

Summary

Date: August 8, 2025

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

From: Jocquell Rodgers, Executive Director, IOTA Community Schools

RE: Hillcrest High School Reauthorization Notice of Appeal Summary

This letter serves as Notice of Appeal by IOTA Community Schools, in the matter of Hillcrest High School, an Achievement School District transformation charter school application recently denied by the Memphis Shelby County Schools (MSCS) Board of Education.

Green Dot Public Schools Tennessee, GDPST, began operating Hillcrest High School in 2016, as part of the Achievement School District. GDPST, now IOTA Community Schools, has worked diligently to effectively serve the students and families in the Whitehaven community where Hillcrest has been for well over 50 years. Hillcrest High, whose motto is "Ambition, Success, the BEST", has stood as a life force for the students, families, community members, and alumni. These stakeholders have consistently supported our initial mission to transform public education to prepare all students for college, leadership, and life, while embracing our transition mission to create pathways to economic sustainability through transformative academic and social opportunities.

IOTA Community Schools has a vision to continue growing students, providing the necessary interventions and support to build strong leaders, thinkers and creators. IOTA has worked with a vision of partnering with Memphis-Shelby County Schools (MSCS) to strengthen the feeder school pattern for Hillcrest High, providing better academic outcomes for all students. The long-term success of any school is deeply impacted by the academic preparedness of its incoming students, and Hillcrest is no exception. We serve a broad range of students who face challenges academically because they have attended schools that are historically under-resourced and do not understand how to address the population served at Hillcrest High. 89% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch, with 72% receiving reduced Medicaid services. The median household income at Hillcrest is less than \$30k, placing them well below the median household income of other Shelby County residents. There is also a unique population of students at Hillcrest who are homeless, in foster care or transitional housing, accounting for 3% of the students at the school.

IOTA Community Schools has continued to adjust systems to meet the unique needs of our students who enroll in ninth grade after attending MSCS feeder schools. Data on nationally normed assessments (iReady) show many of Hillcrest's incoming students enter reading far below their counterparts in other MSCS schools. Incoming ninth grade students enter Hillcrest at 3.9 grade levels behind in ELA and 4.1 grade levels behind in Math. IOTA has been able to impact these students by achieving a year and one half to two years growth each school year in math and reading when students stay at Hillcrest High from ninth grade through graduation. We

have also come to realize the real life challenges our students face and as an organization, have incorporated more career and technology opportunities for students. Last year, students at Hillcrest earned nearly 450 certifications in a range of fields, including OSHA 10, hair braiding, and CompTIA Tech+. Obtaining these certifications is a crucial first step in ensuring our students are job-ready and marketable after graduation. In addition to earning numerous certifications, a select group of students from Hillcrest were chosen in 2021, 2022, and 2023 to collaborate with TVA (Tennessee Valley Authority) employees and leadership in establishing their inaugural high school internship program, known as S.T.A.R.S. (Student Training and Resource Sharing Program). These selected students received full clearance to all TVA sites and gained insights into various fields, including heavy civil construction, facilities operations, and maintenance. In 2024, the program was officially launched across three states- Tennessee, Georgia, and Alabama- and Hillcrest High School has been recognized for its exemplary contributions in laying the groundwork for this initiative. Our ultimate goal is to ensure a quality education that will support all students beyond high school, whether that is post secondary schooling, the military or work. Last year, 53% of students at Hillcrest High received industry certifications that immediately placed them on a stronger economic trajectory than students who leave school without industry certifications. Each year we hope to provide more access to workforce development and CTE courses to impact 85% of students graduating from Hillcrest High.

IOTA Community Schools is the best option for students at Hillcrest High School. IOTA understands the challenges that come along with transforming high schools, and believes it is the best fit to continue the work in the Whitehaven/Graceland community, using research-based strategies for continuous improvement. Hillcrest high families, students and alumni trust IOTA Community Schools to provide great academic structures and supports, while also opening doors to college and careers.

Attachments:

1. Hillcrest High School initial and amended reauthorization application
2. Summary of application timeline
3. Denial letter from Memphis-Shelby County Schools
4. Amended application without any tracked changes