Education to deny the amended application for Nurses Middle College Nashville.

### **STANDARD OF REVIEW**

Pursuant to T.C.A. § 49-13-108 and Commission Policy 2.000, Commission staff and an independent review charter application review committee conducted a de novo, on the record review of Nurses Middle College Nashville's amended application. In accordance with the Tennessee Department of Education's charter application scoring criteria, "[f]or an application to be deemed eligible for approval, the summary ratings for all applicable categories must be 'Meets or Exceeds the Standard'."<sup>2</sup> In addition, the Commission is required to hold a public hearing in the district where the proposed charter school seeks to locate.<sup>3</sup>

In order to overturn the decision of the local board of education, the Commission must find that the application meets or exceeds the metrics outlined in the Tennessee Department of Education's application-scoring rubric and that approval of the amended charter application is in the best interests of the students, local education agency, or community.<sup>4</sup> If the local board of education's decision is overturned, then the Commission can approve the application, and thereby authorize the school, or affirm the local board's decision to deny.

### **PROCEDURAL HISTORY**

1. The sponsor submitted a letter of intent to Metro Nashville Public Schools expressing its intention to file a charter school application.
2. The sponsor submitted its initial application for Nurses Middle College Nashville to MNPS on February 1, 2024.
3. MNPS assembled a review committee to review and score the Nurses initial application.
4. On March 28, 2024, MNPS's Review Committee conducted a capacity interview with representatives of Nurses.

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<sup>1</sup> T.C.A. § 49-13-108.

<sup>2</sup> Tennessee Department of Education's Application to Create a Public Charter School Scoring Criteria, pg. 2.

<sup>3</sup> T.C.A. § 49-13-108.

<sup>4</sup> Id.

5. MNPS's Review Committee reviewed and scored the Nurses initial application indicating the academic, operations, finance, and past performance sections partially met standards.
6. On April 23, 2024, MNPS Board of Education voted to deny the Nurses initial application.
7. The sponsor amended and resubmitted its application for Nurses to MNPS on May 24, 2024.
8. MNPS's Review Committee reviewed and scored the Nurses amended application based on the charter application scoring rubric and rated each section of Nurses' amended application as partially met standards.
9. On July 23, 2024, the MNPS Board of Education voted to deny the amended application of Nurses.
10. The sponsor appealed the denial of the Nurses amended application in writing to the Commission on August 1, 2024, including submission of all required documents per Commission Policy 2.000.
11. The Commission's Review Committee independently analyzed and scored the Nurses amended application using the Tennessee Department of Education's charter school application scoring rubric.
12. The Commission's Review Committee conducted a capacity interview with key members of the Nurses leadership team on September 13, 2024 via Microsoft Teams.
13. On September 16, 2024, the Commission staff held a public hearing at Davy Crockett in Nashville, Tennessee. At the public hearing, the Executive Director, sitting as the Commission's designee, heard presentations from the sponsor and MNPS and took public comment regarding the Nurses amended application.
14. After the capacity interview, the Commission's Review Committee determined a final consensus rating of the Nurses amended application, which served as the basis for the Review Committee Recommendation Report, attached hereto as **Exhibit A**.
15. The Commission staff conducted a full review of the record which includes the initial and amended applications submitted by the sponsor, documentation submitted by MNPS, and the findings of the public hearing and public comment. The Commission's General Counsel conducted a full review and legal analysis of the record.

## **FINDINGS OF FACT**

### **District Denial of Initial Application**

The Review Committee assembled by MNPS to review and score the Nurses initial application consisted of the following individuals:

| <b>Name</b>     | <b>Title</b>   |
|-----------------|--|
| Tieawasa Hodak  | Director of Exceptional Education                    |
| Casey Minshall  | Coordinator of English Learners                      |
| Robert Wallace  | Executive Office of Resource Strategy                |
| Ken Stark       | Executive Director of Operations                     |
| David Williams  | Executive Officer of Teaching and Learning           |
| Sudhir Sinha    | Data Coach of Research Assessment and Evaluation     |
| Ryan Latimer    | Director of Boundary and Planning                    |
| Casey Megow     | Director of Facilities and Planning and Construction |
| Cordarrell Cobb | Partner School Budget Strategy                       |
| Gay Burden      | External Consultant                                  |



The Nurses initial application received the following ratings from the MNPS Review Committee:

| Sections                     | Ratings                  |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Academic Plan and Design     | Partially Meets Standard |
| Operations Plan and Capacity | Partially Meets Standard |
| Financial Plan and Capacity  | Partially Meets Standard |

After the MNPS Review Committee completed its review and scoring of the initial application, its analysis was presented to the MNPS Board of Education on April 23, 2024. The MNPS Board of Education voted to deny the initial application of Nurses.

### **District Denial of Amended Application**

The Review Committee assembled by MNPS to review and score the Nurses amended application consisted of the following individuals:

| Name            | Title  |
|-----------------|--|
| Tieawasa Hodak  | Director of Exceptional Education                    |
| Casey Minshall  | Coordinator of English Learners                      |
| Robert Wallace  | Executive Office of Resource Strategy                |
| Ken Stark       | Executive Director of Operations                     |
| Sudhir Sinha    | Data Coach of Research Assessment and Evaluation     |
| Ryan Latimer    | Director of Boundary and Planning                    |
| Casey Megow     | Director of Facilities and Planning and Construction |
| Cordarrell Cobb | Partner School Budget Strategy                       |
| Gay Burden      | External Consultant                                  |

Upon resubmission, the MNPS Review Committee conducted a review of the amended application, and the amended application received the following ratings from the MNPS Review Committee:

| Sections                     | Ratings                  |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Academic Plan and Design     | Partially Meets Standard |
| Operations Plan and Capacity | Partially Meets Standard |
| Financial Plan and Capacity  | Partially Meets Standard |

After the MNPS Review Committee completed its review and scoring of the amended application, its analysis was presented to the MNPS Board of Education on July 23, 2024. At the July 23, 2024 board meeting, the MNPS Board of Education voted to deny the amended application of Nurses.

