



Executive Director's Recommendation Nashville School of Excellence 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 6, 2026, the sponsor of Nashville School of Excellence ("Read Foundation" or "NSE") appealed the denial of its amended application by the Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools ("MNPS" or "district") 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 Nashville School of Excellence amended application was not contrary to the best interests of the students, local education agency ("LEA"), or community.¹ Therefore, I recommend that the Commission uphold the decision of Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools Board of Education to deny the amended application for NSE.

STANDARD OF REVIEW

Pursuant to T.C.A. § 49-13-108 and Commission Policy 2.000, Commission staff and an independent charter application review committee conducted a de novo, on the record review of the Nashville School of Excellence amended application. In accordance with the Tennessee State Board of Education's Charter School Application Scoring Rubric ("rubric"), for an application to be deemed ready for approval, the summary rating for each of the major sections must meet the standard. In addition, the Commission is required to hold a public hearing in the district where the proposed charter school seeks to locate.²

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 scoring rubric and that approval of the amended charter application is in the best interests of the students, local education agency, or community.³ If the local board of education's decision is appealed, then the Commission can approve the application, and thereby authorize the school, or can affirm the

¹ T.C.A. § 49-13-108.

² T.C.A. § 49-13-108.

³ T.C.A. § 49-13-108.

local board's decision to deny.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

1. On November 20, 2025, the sponsor submitted a letter of intent to Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools expressing its intention to file a charter school application.
2. The sponsor submitted its initial application for Nashville School of Excellence to MNPS on February 1, 2026.
3. MNPS assembled a review committee to review and score the Nashville School of Excellence initial application.
4. On March 25, 2026, the MNPS Review Committee conducted a capacity interview with representatives of Nashville School of Excellence.
5. The MNPS Review Committee reviewed and scored the Nashville School of Excellence initial application, indicating that the applicant has other network schools which have performance concerns, lack of community support for the STEM focus, and governing board not meeting locally for parent participation.
6. On April 28, 2026, the MNPS Board of Education voted to deny the Nashville School of Excellence initial application.
7. The sponsor amended and resubmitted its application for Nashville School of Excellence to MNPS on June 1, 2026.
8. The MNPS Review Committee reviewed and scored the Nashville School of Excellence amended application based on the scoring rubric and rated the academic, operations, finance, and addenda sections as partially meets the standard.
9. On July 28, 2026, the MNPS Board of Education voted to deny the amended application of Nashville School of Excellence.
10. The sponsor appealed the denial of the Nashville School of Excellence amended application in writing to the Commission on August 6, 2026, including submission of all required documents per Commission Policy 2.000.
11. The Commission's Review Committee independently analyzed and scored the Nashville School of Excellence amended application using the state's scoring rubric.
12. The Commission's Review Committee conducted a capacity interview with key members of the Nashville School of Excellence leadership team on September 10, 2026, via Microsoft Teams.
13. On September 25, 2026, the Commission staff held a public hearing at the Davy Crockett

Building in Nashville, Tennessee. At the public hearing, the Executive Director, sitting as the Commission's designee, heard presentations from the sponsor and the LEA and received public comment regarding the Nashville School of Excellence amended application.

14. After the capacity interview, the Commission's Review Committee determined a final consensus rating of the Nashville School of Excellence 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

Substantial Negative Fiscal Impact Findings and Analysis

At the July 28, 2026, board meeting, the MNPS Board of Education voted to deny the amended application of Nashville School of Excellence based on the consideration of the Charter School Review Team's evidence-finding report and the district's Estimated Fiscal Impact Summary, citing a substantial negative fiscal impact to MNPS.

A local board of education may consider whether the establishment of the proposed charter school will have a substantial negative fiscal impact on the LEA such that authorization of the public charter school would be contrary to the best interests of the students, LEA, or community.⁴ When a local school district has denied a charter school application on the basis of substantial negative fiscal impact, Commission Rule 1185-01-01-.01(4) states that, on appeal, the burden is on the district to establish that substantial negative fiscal impact. If there is a finding of substantial negative fiscal impact, the Commission shall not approve the application.⁵ The Commission staff applied the same general methodology used in previous evaluations conducted by the Office of the State Treasurer, the Tennessee State Board of Education, and the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission to determine if a substantial negative fiscal impact exists in this case. In keeping with the precedent set by these prior analyses, as well as the evidence and testimony presented by MNPS, the Commission considered the district's historical enrollment trends, annual average daily membership ("ADM") fluctuations, and projected

⁴ T.C.A. § 49-13-108(c).

⁵ T.C.A. § 49-13-108(c).

enrollment shifts associated with the proposed school approval. The key question is whether the enrollment decline projected by MNPS is materially different from the enrollment gains and losses the district has historically experienced, and whether those shifts are significant enough to constitute a substantial negative fiscal impact.

The following findings are based on information collected by Commission staff from MNPS regarding the substantial negative fiscal impact of Nashville School of Excellence:

1. Nashville School of Excellence's amended application states that in its first anticipated year of operation (SY2027-28), the school will enroll a maximum of 150 students in grades 6, 7, and 9; scaling to 630 students in grades 6 through 12 at full build-out capacity.⁶
2. Commission staff requested from MNPS the historical trends of projected ADM for the current school year and the actual ADM for three preceding school years. The table below includes actual ADM by year, the MNPS charter school enrollment, the district's projected student growth per year, the actual student growth seen, and the actual percentage growth from the previous year.

Table 1. Historical Average Daily Membership ("ADM") and System Growth⁷

	Actual ADM	MNPS Charter Enrollment⁸	Projected Student Growth	Actual Student Growth	% Growth From Previous Year
SY26-27 (Projected)	78,026	11,969 (15.3%)	2,304	2,304	3.04%
SY 25-26	75,722	12,527 (16.5%)	64	-1,986	-2.56%
SY 24-25	77,708	12,690 (16.3%)	-27	314	0.41%
SY 23-24	77,394	13,283 (17.2%)	-178	203	0.26%

⁶ Amended Application, pg. 20

⁷ All data provided by Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools in response to the Commission's August 12, 2026 request for information.

⁸ Charter Fiscal Impact Summary, pg. 4. The included percentages are based on staff calculation of MNPS Charter Enrollment to Actual ADM.

	Actual ADM	MNPS Charter Enrollment ⁸	Projected Student Growth	Actual Student Growth	% Growth From Previous Year
SY 22-23	77,191	13,088 (17.0%)	344	344	0.45%

3. In MNPS's analysis, the district identified twenty-one schools that would see enrollment decreases because of the opening of NSE.

Table 2. Projected Decrease in ADM Resulting from the Opening of NSE

Impacted School	ADM (SY25-26)	Projected Seats Lost (Year 1)	Projected % ADM Lost (Year 1)	Projected Seats Lost (Build Out)	Projected % ADM Lost (Build Out)
District Schools					
William Henry Oliver MS	395.9	20	5.1%	60	15.2%
Thurgood Marshall MS	523.4	10	1.9%	30	5.7%
McMurray MS	511.0	10	2.0%	25	4.9%
Antioch MS	622.0	10	1.6%	25	4.0%
John F. Kennedy MS	809.9	5	0.6%	10	1.2%
Apollo MS	660.3	5	0.8%	10	1.5%
Antioch HS	1,825.2	5	0.3%	40	2.2%
Cane Ridge HS	1,766.7	5	0.3%	40	2.3%
John Overton HS	1,787.3	5	0.3%	30	1.7%
Glenclyff HS	867.4	0	0.0%	20	2.3%
Hillsboro HS	1,170.6	0	0.0%	10	0.9%
MNPS Charter Schools					
Valor Voyager Academy	520.6	5	1.0%	10	1.9%
Intrepid CP	816.0	5	0.6%	30	3.7%
LEAD Southeast	785.0	5	0.6%	30	3.8%
Valor Flagship Academy	1,427.9	5	0.4%	25	1.8%
Commission Schools					
Nashville Collegiate Prep	1,059.4	10	0.9%	30	2.8%
KIPP Antioch Global MS	200.9	5	2.5%	10	5.0%
KIPP Antioch College Prep MS	523.4	5	1.0%	10	1.9%

Impacted School	ADM (SY25-26)	Projected Seats Lost (Year 1)	Projected % ADM Lost (Year 1)	Projected Seats Lost (Build Out)	Projected % ADM Lost (Build Out)
KA @ The Crossings	335.1	5	1.5%	30	9.0%
KIPP Antioch Global HS	373.2	5	1.3%	30	8.0%
Nurses Middle College	123.6	0	—	10	8.1%
Other MS	—	15	—	50	—
Other HS	—	10	—	65	—
Total		150		630	

- The largest projected Year 1 impact to any district-operated school is approximately 5.1% of ADM. However, most identified schools are projected to experience enrollment shifts of less than 2%, and several are projected to experience enrollment shifts below 1%.
- MNPS estimated that the total fiscal impact during Year 1 of Nashville School of Excellence's operations would be \$2,184,849, growing to \$8,979,510 at full build-out. This amount is based on the number of projected students multiplied by the estimated per-pupil allocation ("PPA").
- In its analysis, MNPS localizes the substantial negative fiscal impact argument to the twenty-one identified schools. The district's calculation applies proportional shares based on impacted schools' ADM. These calculations and impacted schools reflect a mix of traditional district schools, district-authorized charter schools, and Commission-authorized charter schools. This data is reflected in Table 3.

