

To the Members of the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission:

We respectfully disagree with the primary reasons offered in the TPCSC Executive Director's report in supporting the LEA's denial of our charter application. We firmly believe that Founders Classical Academy has the organizational structure and experience, curriculum aligned with Tennessee standards, effective SPED/ELL/At-Risk student programs, and financial wherewithal to excel as a charter school in Tennessee.

Organizational Structure/Experience. Our CMO, ResponsiveEd has a 23-year track record of success operating charter schools in Texas and Arkansas and has brought its Founders Classical Academy model to 21 sites, serving 14,000 students in 2022. Founders consistently exceeds standards in even the highest performing districts. Our board is comprised of individuals who possess extensive business experience to open and oversee the effective operation of a large enterprise such as this. While our board members have demonstrated a strong affiliation with the education world through advocacy, SPED experience, and formal student mentoring initiatives for the past 15+ years, we have also engaged education experts to advise our board on matters unique to the K-12 education field. This includes Gayle Porterfield, a 35-year veteran of Middle TN public and charter intervention programs who spoke at our last appeal in Williamson County. To clarify any confusion about our structure, Del Rey Education, which is a Tennessee 501c3 organization currently comprised of 5 board members with plans to continually recruit new board members to support our mission, will hire an Executive Director with prior proven, successful experience managing an operation of this magnitude. The Del Rey Education Executive Director will directly oversee the CMO, ResponsiveEd, and will hold them accountable to ensure the effective operation of the school. The principal, responsible for the day-to-day operation of the school, will in turn be an employee of ResponsiveEd. To summarize, Del Rey Education will hire an Executive Director who will report to their board, and that Executive Director will directly oversee ResponsiveEd which includes the school principal.

SPED/ELL/At-Risk Students. Our school's focus is to develop the academic potential and personal character of each of our students regardless of special needs, cultural or racial background, socio-economic status, or ability level. Essential to our approach to providing SPED and 504 services to students is our Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) process. Following a universal screen (NWEA MAP) and review of the previous year's academic performance data, students are grouped into tiers based on the extent of their learning needs. At the Tier One level, students who demonstrate gaps are provided with in-class instructional support. Tiers Two and Three are used for targeted individualized support and behavioral interventions with the input from our national SPED team. Where there is evidence that there may be learning differences or diagnosed medical concerns that impact learning, students are recommended for evaluation, and following that, are given appropriate modifications or accommodations via the IEP and 504 processes. This is all done in the context of our curricular program; although, we do use additional resources when helpful, such as the Multisensory Teaching Approach (MTA), an evidence-based dyslexia curriculum based on the Orton-Gillingham approach. This clarity and consistency of instruction in this model has proven invaluable in helping all students with needs as indicated in the schools already operated by Founders in Texas and Arkansas. We will hire high quality, fully licensed educators to support the learning. Extra support, both in small groups and individual tutoring, is a vital part of the school program and built into the school's schedule and faculty hiring. Experience has shown that many parents bring students to our schools because of their support of students with special needs. Overall, our goal is to meet students where they are and push them toward success.

TN Standards Alignment. Founders Classical Academy's classical curriculum is currently used by over a dozen schools in Tennessee. This is not just a generic 'classical' curriculum. The central K-8 curriculum (supplemented with explicit phonics and Singapore mathematics) is Core Knowledge, a program used nationwide in both district programs and charter schools and intended for students of all ability levels. Nashville Classical Academy II was just approved last year by TPCSC and found to be in alignment with all of the TN standards. In addition, Ivy Academy's Skillern Elementary charter school in Soddy-Daisy TN uses the same curriculum as Founders actually co-developed it with them. Their TN-aligned curriculum is virtually identical to ours all the way down to Singapore math. In short, our curriculum already comes in fully aligned with the Tennessee standards.

Financial Solvency. Budget deficiencies were identified in the Executive Director's report. Our budget remains solvent with increased staffing to account for unforeseen needs relative to be on the high side for potential percentage of SPED students, especially those with disabilities. Our budget can also support additional funds for cited shortfalls in retirement contributions, social security, and adequate instructional supplies. The main concern offered through the Executive Director's report was making it through the early stages of opening should startup funds not materialize. In addition to our approved loan by Eco-Fin, we want to reiterate that our contingency plan should we not raise funds through philanthropy to cover the shortfall is an open-ended, no interest loan from ResponsiveEd to get through the early stages. Full loan documentation can be furnished upon request.

In light of the above information, the highly vested interest of our local board members, and the strength of our CMO with a 23-year track record of success operating 21 Founders charter schools in Texas and Arkansas serving 14,000 students, we believe Founders Classical Academy is a much needed, and highly beneficial addition to Sumner County, Williamson County and the State of Tennessee overall.

We appreciate this commission's thoughtful consideration of our appeal, and thorough review of our application. We intentionally applied for the next school cycle for our Sumner County location to 2024-25 in order to stagger the opening timing of the two schools. This will also give us time to develop the Sumner County community support in the same pattern as has been done in Williamson County where our latest poll shows that we are up to 400+ students from families who plan to apply to Founders Classical Academy. Please approve our applications to help us bring excellent school choice options to the families who reside in Sumner and Williamson Counties in Tennessee.

Sincerely,

Del Rey Education/ResponsiveEd