### **Commission Review Committee's Evaluation of the Application**

Following the denial of the Nurses amended application and subsequent appeal to the Commission, Commission staff assembled a diverse review committee of internal and external experts to independently evaluate and score the Nurses amended application. This committee consisted of the following individuals:

| Name             | Title             |
|------------------|-------------------|
| Adam Aberman     | External Reviewer |
| Rebecca Ledebuhr | Commission Staff  |
| Maggie Lund      | Commission Staff  |
| Mark Modrcin     | External Reviewer |
| Whitney Noel     | External Reviewer |
| Claire Seguin    | Commission Staff  |

The Commission's Review Committee conducted an initial review and scoring of the Nurses amended application, a capacity interview with the sponsor, and a final evaluation and scoring of the amended application resulting in a consensus rating for each major section. The committee's consensus rating of the Nurses application was as follows:

| Sections                     | Ratings                   |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Academic Plan and Design     | Meets or Exceeds Standard |
| Operations Plan and Capacity | Meets or Exceeds Standard |
| Financial Plan and Capacity  | Meets or Exceeds Standard |

The Review Committee recommends the approval of the amended application for Nurses Middle College Nashville because of the innovative mission and academic plan, demonstrated community support, robust financial position, and proactive facility plan.

The academic plan presented by the applicant meets or exceeds standard outlined in the scoring rubric and aims to integrate rigorous academic instruction with nursing career preparation, benefiting from a proven model from the proposed charter management organization ("CMO") that operates successful schools in Rhode Island and New York. The curriculum aligns with Tennessee state standards while providing opportunities for work-based learning, dual enrollment, and industry credentials focused on the nursing profession. The assessment and special populations plans are data-driven and ensure students will receive appropriate services. Additionally, the enrollment strategy focuses on recruiting a diverse student body from underserved communities to fulfill the school's mission to diversify the nursing workforce, with significant community support demonstrated through partnerships and interest from local families.

The applicant's operations plan meets or exceeds standard due to the experienced governing board and leadership team, the professional development and staffing plan, and the outlined facilities plan. The board is comprised of individuals with diverse experience, providing strategic oversight aligned with the school's mission. The applicant plans to hire a Director of Teaching and Learning to ensure K-12 academic leadership, alongside a recruitment specialist to attract uniquely qualified staff. A robust professional development plan is proposed, focusing on continuous growth for educators and internal leadership development. The facilities plan is proactive, with a secured letter of intent ("LOI") for a suitable location in the desired area and contingency measures, ensuring readiness for a successful opening.

Lastly, the financial plan and capacity meets or exceeds standard, supported by a comprehensive operating budget. The school has secured substantial funding from Bloomberg Philanthropies, along with the Charter School Program grant, which will cover start-up, operational, and facilities costs. With realistic financial assumptions, the plan projects positive cash flow and strong net margins. The board exhibits financial expertise, and oversight will be provided by the proposed Executive Director with support from the business manager to ensure appropriate day-to-day financial management. Overall, the applicant demonstrates a strong foundation for a successful school launch.

For the aforementioned reasons, the Review Committee found that the sponsor did meet or exceed the standard for approval based on the department's scoring rubric.

For additional information regarding the Review Committee's evaluation of the Nurses amended application, please see **Exhibit A** for the complete Review Committee Recommendation Report, which is fully incorporated herein by reference.

### **Public Hearing**

Pursuant to statute<sup>5</sup> and Commission Policy 2.000, a public hearing chaired by the Executive Director was held on September 16, 2024. MNPS's presentation at the public hearing focused on the mission of the MNPS Office of Charter Schools, the charter school application review process, the outlined reasons for denial, and a request that the Commission uphold the district's decision to deny the Nurses amended application. Representatives from MNPS indicated that the Nurses amended application was denied based on deficiencies in all sections of the application. In academics, MNPS representatives outlined deficiencies in the proposed school calendar and schedule, citing noncompliance with state law for the outlined early release days. Additionally, representatives from the district outlined concerns with documented parent demand for the school, particularly given that MNPS offers similar programs in ten of its other high schools. The district also cited that the school not offering multiple academic pathways for students and the school's narrow focus as concerns, potentially resulting in students having to leave the school if they want to pursue something different from nursing. Representatives from the district also stated that the facility timeline was unrealistic and were concerned that the applicant will outsource administrative functions to a third party. Representatives reiterated that because they already offer robust healthcare pathways in their current high schools, this model is not needed. The MNPS board denied the application in a vote of eight to one.

In the sponsor's opening statement, the applicant stated there is a national nursing shortage with an urgent need for additional programs to support students in entering the nursing workforce. The applicant outlined the mission, vision, and four-year college prep curriculum where all content is taught through a nursing lens and aligned to the Tennessee state standards. The applicant spoke to the proven track record of other schools operated by the proposed CMO, with only 10% of students entering the program at grade level, 94% of these students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch, and 100% of graduates receiving an entry-level patient care workforce credential. Additionally, of these graduates, 77% enrolled in college after graduation. The applicant described strong community engagement in Nashville with the school's participation in community events, hosting summer camps, and over 300 Davidson County students expressing interest in enrolling. The applicant also has strong partnerships with local healthcare institutions. The applicant stated that they have a signed LOI for a facility, that they will work to remain in compliance with state law regarding the school calendar and schedule with early release days, and that they have significant support in start-up funding. The proposed Executive Director also reiterated how the certified nursing assistant ("CNA") credential opportunity is different than the certification opportunities within the healthcare pathways at MNPS high schools, and students with the CNA credential can go directly into the workforce or further pursue a degree in nursing.