Table 3. Projected Fiscal Impact at Year 1 and at Full Build-Out

Impacted School	Per Pupil Allocation	Fiscal Impact (Year 1)	Fiscal Impact (Build Out)
District Schools			
William Henry Oliver MS	\$16,646	\$332,916	\$998,748
Thurgood Marshall MS	\$17,584	\$175,838	\$527,515
McMurray MS	\$18,215	\$182,153	\$455,383
Antioch MS	\$17,977	\$179,769	\$449,422
John F. Kennedy MS	\$21,167	\$105,836	\$211,672
Apollo MS	\$18,147	\$90,734	\$181,467
Antioch HS	\$17,703	\$88,513	\$708,102

Impacted School	Per Pupil Allocation	Fiscal Impact (Year 1)	Fiscal Impact (Build Out)
Cane Ridge HS	\$17,564	\$87,820	\$702,562
John Overton HS	\$17,374	\$86,872	\$521,232
Glenclyff HS	\$18,384	\$0	\$367,675
Hillsboro HS	\$15,836	\$0	\$158,358
MNPS Charter Schools			
Valor Voyager Academy	\$16,309	\$81,545	\$163,090
Intrepid CP	\$17,009	\$85,046	\$510,277
LEAD Southeast	\$17,365	\$86,824	\$520,942
Valor Flagship Academy	\$16,073	\$80,365	\$401,826
Commission Schools			
Nashville Collegiate Prep	\$17,586	\$175,859	\$527,577
KIPP Antioch Global MS	\$17,507	\$87,533	\$175,067
KIPP Antioch College Prep MS	\$16,614	\$83,068	\$166,136
KA @ The Crossings	\$17,949	\$89,745	\$538,470
KIPP Antioch Global HS	\$16,882	\$84,412	\$506,473
Nurses Middle College	\$18,752	\$0	\$187,516
Other MS	—	—	—
Other HS	—	—	—
Total		\$2,184,849	\$8,979,510

7. For the traditional district schools, MNPS's calculation localizes all fiscal impact to the individual schools. However, MNPS's documentation and testimony state that approximately 40% of the per-pupil allocation stays at the central/district office level. These schools, through the district's School-Based Budgeting model, receive approximately 60% of the per-pupil allocation.
8. MNPS stated that fixed costs remain at the central office and school level even if 150 students leave the system.
9. MNPS's budget already accounted for the revenue allocated to its district-authorized charter schools and Commission-authorized public charter schools. Because charter school enrollment is already reflected in the district's enrollment projections and funding allocations, including district-authorized and Commission-authorized charter schools within the projected impact calculations makes it more difficult to isolate the direct fiscal effect for MNPS attributable to NSE.

ANALYSIS

After an in-depth analysis, the evidence presented by MNPS does not establish that approving Nashville School of Excellence's amended application would have a substantial negative fiscal impact on the LEA, such that authorization would be contrary to the best interests of students, the LEA, or the community. Therefore, I cannot conclude that MNPS has met its burden of proof under Commission Rule 1185-01-01-.01(4) and T.C.A. § 49-13-108(c).

The crux of the MNPS argument rests on the statutory requirement that districts transfer state and local allocations to a charter school, and the opening and operations of Nashville School of Excellence in Year 1 would result in a shifting of approximately \$2,184,849 in per-pupil funding, growing to \$8,979,510 at full build-out. For context, the Year 1 projected fiscal impact represents approximately 0.15%⁹ of the district's annual operating budget in Year 1, and the Year 1 enrollment of 150 represents 0.19% of the district's total enrollment for SY27-28. There is no evidence in the record establishing what percentage of the district's overall operating budget would be affected at full build-out, limiting the ability to assess whether the projected impact is truly substantial.

In analyzing NSE's fiscal impact, MNPS calculates the district's fiscal impact by multiplying the estimated student enrollment decline for each selected school by its estimated per-pupil allocation. The district's argument relies on the premise that projected enrollment shifts at identified schools are sufficient to establish a substantial negative fiscal impact. Additionally, the district stated that opening NSE would continue to dilute available resources for schools, despite overall district enrollment in MNPS remaining stable at roughly 77,000 students, as shown in Table 1.

The district's analysis leaves several relevant questions unanswered. First, the district failed to present evidence demonstrating that, due to the opening of NSE, the impact would be beyond any enrollment fluctuations within the district. 2024-25 to 2025-26 ADM declined by 1,986 students. NSE's Year 1 enrollment is only 150. Even assuming all Year 1 NSE students originated from MNPS, the projected enrollment effect would remain substantially smaller than enrollment fluctuations the district has previously experienced. Additionally, MNPS's documents project 3% growth in student enrollment for SY26-27. Historical enrollment figures demonstrate that MNPS has experienced comparable enrollment fluctuations over time.

Furthermore, the district's modeling relies on broad community-level impacts and incorporates other charter options, without clearly articulating how those shifts directly affect

⁹ MNPS Fiscal Year 2026-27 Operating Budget, June 23, 2026, pg. 2.

the LEA budget or traditional school operations under the School-Based Budgeting (“SBB”) model. The district assumes that the total Tennessee Investment Student Achievement (“TISA”) amount contained in Table 3 represents a direct reduction to individual school budgets, yet district documentation and public hearing statements clarify that these figures do not reflect the actual amounts individual schools might lose. On average, only a portion of total TISA funding is distributed directly to schools through Student-Based Budgeting, with the remainder invested centrally. MNPS’s fiscal impact calculations did not distinguish between the portion of funding distributed through School-Based Budgeting and the portion retained for district-level expenditures. Based on district testimony regarding SBB allocations, the projected school-level impact may be lower than the gross per-pupil allocation figures presented in the district’s analysis. However, MNPS did not calculate an actual projected fiscal impact on schools because the district used the full per-pupil allocation in its evidence.

To support the Commission’s analysis of the evidence, Commission staff applied the district’s testimony to the Year 1 fiscal impact figures provided by the district. This calculation reduces the impact on a school’s revenue by 40%, aligning with how MNPS’s per-pupil funding is distributed through School-Based Budgeting.

Table 4 Estimated School-Level Fiscal Impact Based on School-Based Budgeting Allocation

Impacted District School (Non-Charters)	Fiscal Impact (Year 1) Full PPA	SBB Revenue Amount (60% of PPA)
William Henry Oliver MS	\$332,916	\$199,750
Thurgood Marshall MS	\$175,838	\$105,503
McMurray MS	\$182,153	\$109,292
Antioch MS	\$179,769	\$107,861
John F. Kennedy MS	\$105,836	\$63,502
Apollo MS	\$90,734	\$54,440
Antioch HS	\$88,513	\$53,108
Cane Ridge HS	\$87,820	\$52,692
John Overton HS	\$86,872	\$52,123
Glencliff HS	\$0	\$0
Hillsboro HS	\$0	\$0
Total	\$1,330,451	\$798,271

Based on MNPS’s testimony that approximately 60% of TISA funding is distributed through School-Based Budgeting, the projected school-level impact shown in Table 4 would be approximately \$798,271 across eleven schools. MNPS does not present evidence that this reduced amount has a substantial negative fiscal impact on the schools. While MNPS asserts

that certain costs are fixed, the district did not quantify those expenditures or demonstrate how they translate into a substantial negative fiscal impact attributable to NSE. While the district attempts to localize the impact of opening a charter school to specific schools, the evidence presented does not establish that the projected fiscal effect is a substantial negative fiscal impact on the district.

The Commission also considered whether projected impacts on individual schools demonstrate a substantial negative fiscal impact on the LEA. While the potential impact on individual schools is acknowledged, evidence demonstrating a substantial negative fiscal impact for a district serving approximately 77,000 students cannot be limited to impacts at one or more schools. The statutory question is whether the district has demonstrated a substantial negative fiscal impact on the LEA. Moreover, the district's full build-out projections assume the school reaches maximum enrollment and that current fiscal and enrollment conditions remain unchanged throughout the projection period. Table 5 reflects a steady increase in MNPS's total per-pupil allocation, which is a combination of state and local funding, over recent years.

Table 5. Total Per Pupil Allocation¹⁰

	Total State and Local TISA Revenue
SY2026-27 (Projected)	\$17,432
SY2025-26*	\$17,356
SY2024-25	\$15,307
SY2023-24	\$14,640

*awaiting final true up.

In the aggregate, MNPS has not provided rigorous, direct evidence to meet the statutory burden of proving a substantial negative fiscal impact. The Tennessee legislature uses the term “substantial, negative fiscal impact” but does not define those terms in the statute. Where keywords are not defined, words are given their usual and accepted meaning. Substantial is defined as considerable in quantity; significantly great.¹¹ Based on the plain language definition, to meet the bar of being considered substantially negative, the fiscal impact of opening a charter school must rise above and beyond normal systemic fluctuations.

