



Executive Director's Findings and Recommendation Charter School Application for Promise Academy Spring Hill

Pursuant to Tennessee Code Annotated (T.C.A.) § 49-1-614, if, at any time, an Achievement School District (ASD)-authorized charter school meets the priority exit criteria set forth in the state's accountability model, then the school may apply to the LEA or the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission ("Commission") for a new charter agreement with a term not to exceed the term of the initial ASD charter agreement.¹ On November 15, 2022, having earned priority exit status on the state's accountability system, the Governing Board of Promise Academy Spring Hill ("Promise Academy") applied to the Commission for continued authorization under the Commission.

Based on the procedural history, findings of fact, analysis, and Review Committee Report attached hereto, I believe that approval of the Promise Academy Spring Hill application is in the best interests of the students, local education agency (LEA), or community. Therefore, I recommend that the Commission approve the application for Promise Academy Spring Hill.

STANDARD OF REVIEW

Pursuant to T.C.A. § 49-1-614(k)(4) and Commission Rule 1185-01-03, Commission staff and an independent charter application committee conducted a review of Promise Academy's application. The Commission's charter application scoring rubric "[r]equires 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." In addition, the Commission is required to hold a public hearing in the district where the charter school is located.²

The Commission has the ability to approve the application, with authorization to continue under the Commission, or deny the application.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

1. On October 12, 2022, the Governing Board of Promise Academy Spring Hill submitted a letter of intent to the Commission expressing its intention to file a charter school application.
2. The Governing Board submitted a charter application in writing to the Commission on November 15, 2022, including submission of all required documents per Commission Rule 1185-01-03.
3. The Commission's review committee independently analyzed and scored the Promise Academy Spring Hill application using the Commission's charter application scoring rubric.
4. On December 13, 2022, the Commission staff held a public hearing at Promise Academy Spring Hill in Memphis, Tennessee. At the public hearing, the Executive Director, sitting as the Commission's Designee, heard presentations from the school and Memphis-Shelby County Schools and took public comment regarding the Promise Academy Spring Hill application.

¹ (T.C.A.) § 49-1-614

² Commission Rule 1185-01-03



5. The Commission’s review committee conducted a capacity interview with key members of the Promise Academy Spring Hill leadership team on December 19, 2022 via Microsoft Teams.
6. After the capacity interview, the Commission’s review committee determined a final consensus rating of the Promise Academy Spring Hill application, which served as the basis for the Review Committee Recommendation Report, attached hereto as **Exhibit A**.

Commission’s Review Committee’s Evaluation of the Application

Commission staff assembled a diverse review committee of internal and external experts to independently evaluate and score the Promise Academy Spring Hill application. This review committee consisted of the following individuals:

Name	Title
Trent Carlson	Commission Staff, Authorizing Coordinator
Nancy Dickson	External Reviewer
Beth Figueroa	Commission Staff, Director of Authorizing
Autumn Hillis	External Reviewer
Maggie Lund	Commission Staff, Deputy Director of Authorizing

The review committee conducted an initial review and scoring of the Promise Academy Spring Hill application, a capacity interview with the Promise Academy Spring Hill leadership team, and a final evaluation and scoring of the application, resulting in a consensus rating for each major section. The review committee’s consensus rating of the Promise Academy Spring Hill application was as follows:

Sections	Ratings
Academic Plan Design and Capacity	Meets or Exceeds
Operations Plan and Capacity	Meets or Exceeds
Financial Plan and Capacity	Meets or Exceeds
Past Performance	Meets or Exceeds

For additional information regarding the review committee’s evaluation of the Promise Academy Spring Hill application, please see **Exhibit A** for the complete Review Committee Recommendation Report, which is fully incorporated herein by reference.

Public Hearing

Pursuant to Commission Rule 1185-01-03 and Commission policy 2.000, a public hearing chaired by the Executive Director was held on December 13, 2022. In the school’s opening statement, the school’s Executive Director, Patrick Washington, shared the vision for Promise Academy Spring Hill, which is “to be the model of excellence and innovation in education.” He stated the school staff has worked hard to exit the priority list, noting their commitment to providing quality education and their intentionality in making sure they serve all students. The opening statement



concluded with a review of how important community and culture are to the school, with students performing the Promise Pledge as an example of how they work to build a positive school culture.