During questioning by the Commission, representatives from MNPS further explained how the proposed model by the applicant is not innovative for the area since ten other MNPS schools include healthcare pathways and certification opportunities. The representatives also explained that while they acknowledge offering multiple pathways is not a requirement in the scoring rubric, there are concerns that students would have to leave the school if they chose to no longer pursue nursing, which could cause problems with credits transferring. The concerns for the

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<sup>5</sup> T.C.A. § 49-13-108(5)(b)(i).

planned early release days were also addressed during questioning, with the district stating that other MNPS charter schools use early release days but achieve a 6.5-hour instructional school day. The Commission then asked questions surrounding the district's concerns with the school's financial plan. Representatives clarified that while the funding is available in the early years of the school, it is unclear if the school can sustain these funds long-term. Additionally, there were cited concerns that the funding could have political ties hindering operations and concerns with outsourcing back-office functions. Finally, the facility plans were discussed by representatives of the district, stating the timeline outlined for the start-up plan was unrealistic, and there was not enough money set aside for contracting with an architect. The Commission followed up on a point raised in the opening presentation regarding insufficient credentials for school staff, and it was clarified that this language came from language stated by the MNPS board in the reasons for denial and referred to how the MNPS Review Committee concluded that those opening the school lacked proper credentials.

The Commission then questioned the sponsor. The sponsor spoke about their engagement efforts in the community, including interfacing with potential parents through health drives, open houses, and other community events. The proposed Executive Director has also met with Metro Nashville Housing and Vanderbilt University, who agreed to send communication about the school. The applicant also clarified that the school can be operational and fiscally sound with 125 students in Year 1. The applicant stated that an LOI has been signed for a property in the downtown area of Nashville. Based on the schematics, the applicant is confident that they can meet the timeline for renovations to successfully open in the 2025-26 school year, which would cost roughly \$1 million – \$1.5 million. The Commission then questioned the applicant regarding their transportation plan, which is a combination of private bussing and public transit. The proposed Executive Director met with WeGo public transit to ensure proper transportation of students where appropriate and stated that they have also allocated funds in the budget for additional buses as needed. The applicant clarified their contingency plans should they not be able to have shorter school days to accommodate for professional development, stating that they would have more collaborative planning time during school hours, use asynchronous training modules, and add more professional development to the summer before school starting. The Commission then questioned the applicant regarding the finances of the school. The applicant clarified that the private philanthropic funding received has no conditions other than ensuring they meet the mission of the school. The proposed Executive Director will also be responsible for overseeing finances, with board support, and the applicant will contract with a third-party vendor for back-office support. Additionally, upon approval, the proposed Executive Director will hire a business manager who will manage day-to-day financial operations.

The public hearing concluded with closing statements by both parties and the receipt of seventeen in-person comments, with seven speaking in support of MNPS and ten speaking in support of Nurses. The Commission also accepted written comments, and the Commission received 110 written comments, with five writing in support of MNPS and 105 writing in support of Nurses.

### **Analysis**

State law requires the Commission to review the decision of the local board of education and determine if the application “meets or exceeds the metrics outlined in the Tennessee Department of Education’s application-scoring rubric and,”<sup>6</sup> whether “approval of the application is in the best interests of the students, LEA, or community.”<sup>7</sup> In addition, pursuant to T.C.A. § 49-13-108, the Commission adopted the State Board of Education’s Quality Charter Authorizing Standards set forth in State Board Policy 6.111 and utilizes these standards to review charter applications

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<sup>6</sup> T.C.A. § 49-13-108(5)(E).

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*



received upon appeal. In making my recommendation to the Commission, I have considered the Review Committee's Recommendation Report, the documentation submitted by both the sponsor and MNPS, the arguments made by both parties at the public hearing, and the public comments received by Commission staff and conclude as follows:

The Review Committee's report and recommendations are thorough, citing specific examples in the application and referencing information gained in the capacity interview in support of its findings. For the reasons explicated in the report, I agree that the Nurses amended application did rise to the level of meeting or exceeding the standards required for approval.

I agree with the Review Committee that the sponsor put forth a strong academic plan, with a clear mission and vision for the school model. I feel confident that this academic model will provide a high-quality choice to families in the area. The local district testified that MNPS currently offers a health sciences concentration at its high school academies; therefore, the model proposed by the sponsor is not innovative as required by the new start application. I disagree with this assertion. The sponsor's education plan is innovative and would be unique to the Metro Nashville school system. While the local district does have health sciences concentrations at other high schools, none of the pathways presented during the public hearing contain the graduation path proposed by the sponsor. The sponsor provided clear indicators that the nursing focus of the proposed school would be built on Tennessee state standards, and the sponsor has developed robust partnerships within the Nashville healthcare community. The proposed CMO has successfully implemented the academic model in two other states, and this is an opportunity to provide this option to high school students in Nashville.