The district also argues that additional charter schools affect the broader public-school ecosystem. However, that consideration is distinct from the statutory requirement that the

¹⁰ Tennessee Department of Education Payments to the Charter Commission

¹¹ Substantial, Merriam-Webster Dictionary, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/substantial> (last visited Sept. 29. 2026).

district establish a substantial negative fiscal impact. The Commission, as an appellate body, regularly analyzes the impact on the surrounding community when acting on a new start application, a renewal application, or a revocation. The Commission is cognizant that its decisions, as with all authorizers' decisions, impact students, families, and schools in the community.

However, that analysis is separate from the one required to prove a substantial negative fiscal impact in accordance with the statute. Because the district has historically managed normal enrollment shifts and benefits from broader funding growth, the evidence provided by MNPS does not substantiate a finding that the approval of Nashville School of Excellence will cause a substantial negative fiscal impact such that authorization would be contrary to the best interests of students, the LEA, or the community.

District Denial of Initial Application

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

Name	Title
Cordarrell Cobb	Resource Strategy Coordinator
Ryan Latimer	Director of Boundary Planning and Enrollment Forecasting
Casey Megow	Executive Director of Facility Maintenance and Construction
Dr. Sudhir Sinha	Data Coach
Ken Stark	Executive Officer of Operations
Dr. Bill Warren	External Reviewer
Dr. David Williams	Deputy Chief of Academics

The Nashville School of Excellence initial application received the following ratings from the MNPS Review Committee:

Sections	Ratings
Educational Program Design and Capacity	Partially Meets Standard
Operations Plan and Capacity	Partially Meets Standard
Budget and Finance	Partially Meets Standard
Addenda	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 28, 2026. The MNPS Board of Education voted to deny the initial application of Nashville School of Excellence.

District Denial of Amended Application

The Review Committee assembled by MNPS to review and score the Nashville School of Excellence amended application mirrored that of the review committee that reviewed the initial application. 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
Educational Program Design and Capacity	Partially Meets Standard
Operations Plan and Capacity	Partially Meets Standard
Budget and Finance	Partially Meets Standard
Addenda	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 28, 2026. At the July 28, 2026, board meeting, the MNPS Board of Education voted to deny the amended application of Nashville School of Excellence

Commission Review Committee's Evaluation of the Application

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

Name	Title
Adam Aberman	External Consultant
Beth Elpers	Commission Staff
Darlene Flores	External Consultant
Autumn Hillis	External Consultant
Maggie Lund	Commission Staff

The Commission's Review Committee conducted an initial review and scoring of the Nashville School of Excellence 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 Nashville School of Excellence application was as follows:

Sections	Ratings
Educational Program Design and Capacity	Partially Meets Standard

Sections	Ratings
Operations Plan and Capacity	Meets Standard
Budget and Finance	Meets Standard
Addenda	Partially Meets Standard

The Review Committee recommends denial of the amended application for Nashville School of Excellence because, while the applicant met the standards for Operational Plan and Capacity and Budget and Finance, it did not provide sufficient evidence in the Educational Program Design and Capacity and Addenda sections to demonstrate the community need, academic capacity, governance oversight, and academic track record necessary to satisfy the criteria of the State Board's rubric.

The applicant's Educational Program Design and Capacity partially meets the standard. While the amended application proposes a compliant academic model supported by high-quality, state-approved instructional materials and well-defined school schedules, the Review Committee identified significant concerns regarding demonstrated community need, alignment to the proposed student population, and the organization's capacity to successfully implement the model in South Nashville. The applicant did not sufficiently demonstrate that the interest generated through community outreach translates into actual enrollment demand within a geographic area already served by several traditional public and charter school options, including schools offering similar science, technology, engineering, and mathematic ("STEM")-focused programming. Additionally, the application did not provide a comprehensive analysis of existing seat availability or unmet need within the Nolensville Pike corridor, relying instead on general expressions of interest and assumptions regarding student mobility from existing schools. Although the applicant identified the area's substantial Kurdish and multilingual populations as a primary focus of the proposed school, the staffing model does not adequately account for the anticipated English learner population, raising concerns regarding compliance and service delivery. Further, network-level English learner and special education supports identified as critical components of the model are not funded during the school's initial year of operation, placing additional responsibilities on instructional staff and raising questions about the fidelity of intervention, coaching, and evaluation systems. The Review Committee also found that the founding team and governing board did not sufficiently demonstrate the capacity to provide effective academic oversight, as board members were unable to clearly articulate how academic performance is monitored across the network or how the board responds to inconsistent academic outcomes within existing Memphis campuses.

The applicant's Operations Plan and Capacity meets the standard. The application presents a clear governance structure, competitive staffing plan, viable facility strategy, and

organizational systems aligned with state and federal requirements. The proposed board structure meets minimum governance expectations through the use of standing committees, representation from the Nashville community, and plans to add a local parent representative. The Review Committee expressed concerns regarding the board's relatively infrequent meeting schedule and limited reflection on academic performance data; however, these concerns were outweighed by the strength of the overall operational framework. The facility plan is supported by an executed Letter of Intent, a realistic renovation timeline, and partnerships with experienced development professionals. In addition, the applicant demonstrated prior success in managing comparable facility projects and operational functions within its existing network. Taken together, the committee determined that the organization possesses the operational infrastructure necessary to support the proposed school.

The applicant's Budget and Finance section meets the standard. The application demonstrates organizational financial stability and presents a conservative, sustainable multi-year financial plan. The Read Foundation maintains substantial financial reserves, has received clean independent audit results, and benefits from diversified revenue sources, including federal startup funding and philanthropic support. Budget assumptions are reasonable, align with anticipated TISA revenues, and reflect appropriate planning for student enrollment and staffing. The applicant also demonstrated sound financial management practices and internal controls through established financial systems and procedures. Furthermore, contingency planning included in the application indicates that the proposed school would remain financially viable under lower-than-projected enrollment scenarios.

The applicant's Addenda partially meets the standard. Although the network has established a clear organizational structure, a defined allocation of responsibilities, and a measured growth strategy, the Review Committee determined that the academic performance of the existing Memphis schools does not provide sufficient evidence to support replication. State accountability data reflect ongoing challenges across the network in student achievement, academic growth, proficiency rates, and postsecondary readiness outcomes at both the elementary and secondary levels. Ready Graduate rates and ACT performance remain below district and state averages, and teacher retention challenges continue to persist. During the capacity interview, the applicant did not demonstrate a comprehensive, system-wide strategy for addressing these performance gaps, instead attributing academic declines largely to isolated staffing changes. The Committee also found limited evidence that the governing board exercises meaningful oversight of academic results or systematically holds school leadership accountable for performance outcomes. Additionally, the proposed expansion model places significant academic and operational responsibility on the Nashville school leader while providing limited evidence that the network's core academic systems have consistently produced strong

outcomes across existing campuses. Given the network's mixed academic results, the lack of clearly articulated corrective actions, and concerns regarding the capacity to sustain and replicate strong academic performance, the Committee concluded that Addenda A and B partially meet the standard.

For the aforementioned reasons, the Review Committee found that the sponsor did not meet or exceed the standard for approval based on the state board's scoring rubric.

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

Public Hearing

Pursuant to statute¹² and Commission Policy 2.000, a public hearing chaired by the Executive Director was held on September 25, 2026. Representatives from Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools at the public hearing focused on the quality of the application review process, the support that was provided to the applicant throughout the review process, and the reasons for denial of the application. Representatives from MNPS indicated that the amended application from the Nashville School of Excellence was denied due to ongoing concerns about the educational program, organizational and governance capacity, financial sustainability, and the applicant's ability to successfully replicate its model in Nashville. MNPS explained that trained review team members conducted an independent review of the amended application using the State Board rubric before participating in a consensus process that informed the recommendation presented to the local board. The district stated that the MNPS Board of Education considered the application, review team findings, fiscal impact analysis, and public deliberations before voting unanimously to deny the amended application.

The district stated that the application continued to receive ratings of "Partially Meets Standard" in Educational Program Design and Capacity, Operations Plan and Capacity, Budget and Finance, and Addenda. MNPS cited concerns related to community demand, instructional implementation, leadership capacity, governance structures, staffing and operational planning, and financial assumptions. The district also expressed concerns regarding the academic outcomes of existing network schools and the applicant's capacity to successfully replicate its model in Nashville. In addition to the application findings, MNPS discussed its determination that approval would result in a substantial negative fiscal impact. The district estimated a fiscal impact of approximately \$2.2 million in Year 1 and approximately \$9 million at full enrollment.

¹² T.C.A. § 49-13-108.

MNPS also asserted that enrollment shifts would affect both district-operated and charter schools within the proposed service area.

