



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

Dear Executive Director Stovall:

On behalf of the Trimble Forward Alliance (TFA), charter sponsor for Trimble Academy, we respectfully submit this letter as part of our formal appeal of the recent denial of our amended charter application by the Dyer County School System (DCSS), pursuant to Tennessee Code Annotated 49-13-108.

Trimble Academy's proposed 187-student K-8 charter school is committed to cultivating the body, mind, and heart of each student in a traditional setting and an immersive outdoor environment, coupled with a classical, content-rich education that nurtures moral and civic virtue. We will provide our educators with the atmosphere, tools, and flexibility to employ innovative approaches to educate our children while being accountable for advancing student achievement aligned with Tennessee State Standards. Trimble Academy will be the only school in the Local Education Area (LEA) to offer a classical education and an immersive outdoor learning experience, and the first "rural" charter school in the state of Tennessee.

Our appeal is grounded in three primary areas:

(1) Approval of Trimble Academy is in the best interests of students, particularly students in the former Trimble School zone, and the larger LEA. Trimble Academy is designed to meet the needs of students and families by providing a choice for those who thrive in a small, high-quality educational environment. Through an innovative teaching model that integrates nature, agriculture, and STEM within the framework of a classical education aimed at cultivating wisdom, virtue, and a lifelong love of learning, we will teach students not only what to learn but also how to learn and the purpose of learning. For students who live in Trimble and the northern end of Dyer County and were re-zoned to a school approximately 10 miles away with close to 700 students this past year, Trimble Academy will offer the choice to once again attend a local community school, as is offered in the middle and southern parts of the county. Of course, we will welcome students from throughout the county who want to experience the high-quality, unique learning environment offered by Trimble Academy.

(2) Approval of Trimble Academy is in the best interest of the small, rural town of Trimble in northwest Tennessee. Since the 1930's, the school in Trimble has been the heart of our community. Graduates leave for college or careers only to find themselves moving back to the area when they start a family to ensure their children have the same opportunity they had to attend a small community school. The support of the community for the school has always been second to none and is already evident for Trimble Academy. Volunteers have offered expertise in agriculture, aerodynamics, wildlife management, forestry, music, arts, business, wellness/health, etc. to Trimble Academy upon opening.

For the town, having a school means long-term residents, consistent property values, and stable tax revenue to keep our town viable. For businesses, a school brings consistent traffic and customers and provides jobs in the community. When families must leave town each day for education – or move away entirely – community life begins to thin, homes sit empty, businesses struggle, and younger generations lose their connection to the place they were raised. A school is not just a place of learning; it is a signal that a town is alive and planning for its future. Trimble Academy will provide jobs, a demand for additional housing, customers for local businesses, and an opportunity for community development and economic growth.

(3) The Trimble Academy application meets standards for a strong application on the state's scoring rubric. A strong public charter school begins with a high-quality application. TFA dedicated countless hours and resources to ensure our application laid a solid foundation for Trimble Academy. We worked with a consultant, had our application reviewed by a 3rd party, Tennesseans for Student Success (TSS), and strengthened all areas of deficiency during the district appeal. We believe the decision of the Dyer County School Board was not in alignment with the scoring rubric, and we faced the following challenges during the application process:

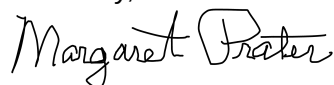
- DCSS did not comply with sending a per-pupil estimate of funding within the required 10 days after receipt of our Letter of Intent. After TFA requested the information, a figure of \$9,202.43 was provided. TFA's request for an explanation of the lower-than-anticipated amount went unanswered. TFA was advised by TDOE to contact a TN Education Funding Contact, who provided a per-pupil funding estimate of \$12,251.85. DCSS's estimate of over \$400,000 less the first year would have made it impossible to complete a viable budget and move forward with the application.
- DCSS identified 5 members of the TFA team to participate in the capacity interview. TFA asked to either add or substitute our education service provider/consultant, Ms. Angie Markum. Our request was denied. No additions or substitutions were allowed.
- Other than the capacity interview and a two-minute "general" public comment period at the beginning of the board meeting, there was no dialogue allowed with the review team or board for what TFA considers to be "mischaracterization" of several areas of the application.
- Tennessee Firefly published an article, "Unusual Charter Review," citing numerous items:
 - o Every other school district in Tennessee provided applicants a copy of the review in advance of the vote, but Dyer County did not. (TFA requested a copy prior to the vote and was denied. A copy was received 3 days after the vote.)
 - o Districts routinely have representatives from their review committee present the findings to the board before voting. Dyer County Schools chose to have its attorney present.
 - o The votes are routinely available for public viewing on Facebook or YouTube. The district did not record the meeting for public viewing.
 - o A lack of substantive discussion by board members of the committee findings and the proposed school's potential impact for students was also unusual.
 - o The only board member to speak before unanimously voting down Trimble's application appeared to lack a full understanding of how waivers work. The proposed Trimble Academy included 16 waivers to enable the school to implement an educational model that integrates outdoor education, character, and civic virtues with classical education. A Tennessee Firefly analysis of waivers in other school districts found that Trimble's 16 requested waivers were not unusual, but the board member questioned whether the

- number is cause for concern, stating, “Just the sheer volume of waivers, I think that the waivers might suggest that Trimble Academy’s lack of readiness to operate a school.”
- o Although DCSS has never received a charter application before, they did not involve someone with charter school experience in the review process.
 - Except for one visit in June 2025, DCSS denied TFA’s repeated requests for access to the former school building to determine repair estimates for the application budget. However, DCSS cited lack of “necessary improvement details” and “viable primary facility plan” as a part of the denial of the original and amended application. NOTE: DCSS returned the building to the town of Trimble on May 29, 2026, 11 days after the amended application was due. TFA has had a neutral architectural/engineering firm and a contractor inspect the property and has an upcoming inspection from a specialized historic restoration company.
 - After submission of the original application, we were approached by Tennesseans for Student Success (TSS) to provide a Quality Charter Review of our application as they do for all new-start applications. We welcomed their independent review but found it concerning that it differed dramatically from the DCSS review using the same State scoring rubric.

Scoring Rubric – Initial Application	TSS	DCSS
Meets/Exceeds	52%	10%
Did Not Meet	5%	38%
Scoring Rubric – Appeal Application	TSS	DCSS
Meets/Exceeds	Recommended for Approval	20%
Did Not Meet		28%

We recognize that approving Trimble Academy is a huge responsibility as it puts stewardship of not only public funds, but our most precious asset – our children and their future in the care of a new entity, Trimble Forward Alliance, that did not exist until the town’s school closed a year ago. What our team of volunteers has accomplished over the last year, despite many odds, should be a testament to our determination and dedication to making Trimble Academy a reality for families and our community. Fortunately, we have had many supporters – Skillern Elementary/TN Classical Academies, TN Charter School Center, Tennesseans for Student Success, TN Department of Education, State Representative Rusty Grills, and countless others locally and across the state who have provided guidance and support. As the first rural charter school to be approved in Tennessee, we pledge to “pay it forward” and provide our support to other rural communities who deserve the opportunity for public school choice options for their children. Approving Trimble Academy is a statement that our children are worth educating locally, and that communities like ours deserve the opportunity to remain vibrant, connected, and forward-looking. We respectfully urge you to give full consideration to this application and to the long-term positive impact Trimble Academy will have on our children, families, and the future of Trimble and northwest Tennessee.

Sincerely,



Margaret Prater, President
Trimble Forward Alliance