One of the primary concerns cited by the district was the proposed instructional calendar of the school; however, this is a highly complex and nuanced area of operational implementation. The State Board of Education's rules do allow for schools to have early release days that are less than 6.5 hours if they meet certain requirements, and these requirements are evaluated annually through the calendar approval process. It is through this process that the LEA works with each authorized charter school to submit a calendar to the Tennessee Department of Education for approval, and calendars are evaluated to ensure they meet all requirements in statute and State Board of Education rule. The sponsor stated they will follow all requirements necessary around its instructional calendar and are willing to be collaborative on their professional development planning. Given the fact that this is an area where there is clear oversight and monitoring of each charter school annually, this is not a sufficient reason for denial of this application.

I also appreciate the intention in the sponsor's enrollment plan. The sponsor is choosing to locate in downtown Nashville, for both partnership purposes as well as an effort to offer this choice to the largest demographic possible. The sponsor has set a goal to contribute to the creation of a more diverse nursing workforce, and I believe they have designed a plan to accomplish this. The sponsor has thoroughly considered special populations within the academic model and has set forth thoughtful ways in which Nurses Middle College Nashville could serve those students' needs. Also, the sponsor's academic plans are sufficiently supported by a strong operations plan.

The sponsor's application details an experienced and diverse proposed governing board who are deeply knowledgeable and committed to the mission and vision of the school. The most striking example of this commitment is in the selection of the proposed Executive Director of Nurses Middle College Nashville. Between the district's initial and amended application denials, the governing board hired the proposed Executive Director, who matched the named qualifications as detailed in the application, to lead the work of Nurses. The proposed Executive Director testified to Nurses' plan to hire the Director of Teaching and Learning to bolster the K-12 academic experience in the leadership team. The governing board places a great deal of trust in the proposed Executive Director, and I believe her work since being hired is evidence of her capacity to lead and implement the Nurses model. The governing board

also displayed a great deal of knowledge and expertise in the capacity interview. Various members were able to address questions and concerns from the Review Committee and displayed a uniform vision for the school. There is clear evidence this governing board is equipped and prepared to make difficult but necessary decisions for the success of Nurses.

In addition to having selected downtown Nashville as the location for Nurses, the sponsor also has a strong facility plan, which is imperative to any successful school opening. The sponsor has submitted a letter of intent for the preferred facility and has engaged an architect to determine renovation costs and working timeline for a fall 2025 opening. Additionally, the sponsor has in place a viable contingency plan for a facility if the preferred location is no longer an option. This preparation will prove invaluable as the school begins its work, if approved. The sponsor's operations plan is also backed by a strong financial plan.

I agree with the Review Committee that the sponsor's financial plan is strong and capable of supporting the needs of a new public charter school. The sponsor provided evidence of a significant grant from Bloomberg Philanthropies and the Charter School Program Fund to support the school in its work. I am confident that the sponsor's proposed budget can sustain the known and unknown variables associated with opening a new school. The contracted CMO has experience operating charter schools in other states, and those schools have remained in good financial standing since opening. The governing board demonstrated knowledge and understanding of its financial responsibilities, and this plan was strengthened by sharing the plans to hire a business manager for the school upon authorization.

Any authorized public charter school is entrusted with the great responsibility of educating students and a significant amount of public funds. For these reasons, the Commission expects that only those schools that have demonstrated a high likelihood of success and meet or exceed the required criteria in all areas will be authorized. Nurses proposes a strong model based on success in other states. Nashville is known as a healthcare economic center, and the need for additional nurses in the workforce is evident. The existence of Nurses within the Nashville community would only complement the other academic program offerings in surrounding high schools. The school has significant community backing with strong philanthropic support in the early years of its operations. It would be a missed opportunity for students if Nurses was not given the opportunity to open and operate in Nashville.

For the reasons expounded on in this report, I recommend that the Commission approve the Nurses amended application.

### CONCLUSION

For these reasons, and for the reasons stated in the Review Committee Recommendation Report attached hereto as **Exhibit A**, I believe that the decision to deny the amended application for Nurses was contrary to the best interests of the students, the LEA, or community. Therefore, I recommend that the Commission overturn the decision of the MNPS Board of Education and approve the amended application for Nurses.



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Tess Stovall, Executive Director  
Tennessee Public Charter School Commission

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10/17/24

Date





**TENNESSEE**  
PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL COMMISSION

**EXHIBIT A**

**Charter Application Review Committee Recommendation Report**

October 17, 2024

School Name: Nurses Middle College Nashville

Sponsor: Nurses Middle College Nashville

Proposed Location of School: Metro Nashville Public Schools

Evaluation Team:

- Adam Aberman
- Rebecca Ledebuhr
- Maggie Lund
- Mark Modrcin
- Whitney Noel
- Claire Seguin

This recommendation report is based on a template from the National Association of Charter School Authorizers.



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## Introduction

Tennessee Code Annotated (“T.C.A.”) § 49-13-108 allows the sponsor of a public charter school to appeal the denial of an application by the local board of education to the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission (“Commission”). In accordance with T.C.A. § 49-13-108, the Commission shall conduct a de novo, on the record review of the proposed charter school’s application, and the Commission has adopted national and state quality authorizing standards to guide its work. As laid out in Commission Policy 3.000 – Core Authorizing Principles<sup>1</sup>, the Commission is committed to implementing these authorizing standards that are aligned with the core principles of charter school authorizing, including setting high standards for the approval of charter schools in its portfolio.

In accordance with T.C.A. § 49-13-108, the Commission adopted Commission Policy 2.000 – Charter School Appeals. The Commission has outlined the charter school appeal process to ensure the well-being and interests of students are the fundamental value informing all Commission actions and decisions. The Commission publishes clear timelines and expectations for applicants, engages highly competent teams of internal and external evaluators to review all applications, and maintains rigorous criteria for approval of a charter school. In addition, the Commission plans to evaluate its work annually to ensure its alignment to national and state standards for quality authorizing and implements improvement when necessary.