In the sponsor's opening statement, representatives from Nashville School of Excellence discussed the history and performance of the Read Foundation network, highlighting the organization's growth since opening its first Memphis campus in 2010. NSE reported that the network currently operates four schools serving approximately 2,000 students and highlighted academic recognitions, STEM designations, graduation rates, and enrollment growth across its campuses. The applicant emphasized its experience serving diverse student populations, including English learners and students with disabilities. NSE described a proposed school model focused on STEM education, college and career readiness, industry certifications, and student support services. Representatives explained that students would have access to middle and high school STEM and career pathways designed to prepare students for postsecondary opportunities and employment. The applicant also discussed the organizational structure that would support the proposed school, including executive leadership, central office staff, and governing board oversight. Representatives highlighted parent interest surveys, support letters from community organizations, public outreach efforts, and relationships with community partners. NSE stated that Nashville's continued population growth, expanding workforce opportunities, and family interest supported the proposed expansion into the Nashville market.

During questioning by the Commission, district representatives were asked about the review process, the amended application findings, governance concerns, financial assumptions, and the district's substantial negative fiscal impact determination. MNPS explained that review team members were selected based on expertise in academics, operations, and finance, received training on the State Board rubric, and participated in independent reviews followed by a consensus process. The district stated that several deficiencies identified during the initial review remained largely unaddressed in the amended application, particularly those related to community engagement, governance, organizational capacity, and replication planning. District representatives also discussed concerns regarding the applicant's proposed governance structure, noting that the amended application did not sufficiently demonstrate a strong local board presence in Nashville. MNPS further explained that concerns about financial sustainability stemmed from assumptions about transportation, student fee revenue, and other operational costs that reviewers believed were not adequately supported. Regarding fiscal impact, the district stated that its projections were based on historical enrollment patterns, proposed location data, and anticipated enrollment shifts from surrounding district and charter schools. District representatives further explained that these projected enrollment shifts would reduce per-pupil funding available to affected schools and the district, resulting in a fiscal impact that MNPS concluded met the statutory threshold for a substantial negative fiscal impact.

determination.

The Commission then questioned the sponsor regarding the academic performance of existing schools within the network, organizational capacity to expand into Nashville, community demand, governance, and plans for serving special student populations. Much of the discussion centered on recent academic outcomes within the Read Foundation network and whether the organization's performance history demonstrated readiness to replicate its model in a new market. The sponsor was asked to address areas of academic underperformance identified by MNPS and the Commission and explain why expansion was appropriate at this time. In response, NSE acknowledged that some schools within the network had experienced academic challenges but emphasized that the organization has a long history of positive student outcomes, including strong graduation rates, TVAAS growth outcomes, college acceptance rates, and successful service to diverse student populations. The sponsor described steps taken to address recent areas of concern, including leadership changes, increased instructional supports, monitoring systems, and targeted improvement efforts. The sponsor then explained that the decision to replicate in Nashville was driven by community interest, population growth, workforce needs, and the organization's assessment of its own readiness to replicate. NSE stated that it had conducted outreach in the Nashville area, engaged with families and community stakeholders, reviewed market conditions, and determined there was demand for an additional STEM-focused educational option. Finally, the Commission questioned the sponsor about plans to serve English learners and students with disabilities. NSE stated that the network has extensive experience serving both student groups and that staffing and support services would be adjusted based on enrollment needs. The sponsor maintained that its organizational experience, operational infrastructure, and track record of operating multiple Memphis schools positioned it to successfully open and operate the proposed Nashville campus.

The public hearing concluded with closing statements by both parties and the receipt of twelve in-person comments, with two speaking in support of MNPS and ten speaking in support of Nashville School of Excellence. The Commission also accepted written comments, and the Commission received 239 written comments, with zero writing in support of MNPS and 239 writing in support of Nashville School of Excellence.

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 State Board of Education’s application-scoring rubric and,” whether “approval of the application is in

the best interests of the students, LEA, or community.”¹³ 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 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 LEA, 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 during the capacity interview to support its findings. For the reasons explained in the report, I agree that the Nashville School of Excellence amended application did not rise to the level of meeting or exceeding the standards required for approval.

I agree with the review committee that the application partially meets the standard for approval. The sponsor has significant experience in delivering its academic model, as evidenced by the longstanding network of schools. There is no doubt that the network’s Memphis schools demonstrate strong enrollment and that families continue to choose the MSE network schools in Memphis. What remains unclear is how the network responds to its academic data. The Commission seeks to approve only high-quality applications that have demonstrated a capacity for successful implementation. The Read Foundation operates four campuses in Memphis, Tennessee, and through this application seeks to replicate and expand into Nashville. In accordance with the State Board of Education’s scoring rubric, analysis of this application shall include evaluation of the academic results of the existing campuses. Table 6 below outlines the available state report card data. In the 2024-2025 school year, all network schools received letter grades of C and D. In the 2023-24 school year, one network school received an F and received a Targeted Support and Intervention designation from the Tennessee Department of Education. If these schools were authorized by the Commission, some of the network schools would likely be placed under academic intervention with the Commission.

¹³ T.C.A. § 49-13-108.

Table 6. Historical Read Foundation Network State Report Card Data

Name	Grades Served	SY22-23 Letter Grade	SY23-24 Letter Grade	SY24-25 Letter Grade	SY22-23 Composite TVAAS	SY23-24 Composite TVAAS	SY24-25 Composite TVAAS
MSE ¹⁴ Elementary (8310)	K-5	C	F	D	5	1	3
MSE Elementary Cordova (8303)	K-5	D	D	C	1	1	4
MSE (8252)	6-12	C	C	C	5	4	3
MSE Cordova (8304)	6-12	C	C	D	4	5	1

The network's Ready Graduate accountability data also fell below Memphis-Shelby County Schools and the state. Tennessee Department of Education accountability data indicates that the Ready Graduate rate at Memphis School of Excellence was 32.9%, significantly below the Memphis-Shelby County Schools district average of 47.4% and the state average of 53.1%. Additionally, the network acknowledged that its ACT average is not where they want it to be. While the sponsor rightfully highlighted its high graduation and college acceptance rates, there is significant work to be done by the network in its high schools to improve their accountability data. It is concerning that this would be the grade band that the school plans to open in Nashville.

Looking at the overall proficiency rates of the network's schools relative to Memphis-Shelby County Schools in Tables 7 and 8 below, the network shows mixed results. While there are four success rates in which the network's schools outperform the district, there are eight in which they fall below the district's results. While perfection is a near impossibility, I can only recommend a network for expansion when there is clear and compelling data of strong academic results within the existing schools. There is currently insufficient evidence to demonstrate the network's academic results merit expansion.