Brittany Monda, Assistant Superintendent of Charter Schools for Memphis-Shelby County Schools (MSCS) presented at the public hearing and focused on the district's plan to be a portfolio district, noting their intention to serve all students in the district with various school choice options. Ms. Monda noted MSCS's current relationship with Promise Academy's other school, Promise Academy Hollywood, and how they are supportive of the network's efforts in the community. This current partnership provides MSCS with knowledge of Promise Academy Spring Hill's goals and how they believe the school benefits students and families. Finally, Ms. Monda closed by reflecting on MSCS's progress as an advancing district that includes charter schools as a large part of their academic success.

During questioning by the Commission, the Promise Academy Spring Hill team shared that they plan to invest in new marketing efforts to help recruit more students and ensure stable enrollment over time. Using their recruitment team, they intend to canvas the city and target popular city events to drive student enrollment. When answering questions regarding their recent academic data, Promise Academy Spring Hill leadership shared that their data reflects the intentional work they have put in over the last year, and they pointed to their achievement of priority exit as proof of their success. When questioned about contingency planning, Dr. Washington spoke about the long-standing commitment they have from their board members, and how the board is actively involved in contingency planning to ensure they have funds to cover any emergent situations.

The public hearing concluded with closing statements by the school and the receipt of 10 in-person comments, all speaking in support of Promise Academy Spring Hill. The Commission also accepted written comments and received no written comments.

ANALYSIS

Under T.C.A. § 49-1-614, the Commission is charged with determining if a charter school currently operating under the Achievement School District will continue its authorization under the Commission or remain within the Achievement School District. Pursuant to T.C.A. § 49-13-108, the Commission adopted the State Board of Education's quality public charter schools authorizing standards to review all charter applications received. In making my recommendation to the Commission, I have considered the Review Committee's Recommendation Report, the presentations at the public hearing, and the public comments received by Commission staff and conclude as follows:

In consideration of the Review Committee's Recommendation Report, I find that the review committee has cited specific examples in the application and referenced information gained at the capacity interview in support of its findings. For the reasons delineated in the report, I agree that the Promise Academy Spring Hill application has met all requirements for approval as outlined in the scoring rubric for the academic, operational, financial, and past performance sections of the application. The academic plan includes an established positive culture that utilizes low teacher-to-student ratios and intentional instructional support for both students and teachers. The school utilizes a positive behavior intervention system to further support the development of the students and the overall culture of the school. Promise Academy Spring Hill has a variety of internal assessments in use to track the proficiency and growth of its students. The school also has familiarity with an open enrollment model, as it is used by the Hollywood campus. This will be necessary for implementation under the Commission's authority, and the school has a plan for these adjustments.

The operations plan demonstrates a low teacher attrition rate, which should be noted especially with the nationwide teacher shortage many schools are experiencing. The commitment of the governing board is worth noting



as well, as those members play an active role in all aspects of the school's operations. Deeply invested in its community, Promise Academy Spring Hill has indicated contingency plans for the purchase of its building to cement its commitment to serving the members of the Raleigh and Frayser communities of Memphis. Financially, Promise Academy Spring Hill has demonstrated strong philanthropic support, which has been instrumental to the success of the school given the unprecedented delays in reimbursements by the Achievement School District. I believe that the cash position will improve for the school once needed reimbursements are distributed, and the school will remain in a strong financial position. It is worth noting that the Chief Financial Officer for Promise Hill Spring Academy recently left her position, and it will be imperative for the school to maintain a strong focus on the organization and operations of the school as it makes the transition to a back-office provider.

The school earned priority exit status based on the state's accountability system. Promise Academy Spring Hill, while acknowledging the success of its academic model and strong network connection, admits that they still have gains to make in proficiency for their students to meet the standards within the Commission's School Performance Framework. Promise Academy Spring Hill's application to the Commission lacked many significant details that required Commission staff to request additional information. These additional requests were to ensure Commission staff and the review committee could properly assess the school's capacity for success under the Commission's authority. This lack of sufficient detail in the application was ultimately corroborated by the Executive Director of the Promise Academy Spring Hill's public hearing testimony, in which he discussed struggling to complete the application. While I understand that the application process is rigorous and time consuming, it is due to the fact that the Commission prides itself on holding a high bar for authorization to provide high-quality choice options for students in Tennessee. The school must continue to drive its students' academic growth to achieve success under the Commission's performance standards. Additionally, the school will have to develop contingency plans as it moves from one authorizer to another and as it operates under a new set of expectations.

While the school acknowledges that it still has work to do to meet the state's accountability expectations and the Commission's performance standards, I have determined that the school has met the academic and operational achievement to earn an exit from the Achievement School District and to continue the remainder of its charter agreement under the Commission. The Commission holds high expectations for all schools entering its portfolio. The Commission will need to monitor and provide regular oversight, support, and feedback for any school to be successful, especially when a school is moving from a turnaround district. Nevertheless, I have determined that based on the performance record of the school and the application materials, it is in the best interest to allow Promise Academy Spring Hill to continue its authorization under the Commission for the remainder of its charter term.