The Commission’s charter application review process is outlined in T.C.A. § 49-13-108, Commission Policy 2.000 – Charter School Appeals, and Commission Policy 2.100 – Application Review. The Commission assembled a charter application review committee comprised of highly qualified internal and external evaluators with relevant and diverse expertise to evaluate each application. The Commission provided training to all committee members to ensure consistent standards and fair treatment of all applications.

## Overview of the Evaluation Process

The Commission’s charter application Review Committee developed this recommendation report based on three key stages of review:

1. Evaluation of the Proposal: The Review Committee independently reviewed the amended charter application, attachments, and budget submitted by the sponsor. After an independent review, the Review Committee collectively identified the main strengths, concerns, and weaknesses as well as developed specific questions for the applicant in the three sections of the application: Academic Plan and Design, Operations Plan and Capacity, and Financial Plan and Capacity.
2. Capacity Interview: Based on the independent and collective review of the application, the Review Committee conducted a ninety-minute interview with the sponsor, members of the governing board, and identified school leader to address the concerns, weaknesses, and questions identified in the application, and to assess the capacity to execute the application’s overall plan.
3. Consensus Judgment: At the conclusion of the review of the application and the capacity interview, the committee submitted a final rubric and developed a consensus regarding a rating for each section of the application.

This recommendation report includes the following information:

1. Summary of the Application: A brief description of the applicant’s proposed academic, operations, and financial plans.

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<sup>1</sup> All Commission rules and policies may be found on the Commission’s [website](#).

2. Summary of the Recommendation: A brief summary of the overall recommendation for the application.
3. Analysis of each section of the application: An analysis of the three sections of the application and the capacity of the team to execute the plan as described in the application.
  - a. Academic Plan and Design: school mission and vision; enrollment summary; academic focus and plan; academic performance standards; high school graduation and postsecondary readiness; assessments; school calendar and schedule; special populations; school culture and discipline; recruitment and enrollment; parent and community engagement and support; and the capacity to implement the proposed plan.
  - b. Operations Plan and Capacity: governance; start-up plan; facilities; personnel/human capital; professional development; insurance; transportation; food service; additional operations; charter management organization; and the capacity to implement the proposed plan.
  - c. Financial Plan and Capacity: planning and budget worksheet; budget narrative; and the capacity to implement the proposed plan.

The Commission's charter application Review Committee utilized the Tennessee Department of Education's Application to create a Public Charter School Scoring Criteria ("the rubric"), which is used by all local boards of education when evaluating an application. The rubric states:

An application that merits a recommendation for approval should present a clear, realistic picture of how the school expects to operate; be detailed in how this school will raise student achievement; and inspire confidence in the applicant's capacity to successfully implement the proposed academic and operational plans. In addition to meeting the criteria that are specific to that section, each part of the proposal should align with the overall mission, budget, and goals of the application.

The evaluators used the following criteria and guidance from the scoring rubric to rate applications:

| Rating                    | Characteristics  |
|---------------------------|--|
| Meets or Exceeds Standard | The response reflects a thorough understanding of key issues. It clearly aligns with the mission and vision of the school. The response includes specific and accurate information that shows thorough preparation.                          |
| Partially Meets Standard  | The response meets the criteria in some respects but lacks sufficient detail and/or requires additional information in one or more areas.  |
| Does Not Meet Standard    | The response is incomplete; demonstrates lack of preparation; does not align with the mission and vision of the school; or otherwise raises significant concerns about the viability of the plan or the applicant's ability to carry it out. |



## Summary of the Application

School Name: Nurses Middle College Nashville

Sponsor: Nurses Middle College Nashville

Proposed Location of School: Metro Nashville Public Schools

Mission:<sup>2</sup> The mission of Nurses Middle College Nashville is to prepare a diverse group of students to become the highly educated and professional nursing workforce of the future.

Number of Schools Currently in Operation by Sponsor: There are no schools currently in operation by the sponsor.

Proposed Enrollment:<sup>3</sup>

| Grade Level | Year 1:<br>2025-2026 | Year 2:<br>2026-2027 | Year 3:<br>2027-2028 | Year 4:<br>2028-2029 | Year 5:<br>2029-2030 | At Capacity: |
|-------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| 9           | 125                  | 140                  | 150                  | 150                  | 150                  | 150          |
| 10          |                      | 110                  | 125                  | 130                  | 130                  | 130          |
| 11          |                      |                      | 90                   | 110                  | 110                  | 110          |
| 12          |                      |                      |                      | 90                   | 110                  | 110          |
| Totals      | 125                  | 250                  | 365                  | 480                  | 500                  | 500          |

### Brief Description of the Application:

The sponsor, Nurses Middle College Nashville, is proposing to open a charter school in Davidson County, Tennessee and serve students in ninth through twelfth grades when fully built out. The school, Nurses Middle College Nashville ("Nurses"), is a new-start school and would be organized under a local governing board. The local governing board plans to contract directly with NursesMC as its charter management organization ("CMO") to operate the school. The CMO operates two other Nurses Middle College high schools in Rhode Island and New York. The school intends to operate in the downtown community of Nashville and serve students throughout the city. Nurses proposes to prepare a diverse group of students to become the highly educated professional nursing workforce of the future through an intentionally designed model that allows students to garner a comprehensive understanding of nursing, earn industry credentials, and complete work-based learning opportunities.