¹⁴ Memphis School of Excellence

Table 7. SY24-25 Success Rate in English Language Arts

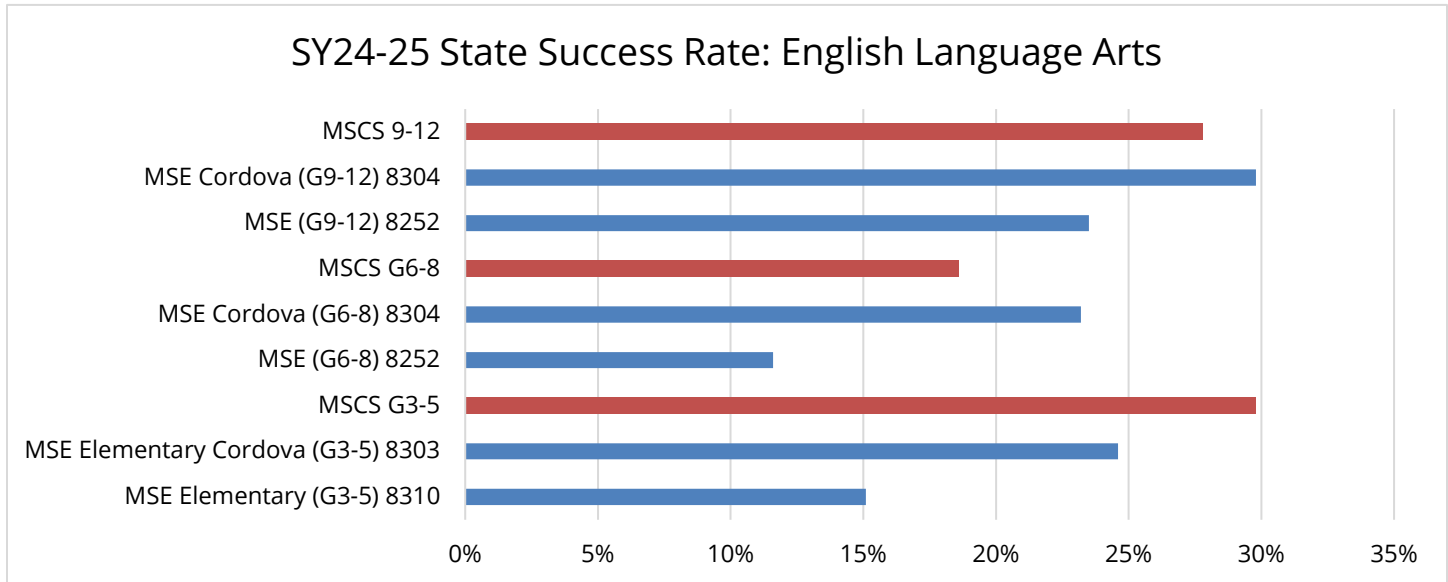
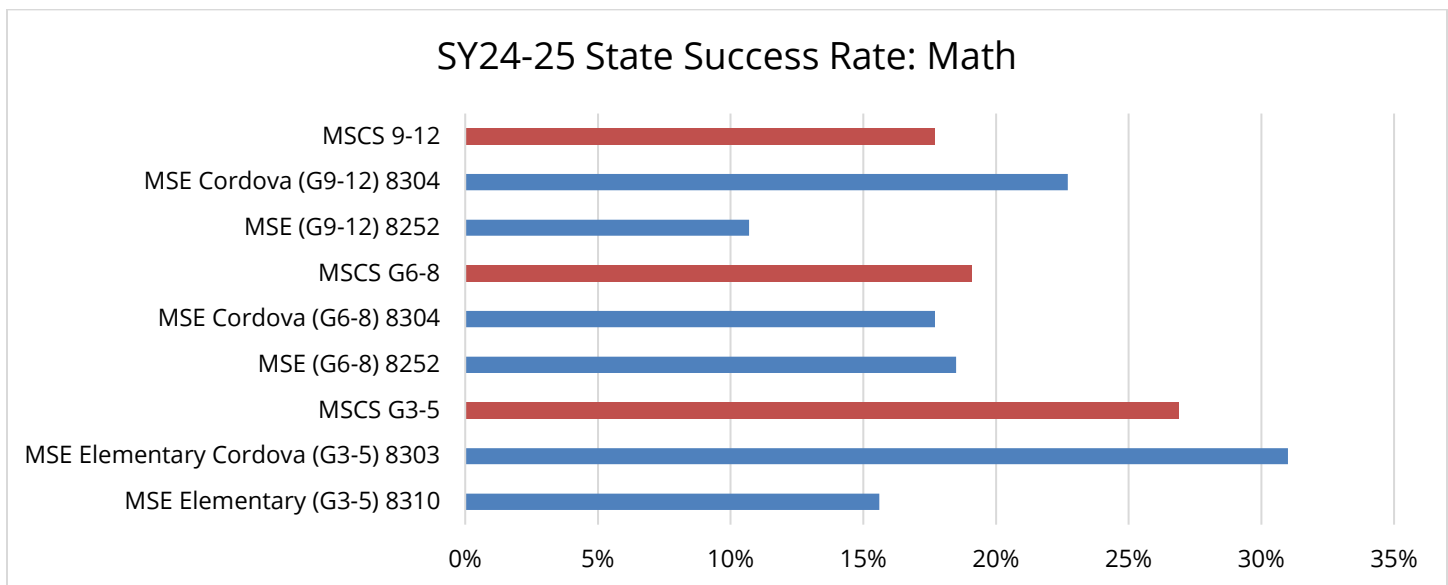


Table 8. SY24-25 Success Rate in Math



I believe that the sponsor has an intentional plan for the community it seeks to serve. The sponsor has established relationships with its target community, including local businesses, and this community engagement is further evidenced by the letters of support, parent interest forms, and public comments received as part of this appeal. What is missing from the application is how the need for Nashville School of Excellence in the intended location was assessed, or whether the intended location lacks quality seats. When questioned during the public hearing, the sponsor shared that the board made the decision to expand after hearing from various Nashville organizations and centers and assessing its capacity to do so. The explanation does not address the need for an additional option at the proposed location. The

sponsor acknowledges that many traditional and charter schools exist in the intended area. It also acknowledges that schools in the area already provide STEM-focused academic programs. The sponsor states that it will meet its enrollment goals because families will leave waitlists at other charter schools to enroll in NSE. There is simply no evidence that this will occur. The sponsor failed to address how it would provide a unique model for these areas of Nashville, such that families would be drawn away from the current available options.

I also share in the Review Committee's concerns about the sponsor's plan for serving special populations, particularly the English learner population. The sponsor's projected EL population of 25% is significantly lower than the average EL demographic of its intended location. The data indicate that schools in the intended area have more than double the percentage of EL students. While I appreciate the school's plan to adjust staffing, my concern is whether the sponsor's staffing plans for special populations reflect the location they intend to serve and fully align with the anticipated student demographics. Enrolling 50% to 60% of their student body as English learners is likely, and this would quickly overwhelm the proposed staffing plan. Additionally, given the persistent difficulty with hiring EL-endorsed teachers, there remain concerns about whether the school could recruit to meet staffing requirements.

The sponsor has strengthened its governing board to ensure a stronger Nashville presence and has a plan to select a local parent representative, if approved. I also commend the sponsor's governing board for its proven experience in running charter schools in Memphis. However, there is little evidence that the current governance model both supports improving academic results at the current schools and expanding into a new geographic region. During the capacity interview, the board representative stated that the academic results were the executive director's responsibility and that the board took little ownership of the network's data. Since the governing board is the legal entity that the Commission would contract with, it is critical that the governing board understands what it will be held accountable for.

Moreover, the network is based primarily in Memphis, and, as a result, the named school leader responsible for daily operations becomes even more important on day one. The board has named an experienced leader for the Nashville School of Excellence, and the network staff has planned regular visits to Nashville. However, gaps remain regarding both the school leader's ability to successfully fulfill all outlined responsibilities and the network's ability to bolster the academic performance of Memphis schools and to open a new, geographically distant school.

I have confidence in the sponsor's facility plan, as it is supported by a letter of intent from the property owner of its selected location in addition to having completed the due diligence related to renovations and timelines. I believe that if approved, the sponsor will have its permanent facility in its preferred location. I also believe the sponsor can fund any necessary

renovations, as the overall financial plan meets the State Board of Education's scoring rubric for approval.

As an expanding school and/or network, Nashville School of Excellence was the only applicant in the 2026 new start cycle to secure the Charter Schools Program ("CSP") grant because it is considered an expansion. In addition to the CSP grant, the sponsor has secured or has commitments from other philanthropic services and has strong financial support from the Read Foundation. As an established operator, the sponsor understands Tennessee's funding formulas and has therefore developed a realistic and viable budget for Nashville School of Excellence's initial operating years. The sponsor's financial plan makes reasonable assumptions that account for unanticipated expenditures or fluctuating enrollment, should they occur.

Overall, the sponsor's operations and financial plans are strong and well-positioned to support a new school if the application is approved. Despite the strong operational and financial plans, I cannot recommend approval of the Nashville School of Excellence application. One of the most important considerations in approving a charter application is the sponsor's educational plan and capacity. For many applicants, academic evaluation is speculative. However, Nashville School of Excellence is sponsored by an established entity. There is a long-established network of schools based in Memphis, Tennessee, with data that serve as indicators for the program that could be expected with replication and expansion into Nashville. I cannot recommend that the Commission approve into its portfolio an educational plan that has resulted in schools receiving a letter grade of C or D and low TVAAS composite scores. While I recognize the network's acknowledgment of the work needed at the high school level to improve academic performance, this is the proposed grade band for NSE. The network needs to increase and stabilize the network's performance prior to applying for replication. My hope is that the sponsor implements changes that lead to increased proficiency, growth, and outcomes for its students.

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.

Part of the Commission's responsibility as a statewide appellate authorizer includes considering the effects of its charter school application approvals on local educational ecosystems. The Commission understands and regularly discusses how opening a new school will affect the intended community. This discussion includes the availability and quality of current options, enrollment trends, and demonstrated demand. While this is not a specific indicator in statute or in the State Board of Education's scoring rubric, this is always a



consideration when evaluating the best interest of the students, the LEA, or the community.

For the reasons expounded on in this report, I recommend that the Commission deny the Nashville School of Excellence amended application.

CONCLUSION

For these reasons, and for the reasons stated in the Review Committee Recommendation Report attached hereto as **Exhibit A**, I do not believe that the decision to deny the amended application for Nashville School of Excellence was contrary to the best interests of the students, the LEA, or community. Therefore, I recommend that the Commission affirm the decision of the MNPS Board of Education to deny the amended application for Nashville School of Excellence.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Tess Stovall". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tess Stovall, Executive Director
Tennessee Public Charter School Commission

October 9, 2026

Date



EXHIBIT A:
Charter Application Review Committee Recommendation Report

October 9, 2026

School Name: Nashville School of Excellence

Sponsor: The Read Foundation

Proposed Location of School: Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools

Evaluation Team:

- Adam Aberman
- Beth Elpers
- Darlene Flores
- Autumn Hillis
- Maggie Lund



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,¹ 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

¹ All [Commission rules and policies](#) may be found on the [Commission's website](#).

four sections of the application: Educational Program Design and Capacity, Operations Plan and Capacity, Budget and Finance, and Addenda.