CONCLUSION

For these reasons, and for the reasons stated in the Review Committee Report attached hereto as Exhibit A, I believe that the decision to approve the application for Promise Academy Spring Hill is in the best interests of the students, the LEA, or community. Therefore, I recommend that the Commission approve the application for Promise Academy Spring Hill.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tess Stovall". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Tess Stovall, Executive Director
Tennessee Public Charter School Commission

1/27/23

Date



TENNESSEE
PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL COMMISSION



TENNESSEE
PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL COMMISSION

EXHIBIT A

Charter Application Review Committee Recommendation Report

January 27, 2023

School Name: Promise Academy Spring Hill

Location of School: Memphis, Tennessee

Evaluation Team:

Trent Carlson
Nancy Dickson
Beth Figueroa
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

Pursuant to Tennessee Code Annotated (T.C.A.) § 49-1-614, if, at any time, an Achievement School District (“ASD”) authorized charter school meets the priority exit criteria set forth in the state’s accountability model, then the school may apply to the LEA or the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission (“Commission”) for a new charter agreement with a term not to exceed the term of the initial ASD charter agreement. On November 15, 2022, having earned priority exit status on the state’s accountability system, the Governing Board of Promise Academy Spring Hill applied to the Commission for continued authorization under the Commission. As laid out in Charter Commission Policy 3.000 – Core Authorizing Principles, the Charter 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.

The Charter Commission’s charter application review process is outlined in Commission Rule 1185-01-03, Charter Commission Policy 2.000 – Charter School Appeals, and Charter Commission Policy 2.100 – Application Review. The Charter 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 Charter Commission provided training to all review committee members to ensure consistent standards and fair treatment of all applications.

Overview of the Evaluation Process

The Tennessee Public Charter School 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 charter application, attachments, and budget submitted by the school. 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 four sections of the application: Academic Plan Design, Operations Plan, Financial Plan, and Past Performance.
2. Capacity Interview: Based on the independent and collective review of the application, the review committee conducted a 90-minute interview with the members of the governing board and 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 academic, operations, financial plans, and performance review.
2. Summary of the recommendation: A brief summary of the overall recommendation for the application.
3. Analysis of each section of the application: An analysis of the four sections of the application and the capacity of the team to execute the plan as described in the application.
 - a. Academic Plan Design and Capacity: school mission; enrollment summary; academic focus and plan; academic performance standards; high school graduation and post-secondary readiness (if



applicable); assessments; school calendar and schedule; special populations and at-risk students; school culture and discipline; recruitment and enrollment; and parent and community engagement and support.

- b. Operations Plan and Capacity: governance; facilities; personnel/human capital; insurance; transportation; food service; additional operations; charter management organization (if applicable); and waivers.
- c. Financial Plan and Capacity: budgeting; budget narrative; and network financial plan.
- d. Past Performance: an overview of growth and proficiency data for the last three years.

The Charter Commission’s charter application review committee utilized the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission’s Charter Application Rubric for use by Achievement School District Charter Schools applying to the Charter Commission¹, which is used by the Charter Commission when evaluating an application from the Achievement School District. The rubric “[r]equires 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.”

The evaluators used the following criteria and guidance from the scoring rubric to rate applications:

Rating	Characteristics
Meets or Exceeds Standard	The response reflects a thorough understanding of key issues. It clearly aligns with the mission and goals of the school. The response includes specific and accurate information that shows thorough preparation.
Partially Meets Standard	The response meets the criteria in some aspects, but lacks sufficient detail and/or requires additional information in one or more areas.
Does Not Meet Standard	The response is significantly incomplete; demonstrates lack of preparation; is unsuited to the mission and vision of the district; or otherwise raises significant concerns about the viability of the plan or the applicant’s ability to carry it out.

¹ This rubric was updated in August of 2022 by the Charter Commission.

Summary of the Application

School Name: Promise Academy – Spring Hill

Charter Management Organization: N/A

Location of School: Memphis, Tennessee

Mission:²

The mission of Promise Academy is to educate, develop, and nurture the mind, body and spirit of our children so that they emerge as life-long learners and world-ready leaders. We envision ourselves as THE model of excellence and innovation in education.