The proposed school will be governed by a local board of individuals with varied experience, including education, healthcare, and nursing experience. In Year 0, Nurses has budgeted \$3,472,098 from the Charter School Program ("CSP") grant and private funding from Bloomberg Philanthropies and projects \$3,334,273 in expenses for the school. The applicant projects the school will have \$5,399,445 in revenue and \$5,114,325 in expenses in Year 1, resulting in a balance of \$422,945. By Year 5, the school projects to have \$9,219,623 in revenue and \$8,803,715 in expenses, resulting in a positive ending fund balance of \$1,215,860.<sup>4</sup> The school anticipates that 82% of the student population will qualify as economically disadvantaged, 10% of the student population will be students with disabilities, and 33% of the student population will be English learners ("EL").<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Nurses Middle College Nashville Amended Application, pg. 4

<sup>3</sup> Nurses Middle College Nashville Amended Application, pg. 21

<sup>4</sup> Nurses Middle College Nashville amended budget

<sup>5</sup> Nurses Middle College Nashville Amended Application, pg. 19



## Summary of the Evaluation

The Review Committee recommends the approval of the amended application for Nurses Middle College Nashville because of the innovative mission and academic plan, demonstrated community support, robust financial support, and proactive facility plan.

The academic plan presented by the applicant meets or exceeds standard as outlined in the scoring rubric and aims to integrate rigorous academic instruction with nursing career preparation, benefiting from a proven model from the proposed CMO that operates successful schools in Rhode Island and New York. The curriculum aligns with Tennessee state standards while providing opportunities for work-based learning, dual enrollment, and industry credentials focused on the nursing profession. The assessment plan is data-driven, allowing for real-time student intervention, and the special populations plan ensures students will receive appropriate services. Additionally, the enrollment strategy focuses on recruiting a diverse student body from underserved communities to fulfill the mission of the school, with significant community support demonstrated through partnerships and interest from local families.

The applicant's operations plan meets or exceeds standard due to the experienced governing board and leadership team, the professional development and staffing plan, and the outlined facilities plan. The board is comprised of individuals with expertise in education, finance, healthcare, and law, providing strategic oversight aligned with the school's mission. The applicant plans to hire a Director of Teaching and Learning to ensure K-12 academic leadership, alongside a recruitment specialist to attract uniquely qualified staff. A robust professional development plan is proposed, focusing on continuous growth for educators and internal leadership development. The facilities plan is proactive, with a secured letter of intent for a suitable location in the desired area and contingency measures, ensuring readiness for a successful opening.

Lastly, the financial plan and capacity meets or exceeds standard, supported by a comprehensive operating budget. The school has secured substantial funding from Bloomberg Philanthropies, along with the CSP grant, which will cover start-up, operational, and facilities costs. With realistic financial assumptions, the plan projects positive cash flow and strong net margins. The board exhibits financial expertise, and oversight will be provided by the proposed Executive Director with support from the business manager to ensure appropriate day-to-day financial management. Overall, the applicant demonstrates a strong foundation for a successful school launch.

### Summary of Section Ratings

In accordance with the Tennessee Department of Education's charter application scoring rubric, applications that do not meet or exceed the standard in all sections will be deemed not ready for approval and strengths in one area of the application do not negate weaknesses in other areas. Opening and maintaining a successful, high-performing charter school depends on having a complete, coherent plan and identifying highly capable individuals to execute that plan. The Review Committee's consensus ratings for each section of the application are as follows:

| Sections                     | Ratings                   |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Academic Plan and Design     | Meets or Exceeds Standard |
| Operations Plan and Capacity | Meets or Exceeds Standard |
| Financial Plan and Capacity  | Meets or Exceeds Standard |



## **Analysis of the Academic Plan and Design**

*Rating: Meets or Exceeds the Standard*

### **Strengths Identified by the Committee**

The applicant's Academic Plan and Design meets or exceeds standard because of the proposed school's comprehensive plan for enrollment, mission and vision alignment, robust academic and assessment plans, and demonstrated community support for the school and proposed model. The application showcases a thoughtful, innovative approach to ensuring student success in the specialized model, including plans to serve special populations of students.

The school proposes an innovative academic model that integrates rigorous academic instruction with nursing career preparation, positioning students for workforce entry and postsecondary success. The proposed CMO successfully operates Rhode Island and New York campuses, offering students a blend of applied learning through work-based experiences, dual enrollment, and opportunities to earn nursing industry credentials while in high school. At the Rhode Island campus, which has been in existence since 2011, the program has ranked among the top in the state for college success metrics, with high rates of students earning college credits and workforce credentials. The academic plan includes curricula that is created by the CMO with a nursing focus and meets the requirements of Tennessee state standards. This, coupled with thoughtfully incorporated postsecondary opportunities, allows students to progress through a high school experience while earning college credits and gaining real-world clinical experience through outlined healthcare partnerships. The assessment plan utilizes a combination of internal assessments and mission-specific evaluations to track student progress for high school credit performance, state testing prep, college readiness assessments such as the SAT and dual enrollment performance, and industry-specific certifications like the certified nursing assistant ("CNA") credential. The academic plan emphasizes data-driven instruction, enabling real-time interventions for students.

The enrollment plan is designed to recruit a diverse student body from across Nashville, particularly prioritizing underserved communities. While the school will locate downtown due to proximity to hospitals and healthcare partners, the targeted recruitment areas focus on economically disadvantaged students and English learners. By targeting these communities, the mission of creating a more diverse nursing workforce will be fulfilled. A clear strength within the application is the demonstration of community support through secured partnerships with local healthcare institutions, universities, and community organizations. During the capacity interview, the applicant shared updates regarding the growing interest in the school, including a survey conducted that indicated 300 families within Nashville expressed interest in enrolling. The school also held local community fairs and summer and fall break camps with students to further garner community support. The outlined enrollment plan within the application accounts for natural attrition, based on data from other schools operated by the CMO, and sets realistic enrollment projections to support the school's academic model and operations. During the capacity interview, the applicant provided sound rationale for its projections, stating that the model is specific, and families and students may decide that nursing is no longer their desired field of study and wish to seek opportunities elsewhere, thus accounting for some natural attrition as students progress into higher grades.