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 leadership 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, financial plans, and addenda.
2. **Summary of the Evaluation:** A brief summary of the overall recommendation for the application.
3. **Analysis of each section of the application:** An analysis of the major sections of the application and the capacity of the team to execute the plan as described in the application.
 - a. **Educational Program Design and Capacity:** School overview; school mission and model; anticipated student population; family and community engagement and support; school culture and discipline; curriculum and instruction; special populations; student assessment and evaluation; educational program capacity; and the capacity to implement the proposed plan.
 - b. **Operations Plan and Capacity:** Governance; staffing; facilities; transportation; health and safety; insurance; food service; start-up plan; operations capacity; and the capacity to implement the proposed plan.
 - c. **Budget and Finance:** planning and budget worksheet; operating budget; budget and finance capacity; and the capacity to implement the proposed plan.
 - d. **Addenda:** (a) supplemental questions for sponsors with past or present relationships to other charter schools, (b) supplemental questions for sponsors proposing to open a new school that will create a network or as part of an existing network/CMO.



The Commission's charter application Review Committee utilized the Tennessee State Board of Education's Charter School Application Scoring Rubric ("rubric"), which is used by all local boards of education when evaluating an application. The rubric states that authorizers should adopt the State Board of Education's ("SBE") Quality Authorizing Standards, which establishes rigorous decision-making criteria. Specifically, SBE Policy 6.111 states a "quality authorizer requires all applicants to present a clear and compelling mission, a quality educational program, a demonstration of community support, a solvent and sustainable budget and contingency financial plans, a clear demonstration of the effectiveness of the model for the target student population, effective governance and management structures and systems, founding team members demonstrating diverse and necessary capabilities in all phases of the school's development, and clear evidence of the applicant's capacity to execute its plan successfully. An application that merits a recommendation for approval should satisfy each of these criteria."²

Each individual question will be rated "Meets," "Partially Meets," or "Does Not Meet." The rubric provides guidance within each question to aid reviewers in determining the extent to which each response meets the standard. Each major subsection will then be assigned an overall rating of "Meets," "Partially Meets," or "Does Not Meet" by averaging the ratings for each individual question within the subsection. Section summaries will then be determined by averaging subsection ratings.³

² Tennessee State Board of Education Policy 6.111

³ Tennessee State Board of Education's Charter School Application Scoring Rubric, pg. 3

Summary of the Application

School Name: Nashville School of Excellence

Sponsor: The Read Foundation

Proposed Location of School: Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools

Mission: To empower each student to succeed in college and their career by mastering a rigorous science, technology, engineering, and mathematics ("STEM") curriculum; experiencing a safe, welcoming, and inclusive environment; receiving individual academic, social, and emotional support; and working alongside families and community partners.⁴

Number of Schools Currently in Operation by Sponsor: The sponsor currently has four operating charter schools authorized by Memphis-Shelby County Schools.

Proposed Enrollment:⁵

Grade Level	Year 1: 2027-2028	Year 2: 2028-2029	Year 3: 2029-2030	Year 4: 2030-2031	Year 5: 2031-2032	At Capacity:
6	50	50	75	75	90	90
7	50	50	75	75	90	90
8	0	50	50	75	90	90
9	50	50	50	50	75	90
10	0	50	50	50	50	90
11	0	0	50	50	50	90
12	0	0	0	50	50	90
Totals	150	250	350	425	495	630

Brief Description of the Application

The sponsor, The Read Foundation, is proposing to open a charter school in Davidson County and serve students in sixth through twelfth grade. The applicant, Nashville School of Excellence ("NSE"), is a new-start school and would be the fifth school for the sponsor. The school intends to operate in the Nolensville Pike area of Davidson County to provide a rigorous STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) curriculum and a welcoming and inclusive environment to promote students' post-secondary success. The school proposes to offer

⁴ Nashville School of Excellence Amended Application, pg. 7

⁵ Nashville School of Excellence Amended Application, pg. 22



individualized support and provide an opportunity for students in the Nolensville Pike area with an additional school option.

The application states that the proposed school will be governed by the Read Foundation. In Year 0, Nashville School of Excellence has budgeted \$308,333 from the Charter Schools Program ("CSP") grant and The Read Foundation and projects \$210,889 in expenses for the school. In Year 1, Nashville School of Excellence projects \$3,404,642 in revenue and \$3,282,324 in expenses, resulting in a balance of \$122,318. By Year 5, the school projects to have \$8,399,819 in revenue and \$7,628,478 in expenses, resulting in a positive ending fund balance of \$1,488,156.⁶ The school anticipates that 34% of the student population will qualify as economically disadvantaged, 10% of the student population will be students with disabilities, and 25% of the student population will be English learners.⁷

⁶ Nashville School of Excellence Amended Budget

⁷ Nashville School of Excellence Amended Application, pg. 19

Summary of the Evaluation

The Review Committee recommends the denial of the amended application for Nashville School of Excellence because while the applicant met standards for Operations Plan and Capacity and Budget and Finance, the applicant failed to provide sufficient evidence in the Educational Program Design and Capacity and Addenda sections to demonstrate the application meets the required criteria of the rubric.

The applicant's Educational Program Design and Capacity partially meets the standard. Although the amended application offers a compliant academic model supported by high-quality, state-approved instructional materials and structured daily schedules, significant gaps remain regarding demonstrated community need, alignment to the target student population, and overall capacity to implement the model in South Nashville. The application does not sufficiently connect the community interest generated through outreach activities to concrete enrollment demand within a corridor already served by multiple traditional and charter schools, including operators with established STEM pathways. Furthermore, the applicant did not provide a clear analysis of actual seat availability or unmet demand in the Nolensville Pike area, relying instead on generalized interest forms and assumptions about families leaving existing charter options. Despite identifying the area's dense Kurdish and multilingual communities as central to the school's mission, the proposed staffing model significantly underestimates English learner ("EL") enrollment, creating immediate compliance challenges. Network-level EL and special education coordinators, identified as essential supports, are not funded in Year 1, and the school relies on core instructional staff to deliver tiered interventions, undermining the fidelity of coaching and evaluation structures. Finally, the founding team and governing board did not demonstrate strong academic oversight capacity. The board was unable to articulate how it evaluates academic performance across the network or responds to mixed academic outcomes in Memphis, raising concerns about its ability to prevent similar underperformance in Nashville.

The applicant's Operations Plan and Capacity meets the standard due to the applicant outlining a clear governance structure, competitive staffing strategies, viable facility plan, and organizational systems aligned with state requirements. The proposed governance structure satisfies minimum standards, with standing committees, Nashville representation, and a clear plan to add a local parent representative. Concerns exist regarding the board's quarterly meeting schedule and limited reflection on academic results; however, these concerns did not outweigh the strength of the operational systems presented. The facility plan is viable, supported by an executed letter of intent and experienced partners engaged for renovation, and the applicant has demonstrated the capacity to execute similar projects successfully. Overall, the operational plan is robust and backed by organizational infrastructure.

The Budget and Finance meets the standard as the applicant demonstrates strong organizational solvency and a conservative, sustainable multi-year budget. The Read Foundation’s significant reserves, clean independent audits, and diversified revenue streams, including CSP startup funds and philanthropic commitments, support readiness for launch. Budget assumptions are reasonable and aligned to expected Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement (“TISA”) funding streams, and the applicant provides clear evidence of internal controls through the use of PowerSchool Unified Administration systems. Contingency scenarios further demonstrate that the school can remain solvent if enrollment falls short.

Lastly, the Addenda partially meet the standard. While the network presents an operational structure with clear delineation of responsibilities and a manageable, slow-growth expansion model, the academic track record across its Memphis portfolio does not meet the bar for replication. Publicly available state accountability data show persistent challenges in academic achievement, Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (“TVAAS”) growth, proficiency rates, and postsecondary readiness across multiple campuses, including both secondary and elementary grade bands. Ready Graduate rates and ACT composite scores fall below district and state averages, and teacher retention challenges persist, with no clear, systemic strategies to address these gaps raised during the capacity interview. Leadership attributed declines primarily to isolated staffing changes rather than explaining comprehensive instructional or organizational responses, and the governing board did not demonstrate meaningful oversight of academic performance. Additionally, the cross-regional model places substantial early operational and academic responsibility on the Nashville principal without clear evidence that foundational academic systems have produced strong results elsewhere. Given these mixed and declining academic outcomes, insufficient articulation of corrective actions, and limited evidence of network-level capacity to sustain strong academic performance, the Committee concludes that Addenda A and B partially meet the standard.

Summary of Section Ratings

In accordance with the Tennessee State Board 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
Educational Program Design and Capacity	Partially Meets Standard

Sections	Ratings
Operations Plan and Capacity	Meets Standard
Budget and Finance	Meets Standard
Addenda	Partially Meets Standard

Analysis of the Educational Program Design and Capacity

Rating: Partially Meets Standard

Weaknesses Identified by the Committee

The applicant's Educational Program Design and Capacity partially meets the standard. Although the application articulates a structurally compliant academic model, critical deficiencies remain regarding the demonstrated need for the new school, the adequacy of specialized staffing, and the proposed school's educational program capacity. Under the State Board of Education's scoring rubric, an applicant must present clear evidence of the capacity to execute the academic plan successfully and demonstrate the effectiveness of the model for the target student population. Throughout the application and capacity interview, the applicant leaves gaps regarding how the model will be effectively adapted to South Nashville and how the plan presented within the application will avoid the persistent academic underperformance observed at the network's existing campuses.