Number of Schools Currently in Operation by Governing Board: Two

Proposed Enrollment:³

Grade Level	Year 1 2023-24	Year 2 2024-25	Year 3 2025-26	Year 4 2026-27	Year 5 2027-28	Fully Enrolled
K	60	60	65	70	75	75
1	60	60	65	65	70	75
2	60	60	60	65	70	70
3	60	60	60	60	65	65
4	55	60	60	60	65	65
5	55	60	60	60	60	60
Total	350	360	370	380	405	410

Brief Description of the Application:

Promise Academy Spring Hill is a charter school in Shelby County, Tennessee and serves students in the Raleigh and Frayser neighborhoods of Memphis. Promise Academy Spring Hill is an elementary school serving grades kindergarten through 5. The school intends to continue serving students primarily from this neighborhood. The school’s educational model is built on students becoming proficient readers and writers of the English Language as reading is the cornerstone of one’s education and is the avenue to mastering content knowledge in all subject areas.⁴ Promise Academy Spring Hill utilizes small group instruction to provide scholars with teacher support and guidance on the student’s instructional level along with low student to teacher ratios. Promise Academy Spring Hill also incorporates a Life and Culture component as part of every student’s educational program that encourages students to participate in active learning through field study.

The Promise Academy Spring Hill governing board is long standing, offers diverse skillsets, and has effectively overseen the school for the last nine years. Promise Academy Spring Hill intends to stay in their current facility upon completion of their charter agreement, which is in 2024. The school intends to work with Memphis-Shelby County

² Promise Academy Spring Hill Application – p. 1

³ Promise Academy Spring Hill Application – p. 4

⁴ Promise Academy Spring Hill application – p. 5



Schools to acquire the facility and make it their permanent school site. Promise Academy Spring Hill's budgeted net income for the 2022-2023 school year was \$19,673.⁵ While the budget includes limited margin, the school has excess to philanthropic support to cover budget shortfalls and the necessary programmatic expenses. The projected net income for the 2023-2024 school year is \$72,744, and the school provided additional information including letters of support to better detail the sources and amounts of philanthropic funds ongoing.

⁵ Promise Academy Spring Hill provided budget – Attachment K

Summary of the Evaluation

The review committee recommends approval of the application for Promise Academy Spring Hill because the applicant meets the standards in the academic, operations, financial, and past performance sections of the rubric.

The academic plan presented by the applicant includes a clear mission and vision for the school and a clear explanation as to the “Promise Academy Spring Hill Way” which includes wrap around support for students both academically and culturally. Promise Academy Spring Hill operates with low student to teacher ratios allowing for more individualized support for students. Additionally, each student receives 150-180 minutes of English Language Arts (ELA) instruction daily that includes both small group and whole group guided reading instruction. The assessment plan for Promise Academy Spring Hill is robust with four different internal assessments coupled with teacher-created formative assessments that are analyzed in weekly data meetings with instructional coaches. Promise Academy operates a second location, Promise Academy Hollywood, as an open enrollment school under Memphis-Shelby County Schools, so leadership is familiar with the open enrollment model and the recruitment and lottery practices needed to maintain a stable enrollment.

The applicant’s operations plan met standard as they have demonstrated strong teacher retention in recent years, they have a diverse and experienced governing board, and they provided a clear facility plan with adequate contingency. Promise Academy Spring Hill has a governing board that is very familiar with the academic progress and day-to-day operations of the school and provides regular financial oversight and support. Promise Academy Spring Hill is a staple within the Frayser and Raleigh communities of Memphis, and the school intends to work with Memphis-Shelby County Schools to acquire the facility it currently occupies to ensure a permanent home in the neighborhood.

Similarly, the financial plan met standard as Promise Academy Spring Hill presented adequate budgets and three-year financial projections. Although there were noted concerns about the limited net income margin along with cash flow concerns, during the capacity interview the governing board provided context for this by explaining that the school has experienced delayed reimbursements from the ASD, which has contributed to their declining cash position. Additionally, in response to these concerns, the governing board provided letters of philanthropic support for the school which demonstrate long-term financial support and fiscal viability.

The applicant's past performance plan also met standards. In recent years, Promise Academy Spring Hill has demonstrated gains in growth toward proficiency for students, particularly in ELA. They scored within the top 10% of charter schools in the 2021-2022 school year with a success rate of 17%, earning them priority exit status. Although these gains are commendable, there are still remaining challenges for the school including proficiency gaps in math and low English Learner (EL) and students with disabilities (SWD) subgroup proficiency. The review committee cited concerns regarding a lack of clarity as to how their instructional model may shift to address these challenges.

