



Empowerment Academy West BRIEF STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF APPEAL

Dear Members of the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission:

The Governing Board of Empowerment Academy West respectfully appeals to the Memphis-Shelby County Schools Board of Education's denial of its amended charter application. We request that the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission independently review the amended application and determine that Empowerment Academy West has demonstrated the educational vision, organizational capacity, financial readiness, and community need necessary to successfully open and sustain a high-quality public charter school serving students and families in Memphis.

I. Empowerment Academy West Embraced the Amendment Process

Following the initial review, Empowerment Academy West carefully evaluated the Charter Authorization Review Team's feedback and substantially strengthened every major component of its application.

The amended application refined the educational program, strengthened governance and operational planning, clarified staffing responsibilities, enhanced financial projections, and incorporated additional evidence supporting the school's academic model. Throughout the amendment process, the governing board remained engaged with Memphis-Shelby County Schools, complied with every submission requirement, and timely submitted all amended materials.

II. Independent Review of the Amended Application

Tennessee's amendment process exists to encourage applicants to improve their proposals. Empowerment Academy West embraced that purpose by making substantial revisions in direct response to reviewer feedback.

We therefore request that the Commission evaluate the amended application on its merits.

III. Approval Is in the Best Interests of Students and the Memphis Community

Shelby County Schools concluded that Empowerment Academy West did not sufficiently demonstrate the need for its proposed educational model. Respectfully, the evidence demonstrates otherwise.

Empowerment Academy West is proposed for **ZIP Code 38106**, one of Memphis's highest-need communities. Publicly available data show:

- More than **38%** of residents live below the federal poverty level.
- Approximately **95%** of residents identify as African American.
- Unemployment exceeds **15%**.
- Graduation rates remain below **75%**.
- Violent and property crime rates significantly exceed national averages.

These socioeconomic conditions create substantial barriers to student achievement and underscore the need for a school intentionally designed to provide academic excellence, stability, mentorship, and meaningful family engagement.

Academic outcomes further reinforce this need. Only **22%** of students are proficient in English Language Arts, and just **35.8%** of third-grade students read on grade level. Literacy outcomes for boys—particularly African American boys—and students with disabilities remain significantly lower, leaving many students without the reading foundation necessary for long-term academic success.

Empowerment Academy West directly addresses these challenges through structured literacy, evidence-based intervention, individualized progress monitoring, and early academic support beginning in kindergarten.

IV. An Innovative Educational Model

The Commission also questioned the proposed all-boys educational model. That model is grounded in documented disparities showing that boys—particularly African American boys in high-poverty communities—experience lower literacy rates, higher disciplinary referrals, and lower graduation rates than many of their peers.

Empowerment Academy West addresses these disparities through rigorous literacy instruction, leadership development, mentoring, character education, individualized intervention, and meaningful family partnerships.

The school also introduces a research-informed **Agrihood educational model**, integrating literacy, science, mathematics, nutrition, environmental stewardship, and project-based learning through authentic experiences. Outdoor classrooms, school gardens, and community partnerships provide students with opportunities to develop academic knowledge alongside critical thinking, collaboration, leadership, and real-world problem-solving skills.

In a community facing persistent poverty, food insecurity, and limited enrichment opportunities, this model supports both academic achievement and whole-child development.

V. Conclusion

The governing board embraced the amendment process, strengthened every major component of its application, and demonstrated organizational readiness. The accompanying Community Needs Assessment establishes a clear need for the school's literacy-focused, community-centered model.

By combining evidence-based literacy instruction, strong family partnerships, positive male mentorship, and an innovative Agrihood educational model, Empowerment Academy West offers a comprehensive approach to improving student achievement and strengthening the surrounding community.

For these reasons, Empowerment Academy West respectfully requests that the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission reverse the decision of the Memphis-Shelby County Schools Board of Education and authorize Empowerment Academy West to serve the students and families of Memphis.

Respectfully submitted,

Natisha Brooks

President, Governing Board

Empowerment Academy West