



June 20, 2025

Tess Stovall Executive Director, Tennessee Public Charter School Commission
500 James Robertson Parkway 5th Floor
Davy Crockett Tower
Nashville, Tennessee 37243

Dear Executive Director Stovall:

Our team writes to you today to provide a statement as a part of our formal appeal of the recent denial of our charter application by Metro Nashville Public Schools ("MNPS") for **The Forge School**, pursuant to Tennessee Code Annotated §49-13-108.

The Forge School ("The Forge") empowers 6th through 12th grade students to forge their own futures by combining academic excellence, hands-on learning, and real-world experiences to ensure that upon graduation students are prepared to enter an architecture, construction, or engineering career with the durable skills and experience needed to thrive in a high-wage, high-demand industry.

The Forge is committed to empowering students to become innovative leaders in Architecture, Construction, and Engineering through hands-on, career-connected learning. Our vision is to have strong partnerships in our community to build pathways that equip students with the durable skills, knowledge, and real-world experience needed to design and construct a sustainable future. Our mission is to forge connections between education and industry, ensuring that our graduates are prepared to contribute to their communities with purpose, creativity, and expertise.

Our appeal is grounded in two primary items: (1) That our application has met or exceeded the metrics outlined in the Tennessee Department of Education's ("TDOE") application scoring rubric; (2) the approval of the amended charter is in the best interests of the students.

1. Our application met or exceeded the metrics outlined in the Tennessee Department of Education's application scoring rubric.

The MNPS conducted an abbreviated review process which compromised a transparent and thorough evaluation period. This change prevented The Forge School from fully engaging with members of the board to demonstrate our extensive community support. Our points below support that the application did not have a fair evaluation against the TDOE's evaluation rubric.

The Forge has met or exceeded expectations per the TDOE rubric, where MNPS has identified The Forge as partially meets in all categories. Based on their evidence findings, our evaluation contained clear factual errors and overlooked critical details that were present in our application, directly undermining the validity of the MNPS review. Items include:

- MNPS claimed our application lacked a convincing rationale for how The Forge's industry certification focus would exceed existing MNPS pathways. However, our application clearly articulates The Forge School's innovative model: we embed the interdependence of ACE pathways



with entrepreneurship and business management, delivering progressive grade-level experiences from day one. Crucially, 100% of Forge School graduates will not only meet standard graduation requirements but also earn a minimum of six industry credentials, dual enrollment credits, and gain valuable internship and CTSO experiences. Every course, from English to Math to Social Sciences, will deeply integrate the understanding and practical application of these career fields. These comprehensive experiences fundamentally differentiate us from the isolated offerings within the Nashville Academies programming, a distinction that was even confirmed by MNPS staff during the public board meeting. Furthermore, MNPS entirely overlooked that no existing MNPS middle school program provides the deep, embedded CTE connections and experiential learning that The Forge School offers starting in 6th grade.

- MNPS inaccurately asserted a lack of universal screening details and how results inform tiered interventions. However, our application comprehensively details our academic plan, including a daily 45-minute RTI² framework, specific screeners, and our external assessment model aligned with state-mandated assessments for all students, including those with diverse needs. The Forge School worked extensively with local special population experts to design an intervention and support framework that exceeds MNPS current offerings.
- The MNPS review minimized our robust community engagement and industry backing. Our application explicitly documents 389 submissions of support from Nashville parents and community members (352 from Davidson County, 249 interested students, representing 29 zipcodes), along with 9 parent letters, 1 student letter, and 47 letters from local industry partners. These community partners included leaders in industry (Lee Company, NOMANash, Southeast Ventures) as well as community-based nonprofits and educational institutions (Habitat for Humanity, Lipscomb University, Persist Nashville, The Forge Nashville). By limiting their enrollment concerns to the District 4 cluster, MNPS also failed to acknowledge that The Forge School will attract students from across the city and has built a robust recruitment and transportation plan to make this possible.
- While the motion for denial centered on the committee's findings, the board debate cited the cost of charter schools and impact to the district's budget. State law does not permit this as a rationale for denying a charter. There are provisions for considering negative fiscal impact, however those specific criteria were neither cited nor met.

These procedural failures and unsubstantiated findings directly suggest that our application was not assessed accurately against the rubric's true intent or content.

2. The approval of the amended charter is in the best interests of the students within the Nashville community.

As The Forge School, we are deeply committed to offering a unique and high-quality public education option that directly addresses the aims of the state's charter school law and serves a diverse student body that serves Nashville's 6-12th grade students with a focus on Architecture, Construction, and Engineering embedded through all of our courses and schedule design. We plan to serve a diverse population from across Nashville of students that have interest in these pathways beginning in 6th grade. We will offer:

- **Innovative, Integrated Career Pathways for Future Workforce Readiness Beginning in Middle School:** We are the pioneers of an interdependent Architecture, Construction, and Engineering pathways, uniquely blended with entrepreneurship and business management skills in Nashville. This comprehensive approach offers students in grades 6-12 a significantly broader and deeper



understanding of industry opportunities, moving beyond the isolated programs currently available within the LEA, with a purposeful middle school approach beginning in 6th grade. This model directly serves both Nashville's and the state's interest in fostering innovation within public education and preparing students for local, high-wage careers, thereby creating a more robust and skilled local workforce for the community.

- **Comprehensive Academic Model:** Our academic plan encompasses layered support for academic and whole-child development. This includes project-based learning, integrated durable skills essential for the ACE career pathways, and robust multi-tiered support systems for all learners. We have intentionally designed it to ensure meaningful academic growth to close achievement gaps, with personalized support as a part of our RTI programming, and personal development support as a part of our Forge Forum advisory period. At the heart of our school are the Forge Foundations, Durable Skills, and unique, industry-aligned supports include a robust mentorship-driven pedagogy. This innovative approach fosters comprehensive student development by directly connecting 6-12th graders to authentic real-world experiences, industry professionals, and practical problem-solving. Our students will be prepared not just for post-secondary education but for immediate and meaningful career engagement, providing a valuable and distinct educational option directly strengthening Nashville's educational ecosystem and its pipeline to the community's industries in architecture, construction, and engineering based on the certifications earned and real-world experience.
- **Widespread Community & Industry Support Meeting Unmet Demand:** We have demonstrated robust community and industry backing, with 389 reported submissions of support from Nashville parents and community members, including 249 indications of interested students in grades 6-12; and 47 letters from local industry partners as a part of this application. This strong demand across Davidson County, combined with a transportation strategy, ensures accessibility for all students—including those outside specific clusters and regions—to be a part of unique programming. This directly supports the charter school mission of responding to community needs and offering diverse educational choices to families where demand for such a specialized, career-focused ACE model for 6-12th graders is evident, ultimately benefiting Nashville by expanding innovative, and high-quality options.

The availability of robust school choice, as enabled by Tennessee's charter school law, is paramount to fostering educational excellence and equity across the state. It empowers families with diverse needs and aspirations to select learning environments that best suit their children, encourages innovation within the public education landscape, and drives continuous improvement across all schools through varied instructional approaches. Ultimately, school choice is about putting the needs of students first, ensuring every child has access to an education that prepares them for success in college, career, and life.

At The Forge, we are deeply committed to offering high-quality public education options for Tennessee students, and we believe in a fair and transparent opportunity to do so as a part of our application review. We appreciate the opportunity to appeal with the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission, and look forward to the next steps of the process, and ultimately achieving the shared goal of providing choice and serving what is in the best interest of students.

Sincerely,
Sara Tuttle, Proposed Executive Director
The Forge School