The applicant demonstrates a commitment to supporting diverse learners, and during the capacity interview stated that 100% of students with disabilities and English learners in the class of 2023 enrolled in postsecondary opportunities from the NursesMC Rhode Island school. The outlined plan within the application includes Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI<sup>2</sup>), push-in, and pull-out opportunities for students with proper teacher credentialing to ensure appropriate services to students. While it is clear the applicant intends to serve all students, staffing ratios may need to be adjusted upon enrollment to ensure adequate service of students in alignment with



statute. The applicant's schedule may also need adjustments to ensure that students who receive special education and/or EL services can participate in work-based learning programming and dual enrollment. The Review Committee was satisfied with the applicant's response to these concerns during the capacity interview due to the CMO and board's demonstrated knowledge of the requirements of service to special populations and the robust financial plan that would allow for adjustments to staffing and scheduling with minimal impact to net margins.

## **Analysis of the Operations Plan and Capacity**

*Rating: Meets or Exceeds Standard*

### **Strengths Identified by the Committee**

The applicant's Operations Plan and Capacity meets or exceeds standard because of the proposed school's experienced governing board, the proposed leadership team's diverse expertise, adequate staffing plans, and detailed facility plan.

The application outlines an experienced, local, and diverse governing board, including members with educational, financial, healthcare, and legal expertise. The board spoke at length during the capacity interview regarding the academic, operations, and financial plans for the school, providing strategic governance aligned with the school's mission. Additionally, two board members have firsthand experience founding charter schools, ensuring a strong foundation in charter school operations. The board has also chosen an executive director to lead the school who has extensive healthcare and postsecondary experience and will provide strong management and strategic oversight, ensuring that the school stays mission-focused while navigating the operational complexities of launching in Nashville. While the Review Committee noted concerns surrounding the proposed Executive Director's lack of K-12 or charter school experience, during the capacity interview, the governing board and proposed Executive Director clarified that the Director of Teaching and Learning, who will be hired upon approval of the application, would be the academic leader for the school and have K-12 experience. The sponsor also clarified that a business manager would be hired at the school to assist in day-to-day management of operations and finances. This proposed combination of local charter school experience, K-12 academic experience, and healthcare expertise positions the school for success in fulfilling its mission. The applicant also included realistic staffing projections with a robust staff recruitment plan, including the hiring of a full-time recruitment specialist.

The applicant demonstrated a robust professional development plan for teachers that aligns to the school's mission and model. This plan includes ten professional development days during the summer, along with additional hours of professional development throughout the school year that include collaborative planning time. The applicant also described instructional coaching for staff and asynchronous professional development opportunities supported by the proposed CMO. The applicant outlined plans to develop leaders from within the organization through teachers having opportunities to serve as academic department chairs and grade level leaders, receiving direct support from the Director of Teaching and Learning and Dean of Student Supports to continuously develop leadership capacity.

The facilities plan for Nurses demonstrates strong preparation and foresight, ensuring that the school has a location within the targeted downtown area of Nashville that sufficiently meets the needs of the outlined academic model. A key strength of this plan is the proactive approach taken by the applicant, who has submitted a letter of intent for its preferred location as outlined within the application. During the capacity interview, the applicant emphasized its readiness to execute the outlined facility plan by sharing estimated renovation costs to the facility and an updated timeline. The applicant has already met with an architect and has received confirmation that the needed renovations could take place within an adjusted timeline to ensure a successful 2025-26 school year opening. The applicant also described multiple contingency plans to the Review Committee should the primary facility option fall through. The applicant has contracted with a reputable firm with extensive charter school facility experience to assist in negotiations and the acquisition of the preferred facility.

The applicant outlines a transportation plan within the application that includes both private busing and public transport to ensure students have access to transportation to and from school and work-based learning opportunities. The Review Committee questioned the applicant regarding how it would be determined if public



transportation was sufficient for students, as well as who would receive access to private busing. The Review Committee found the applicant's response regarding being flexible to the needs of students and adding additional private buses as needed to ensure the school provides equitable access for students across Nashville to be a strength.

## **Analysis of the Financial Plan and Capacity**

*Rating: Meets or Exceeds Standard*

### **Strengths Identified by the Committee**

The applicant's Financial Plan and Capacity meets or exceeds standard because the operating budget includes comprehensive and reasonable assumptions that are necessary to support the start-up and operating expenses for the school. The plan also incorporates financial support from private philanthropy and grants that would support the school on operational costs beginning in Year 0.

The application outlines funds promised from Bloomberg Philanthropies and funds available upon authorization from the CSP grant, both of which are evidenced within the letters of support provided in the application. The funds from Bloomberg Philanthropies total \$19,693,911. The application outlines a detailed plan for how the \$19.7M of Bloomberg funds will be rolled out within the first three years of operations. This rollout includes payments in Years 1-3 to support operational costs and an additional \$9.8M of the grant being used for capital funding in Year 3. During the capacity interview, the Review Committee confirmed that the only requirements of the Bloomberg Philanthropies funds are authorization and execution of the mission of the school. During the capacity interview, the applicant described how the funds would be used in securing facilities and satisfying start-up needs, and that the intent is for the budget to be continuously sustainable on annual per pupil revenues. The Review Committee also clarified that the other two schools started and run by the proposed CMO did not receive similar funds but are in good financial standing. In addition to the philanthropy, the budget outlines \$750,000 in funds from a CSP grant that will be available upon authorization. As a result of the substantial level of start-up funds, as well as reasonable outlined expenses and TISA funding estimates, the application demonstrates positive cash flow and strong net margins.