A primary weakness lies not in the level of community outreach and support, but in the applicant's assessment of actual community need and its failure to connect community interest to concrete enrollment demand and program design. The applicant demonstrated grassroots engagement, securing thirty-three letters of support and 539 parent interest forms. However, the application fails to bridge the gap between general community interest and a verified local need for this specific educational model within an already crowded Nolensville Pike corridor. When asked for evidence that demonstrated community interest would translate into the Year 1 enrollment target of 150 students, the applicant offered general follow-up strategies and outreach with partner organizations rather than provide demonstrable proof that local families will leave existing quality options for NSE.

The target area is densely served by existing options, including traditional public schools and high-performing charter operators, some of which already provide established STEM pathways. Despite citing regional population growth and waitlists at other charter schools in the greater Southeast Nashville community, Valor Flagship and LEAD Southeast, the application provides no analysis of actual middle school or high school seat deficits in these clusters. During the capacity interview, when the Review Committee asked how leadership determined the corridor could sustain an additional charter school, the applicant stated that NSE would absorb families from other operators' waitlists. The applicant also stated that there are already multiple middle schools in the area with a STEM focus or a STEM designation, which is the academic model the school proposes to provide. There is little evidence within the application that this proposed model would meet an unmet programmatic need.

The Review Committee also identified critical concerns regarding the applicant's staffing and service delivery for special populations. The applicant projects an English learner enrollment of 25%, which is misaligned with the surrounding Nolensville Pike corridor where EL populations average approximately 43% and reach up to 71%. Given the applicant's explicit intent to serve the area's dense multilingual and Kurdish immigrant community, budgeting only one EL teacher in Year 1 across three separate grade levels creates an immediate compliance risk regarding state caseload requirements and mandated direct service minutes. Additionally, while network-level EL and special education coordinators are referenced throughout the narrative as essential to compliance and Individualized Learning Plan ("ILP") development, these roles are not funded in the Year 1 school budget. The plan also relies on the Dean of Academics and classroom teachers to deliver pull-out Response to Instruction and Intervention ("RTI²") interventions in Year 1, creating scheduling conflicts that compromise instructional coaching and teacher evaluation fidelity.

The school's educational program capacity is also a concern. As outlined within the State Board of Education scoring rubric, this section evaluates the founding team members' and board's experience and capacity and includes a gap analysis. While the identified principal for NSE has relevant experience, it is unclear whether the capacity of this position has been properly evaluated in the school's early years of operation. While the principal will be supported by the network, which will remain in Memphis, the principal has numerous outlined responsibilities during the pre-opening year and Year 1. Additionally, there was insufficient evidence that the board has the capacity to analyze academic performance gaps and act on them. The Review Committee asked the board questions during the capacity interview regarding the network's Memphis schools and the mixed academic performance over time. The board representative stated that they trusted the executive director to oversee the schools' academic performance; however, this is also a responsibility of the board. It is unclear how the board holds the executive director accountable for the academic performance of the network schools and how the board responds to the data to ensure the same underperformance does not occur in Nashville.

Strengths Identified by the Committee

The sponsor outlines a structured instructional framework within the application, anchored in an extended school day, research-backed instructional materials, and defined early postsecondary pathways. The daily schedule provides 7.25 hours of instructional time four days per week, incorporating ninety-minute daily double blocks in English language arts and mathematics. To protect core instructional time, the schedule has forty-five-minute daily blocks intended for enrichment, remediation, and tiered interventions. The curriculum is built on high-quality, state-approved Tier 1 materials, including Amplify ELA, Into Literature, i-Ready Math, Reveal Math, STEMscopes, and Gallopade, and is supported by established delivery models such

as the gradual release of responsibility and the 5E inquiry framework. For secondary grades, the model incorporates academic rigor through advanced placement (“AP”) course offerings, three specific information technology (“IT”) programs of study (Cybersecurity, Coding, and Web Design), and an executed dual enrollment memorandum of understanding with Motlow State Community College.

The written academic model is supported by a comprehensive student assessment design and an established positive behavior intervention system. The application outlines systematic student progress monitoring through biweekly Mastery Connect knowledge checks, tri-annual Northwest Evaluation Assessment (“NWEA”) Measure of Academic Performance (“MAP”) testing, and Aimsweb benchmarking, with assessment data intended to guide classroom grouping and tiered intervention adjustments. School culture is designed around positive behavioral interventions and supports (“PBIS”) incorporating the SOAR (Safe, Organized, Accountable, Respect) behavioral matrix, alongside restorative justice practices, tiered truancy prevention systems, and annual STEM project-based learning exhibitions.

Analysis of the Operations Plan and Capacity

Rating: Meets Standard

Strengths Identified by the Committee

The Operations Plan and Capacity meets the standard because the applicant has established a clear governance structure, a viable facility acquisition strategy, competitive personnel and staffing systems, and operational plans for transportation, health, safety, and school opening.

The proposed school will be governed by the Read Foundation Board of Directors, a seasoned governing body that has overseen public charter schools in Memphis since 2010. The board maintains active committees and has established an expansion committee to monitor pre-opening milestones and legal compliance for the proposed Nashville campus. The board currently includes two members residing in the Nashville area, and the applicant is committed to seating an elected Nashville parent representative within six months of opening pursuant to T.C.A. § 49-13-109, supplemented by a local advisory council. While the board's structure meets the minimum standard for approval, the strength of the school's governance is weakened by the governing board's response during the capacity interview. During the capacity interview, the governing board demonstrated limited ownership of academic performance at the network's Memphis schools. Additionally, the board meets only quarterly, raising concerns about its capacity to provide sufficient oversight as the network prepares to open a geographically distant location.

The operational staffing model differentiates academic leadership from daily school administration. The founding principal brings sixteen years of educational and administrative experience, including past leadership of high-performing secondary STEM schools, school turnaround, and fluency in Kurdish, a vital language in the Nolensville Pike community. The staffing structure incorporates a dedicated school-based business manager in Year 1 to manage local procurement, student records, and operational logistics. In the capacity interview, network leadership outlined an in-person operational cadence in which the principal attends bi-weekly network leadership meetings in Memphis, central office directors conduct monthly on-site full-day walkthroughs in Nashville, and local leadership teams convene weekly to establish supervision and accountability. In its evaluation of the application, the Committee noted concerns regarding the principal's substantial pre-opening and Year 1 responsibilities as well as the added demand of bi-weekly travel to Memphis. During the capacity interview, the network detailed a structured support model and demonstrated that resources are in place to assist and supervise Nashville-based leadership.



The personnel plan provides competitive compensation to recruit talent in Davidson County, establishing a competitive starting base salary for licensed teachers and performance bonuses up to \$12,000 for high-need subject stipends. The professional development plan includes 113 to 121 annual professional learning hours, structured around a five-day summer institute, full-day in-service sessions, weekly early-release Wednesday professional learning communities ("PLCs"), and access to the network's Grow Your Own Administration pipeline. Taken collectively, the applicant presents a proactive plan for attracting and retaining high-performing teachers with competitive salary ranges and comprehensive incentive structures, paired with a well-structured professional development plan aligned to the school model, thereby meeting the standard of the rubric.

The facilities plan identifies a viable property with the necessary square footage at 5880 Nolensville Road. During the capacity interview, the applicant confirmed that an active letter of intent is executed with the property owner, specifying a 120-day due diligence window and closing contingencies tied to charter approval. The network has engaged Universal Commercial Real Estate, local architectural partners, and project management to oversee phased renovations estimated at \$4 million to \$5 million. The sponsor has a proven track record of facility execution, having previously purchased and financed a \$6 million campus and secured a \$10 million, thirty-year fixed-rate bond with Equitable Facilities Fund.

Daily transportation is provided for all students residing more than two miles from the facility, with full accommodations for Individual Education Plan ("IEP")-mandated transportation at no cost. Food service, health and safety operations, and required insurance coverage are planned in full alignment with state statutes and State Board rules. The operational plan is viable, structured, and supported by organizational capacity.

Analysis of the Budget and Finance

Rating: Meets Standard

Strengths Identified by the Committee

The Budget and Finance plan meets the standard because the applicant demonstrates strong organizational solvency, multi-million-dollar financial reserves, sound internal fiscal controls, and conservative multi-year operating projections.