The Review Committee found that the applicant's budget includes reasonable assumptions for the related costs of opening a new charter school, including facility acquisition and tenant improvements, staffing, contracted services, and supplies. The Review Committee also found that the board demonstrated financial expertise and the plan for financial management was sound. While the board has extensive education-related experience, including financial experience in charter schools, the proposed Executive Director will be responsible for oversight and management of finances. During the capacity interview, the Review Committee received clarification that the proposed Executive Director would meet with the board biweekly to ensure appropriate support of financial management, and upon authorization, a business manager would be hired to oversee day-to-day operations and finances in support of the proposed Executive Director.



## Evaluation Team

**Adam Aberman** is the CEO and Founder of The Learning Collective. Adam has a 25+ year track record in numerous educational venues from traditional public schools to school district administration trainings. Since establishing The Learning Collective in 2003, Adam has assessed over 250 current, and 100 proposed, charter schools nationally (California, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New York and Washington), including as lead writer for charter renewal inspection visits, charged with evaluating the school and writing the report that is submitted to authorizers. In 2022 Adam led a team of reviewers conducting 20 renewal visits for Chicago Public Schools. Adam has led teams of reviewers of charter school applications, submitting the finalized application reviews to boards of education. Recently, Adam worked with the Tennessee State Board of Education to lead its strategic planning and goal-setting process AND is currently leading the New Orleans Public Schools charter application evaluation process. In 2022 Adam co-authored a report of findings and recommendations, supported by Central Michigan University, to inform 57 charter schools across Michigan how to effectively and strategically plan for the 2022-23 school year. Adam has also worked with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) and other organizations on evaluation and strategic planning projects regarding Florida, Idaho, Minnesota, New York, Oklahoma and Ohio authorizers. Other TLC clients have included Alliance College-Ready Public Schools, College Board, Inglewood Unified School District, Tiger Woods Foundation and UCLA. Adam is also the founder, former acting board member and current board member emeritus of [www.icouldbe.org](http://www.icouldbe.org), the non-profit Internet-based career mentoring program that has served over 25,000 students, and hundreds of schools, nationally since 2000. Adam began his career in education as a Spanish bilingual public school teacher in Los Angeles. Adam earned a B.A. from Vassar College and Master's in Public Policy, with an emphasis on Education, from Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.

**Rebecca Ledebuhr** is the Data and Accountability Coordinator at the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission. Before taking on her role at the Charter Commission, Rebecca spent fourteen years working in public schools in North Carolina and Tennessee. Most recently, she served as an instructional coach for mathematics at an MNPS public charter school. Rebecca has served on the Nashville Public Education Foundation's and Mayor's Teacher Cabinet, as a mentor teacher for the Nashville Teacher Residency, and as a Tennessee Educator Fellow for the State Collaborative on Reforming Education ("SCORE"). Rebecca holds a B.A. in Philosophy and Religion from James Madison University.

**Maggie Lund** is the Deputy Director of Authorizing at the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission. Additionally, she serves as an adjunct professor in the Lipscomb College of Education Master's Program, teaching Planning, Instruction, and Assessment and Building Classroom Communities. Prior to her role at the Charter Commission, Maggie served as a school administrator at a Nashville public charter school. Maggie was a Teach for America corps member and served as an 8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher in a charter school for four years. Maggie holds a B.A. in Business Administration and Marketing from Loyola University New Orleans, a Doctor of Education degree, and a Master of Education degree with a specialization in English Language Learning from Lipscomb University. Her dissertation research focused on Restorative Justice Practices and school culture. Most recently, her research article, Mindsets Matter for Equitable Discipline was published in the Middle School Journal.

**Mark Modrcin** currently serves as the Director of Growth and Governance for Vertex Education, which supports public charter schools in Arizona, Nevada and Texas that serve nearly 29,000 students. In this role, he leads the organization's new state growth efforts and supports the boards of Legacy Traditional Schools. Previously, Mark served as the Director of Authorizing for the State Public Charter School Authority of Nevada, as well as a district authorizer in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Mark holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Business from Miami University, an MBA from the University of Tulsa, and is a 2015 alum of the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) Leaders Program.





**Whitney Noel** started her career as an elementary educator and received her Master's of Education in Curriculum and Instruction, with an ELL endorsement, from the University of Washington. In her years of teaching, she taught nationally and internationally, across a variety of school settings - including in Metro Nashville Public Schools. Aside from being a classroom teacher, Whitney has experience in curriculum writing, professional development, and education-related research. Whitney now works for Mosa Mack Science - partnering with districts in selecting and implementing inquiry-based science material.

**Claire Seguin** is serving as the Federal Programs Coordinator at the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission. Prior to joining the Commission, Claire served as the Director of Student Supports where she oversaw the Exceptional Education, Intervention, Gifted, and English Learner programs and was a founding teacher and administrator. Claire holds a BA in Sociology and Disaster Science Management from Louisiana State University, a Master of Education from Lipscomb University, and graduate certificates in Autism Studies and Applied Behavior Analysis from the University of Memphis and Arizona State University respectively. She has contributed to published research on the impact of parental involvement on academic achievement and currently provides advocacy support for families of students with disabilities in public schools.