The Read Foundation maintains an organizational financial position supported by clean annual independent financial audits and an accumulated fund balance of approximately \$13 million, consisting of \$8 million in unencumbered operational reserves and \$5 million invested in liquid money market accounts. This reserve provides a financial backstop to cover startup contingencies, potential enrollment shortfalls, or unexpected capital expenses without jeopardizing the stability of existing campuses. Furthermore, the applicant has secured a \$750,000 pre-approved federal CSP startup grant, private philanthropic support from The City Fund (\$1,000 per pupil in Years 1 and 2), and committed capital from the Read Foundation, ensuring the school is capitalized prior to receiving initial state TISA disbursements.

The five-year operating budget and budget narrative are aligned, demonstrating a clear break-even point in Year 3 and sustainable operating surpluses in all subsequent years. Revenue projections are grounded in the TISA formula allocations and incorporate appropriate base and weighted funding streams for economically disadvantaged students and English learners. Operating expense projections account for core instructional necessities, including competitive instructional salaries, Tennessee Consolidated Retirement System retirement contributions, healthcare benefits, curriculum licensing, contracted transportation, 1:1 student devices, and facility occupancy costs. During the capacity interview, financial consultants from GT3 Group and network executives clarified that the school utilizes PowerSchool Unified Administration financial software, which enforces segregation of duties, automated purchase requisition workflows, multi-tiered approval thresholds, and compliance reporting.

The Review Committee also reviewed the applicant's budget assumptions against the scoring rubric, evaluating the viability and reasonability of operational allocations. In reviewing the application alongside what was shared in the capacity interview, the committee confirmed that these budget scenarios and narrative represent manageable budgeting estimates that do not jeopardize the school's underlying fiscal health. The applicant's minimum-enrollment contingency scenario, which models a 25% reduction in student enrollment, demonstrates that the school can maintain operational solvency by adjusting staffing lines proportionally while safeguarding mandated instructional services for students with disabilities and English learners.



The applicant presents a solvent, sustainable operating budget, realistic revenue drivers, viable contingency protections, and robust internal controls, meeting the standard of the rubric for Budget and Finance.

Analysis of Addenda A: Sponsors with past or present relationships to other charter schools; B: Sponsors opening a new school that will create a network or as part of an existing network

Rating: Partially Meets Standard

Weaknesses Identified by the Committee

The applicable Addenda section partially meets standard because, while the network possesses some operational scaling systems, recent state-level academic accountability data for the network's affiliated schools demonstrate mixed and underperforming academic outcomes that raise questions regarding the model's track record of raising student achievement.

Pursuant to the State Board of Education's scoring rubric, an applicant with past or present relationships with other charter schools must demonstrate clear and compelling evidence of raising student achievement levels through recent state-level performance data and authorizer evaluations. While the Read Foundation has operated charter schools in Tennessee for 15 years and reports high graduation rates (97% to 100%), an examination of publicly available Tennessee State Board of Education accountability metrics reveals mixed success and declining academic performance across its existing Memphis portfolio.

In review of the state school letter grades for the 2024-25 school year, two of the network's four schools received a grade of D and two earned a grade of C, falling short of high-performing benchmark criteria. At the secondary level, the same sixth through twelfth grades proposed for Nashville, academic achievement and growth at the network's Memphis schools have declined. On the 2024-25 State Report Card, Memphis School of Excellence ("MSE") Cordova experienced a decline in growth, earning an overall TVAAS composite score of Level 1 and an achievement score of 2.3. State data reveal low proficiency rates in math and English language arts ("ELA") at MSE Cordova: 23.2% of middle school students and 29.8% of high school students were proficient in ELA, while 17.7% of middle school students and 22.7% of high school students were proficient in mathematics. At the flagship MSE campus, 11.6% of middle school students and 23.5% of high school students were proficient in ELA and 18.5% of middle school students and 10.7% of high school students were proficient in mathematics.

Furthermore, the network's self-identified exemplary school in the application, MSE Cordova Elementary, earned an overall letter grade of C for the 2024-25 school year. The network's other elementary school was identified as a Targeted Support and Improvement ("TSI") school in 2024 and earned an overall letter grade of F during the 2023-24 school year. Ultimately, as outlined in state accountability data, the schools within the Read Foundation network have had recent performance challenges across campuses. During the capacity interview, leadership offered some explanations, attributing declines to isolated teacher

turnover, rather than detailing systemic instructional remedies or holistic responses. The governing board also did not address the mixed past performance during the capacity interview and instead placed responsibility for the outcomes on the executive director.

The network's postsecondary readiness outcomes also show areas of concern. While the applicant highlights high graduation and college acceptance rates, Tennessee Department of Education accountability data indicates that the Ready Graduate rate at Memphis School of Excellence was 32.9%, significantly below the Memphis-Shelby County Schools district average of 47.4% and the state average of 53.1%. Additionally, the average ACT composite score across the network's high schools was 17.4, trailing resident district and state averages. During the capacity interview, the applicant noted the network's focus on AP courses rather than dual enrollment, which affected Ready Graduate scores. With adjustments to dual enrollment, the applicant anticipates this score to improve. However, given the college-preparation focus, the applicant identified Ready Graduate and College and Career Readiness scores as an area of focus for the network, ensuring future alignment with the state and resident district.

Finally, organizational indicators across existing campuses reflect operational challenges that impact academic performance. State report card data shows low teacher retention rates at several network schools (ranging from 31% to 53%). Teacher vacancies were also echoed as a concern by the operator during the capacity interview, affecting student academic performance. In Addendum B, while the network outlines shared back-office services, the cross-regional support model places significant operational responsibility on the local Nashville principal in the pre-opening and early years of operation. Because the sponsor has not established a consistent record of high academic performance and postsecondary readiness at its existing secondary schools, the Review Committee concludes that Addenda A and B partially meet the standard as the network has failed to meet the bar for replication.

Strengths Identified by the Committee

The sponsor outlines a slow growth expansion model for the network. The network has demonstrated operational success in Memphis and outlines a growth plan to replicate the model in Nashville. The applicant clearly outlines the board's composition and projected size, noting that two board members reside in the Nashville area and that a parent representative will be added once the school opens and begins operating. The organizational charts for the network with this expansion provide clearly delineated responsibilities between the board, executive director, network team, and school team, and there is a provided table that clearly outlines decision-making responsibilities between the network and the school. Finally, the network's fiscal health is strong, and the school's budget provides realistic revenue and expense assumptions.



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. Adam has evaluated over 300 current, and 100 proposed, charter schools nationally (California, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New York and Washington), including lead writer for charter renewal visit reports. For the past several years, Adam has led a team of reviewers conducting approximately 60 renewal visits for Chicago Public Schools. Overall, Adam has conducted over 2,500 classroom observations. Adam has led teams of reviewers of charter school applications, submitting the finalized application reviews to boards of education. Adam is currently leading the New Orleans Public Schools' and Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board's charter application evaluation reviews. Adam worked with the Tennessee State Board of Education to lead its strategic planning and goal-setting process. Adam co-authored a report of findings and recommendations, supported by Central Michigan University (CMU), to inform 57 charter schools across Michigan how to effectively and strategically plan for the 2022-23 school year. Adam has worked with CMU and other authorizers to update their performance frameworks. Adam has 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. Adam leads much of TLC's work with boards, leading board retreats and board strategic planning for charter management organizations – such as Beginning with Children Foundation and TMSA – and independent charter schools. Other TLC clients have included Alliance College-Ready Public Schools, College Board, Inglewood Unified School District, KIPP, Tiger Woods Foundation and UCLA. Adam is also the founder, former acting board member and current board member emeritus of 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 in Public Policy, with an emphasis on Education, from Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.

Beth Elpers is the Director of Authorizing for the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission. She is a Certified Public Accountant and has spent the last 15 years specializing in school finance and charter school oversight. Before working at the Commission, Beth worked as an administrator and charter school authorizer in California. She has also had the opportunity to serve as the Chief Business Officer of a charter school, an Executive Director of Fiscal Services for a school district with an annual budget of over \$500 Million, and an auditor of charter



schools and non-profit organizations. She earned her Master of Business Administration degree from California Baptist University, where she also received her B.S. in Business Administration.

Darlene Flores serves as the Applications Specialist for the Hawai'i State Public Charter School Commission, where she facilitates the new charter school application process, coordinates application evaluation activities, and supports approved schools through pre-opening. Her work also includes aligning application requirements with the Commission's academic, financial, and organizational performance frameworks and supporting efforts to strengthen systems for school accountability and continuous improvement. Prior to joining the Commission, Darlene served as the founding Chief Financial and Operations Officer for a startup public charter school in Hawai'i, where she helped build and manage systems related to finance, human resources, operations, technology, enrollment, and school administration. Her experience as both a charter school operator and authorizer gives her a broad perspective on school development, operational capacity, and the systems needed to support sustainable, high-quality public charter schools.

Autumn Hillis has spent her career serving students as a classroom teacher, curriculum writer, instructional coach, and a school principal. She has worked in both traditional public schools and in charter schools throughout her career. Her career interests and projects include effective science instruction for K-12 students and restorative justice practices in schools as a response to decreasing the school to prison pipeline. Dr. Hillis is a product of Nashville public schools and is excited to continue serving students in Nashville and across the state.

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 8th 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*.