Summary of Section Ratings

In accordance with the Charter Commission’s charter application scoring rubric, applications that do not meet or exceed the standard in all sections will be deemed not ready for approval.⁶ The review committee’s consensus ratings for each section of the application are as follows:

⁶ Tennessee Public Charter School Commission ASD Application Scoring Rubric



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Sections	Rating
Academic Plan Design and Capacity	Meets Standard
Operations Plan and Capacity	Meets Standard
Financial Plan and Capacity	Meets Standard
Past Performance	Meets Standard

Analysis of the Academic Plan Design

Rating: Meets Standard

Strengths Identified by the Committee:

The applicant's academic plan design meets standard due to its demonstrated growth and fulfillment of its mission to educate, develop, and nurture the mind, body, and spirit of children so that they emerge as life-long learners and world-ready leaders. Promise Academy Spring Hill demonstrates through their internal assessment plans, data tracking, and 150-180 minutes of ELA instruction daily that the school is committed to its education model of helping students become proficient readers.

The "Promise Academy Spring Hill Way" is referenced frequently throughout the application. During the capacity interview, the school's Executive Director explained that this is part of the established culture within the school that puts children first and provides wrap around support for students throughout their academic journey. Promise Academy Spring Hill utilizes co-teaching models and low student to teacher ratios to ensure that students have more one-on-one time with teachers along with a comprehensive RTI² program. Additionally, the school provides not only instructional support for students, but also for staff through instructional coaches that help with planning, and data analysis. Promise Academy Spring Hill also has a positive behavior intervention system that is thoroughly tracked through software and ensures all scholars have a positive environment at school. This is reinforced through opportunities for additional classes in art, mindfulness, and a robust social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum. Students are provided opportunities to celebrate their successes, not only at an individual level, but at a school level. Teachers are trained on the SEL curriculum each summer along with effective classroom management practices and restorative justice practices. All these items encompass the "Promise Academy Spring Hill Way".

Promise Academy Spring Hill utilizes four different internal assessments throughout the year including iReady, Case Benchmark assessment, Aimsweb, and the STEP Reading assessment. Teachers use interim and biweekly assessments to track student learning in weekly data meetings with their instructional coach and other grade-level teachers to provide support and adjust instruction. Students also receive 150-180 minutes of ELA instruction each day, incorporating components of reading skills such as phonics, fluency, vocabulary development, and comprehension along with reading, writing, and speaking skills for 4th and 5th graders. During the capacity interview the principal of Promise Academy Spring Hill explained that these 150-180 minutes include opportunities for small group instruction, guided reading, and intervention time. Through the RTI and MTSS process, the school identifies what supports students may receive during this time outside of typical, whole group instruction. The review committee noted that students are currently not meeting ELA proficiency standards under the Commission's school performance framework, and the internal STEP reading and literacy assessments data from SY21-22 indicates that 87.7% of students are performing below grade level. During the capacity interview, the review committee asked if the tiered supports for students, particularly in ELA given the school's instructional shifts, are working and what adjustments the school is making in this area. The applicant responded that the school is developing more robust RTI² processes and partnering with the Diverse Learners Cooperative to continue building strong systems. The review committee, however, was left with questions surrounding the efficacy of the current instructional model given the internal assessment data is not trending well for performance on TNReady in terms of ELA or math proficiency.

Finally, Promise Academy Spring Hill is familiar with operating an open enrollment school as their Hollywood location is an open enrollment school in Memphis-Shelby County Schools. Therefore, they are equipped and have relevant experience for the impending transformation from a zoned to an open enrollment school should they be



authorized by the Commission. The applicant provided lottery processes along with recruitment strategies to expand their reach to surrounding neighborhoods and ensure stable enrollment over time.

Analysis of the Operations Plan

Rating: Meets Standard

Strengths Identified by the Committee:

The applicant's Operational Plan meets the standard because it includes strong teacher retention and staffing practices, an active governing board with a diverse set of experience and skills, adequate contingency planning for an impending change in authorizers, and an adequate facility plan including contingency plans should the need to move facilities arise.

Promise Academy Spring Hill has only had roughly 2% teacher attrition since 2020. This level of retention is unique, particularly given the current environment of teacher shortages across the nation since the COVID-19 pandemic. Promise Academy Spring Hill attributes this success to providing a safe and comfortable work environment for teachers that offers competitive salary and benefits along with opportunities to lead within the organization. Some of the opportunities for teachers to lead include adding content lead teachers and the opportunity for experienced teachers to serve as mentors to teachers new to the profession. The school has 21 classroom teachers on staff along with six support staff positions to ensure they are able to keep low student to teacher ratios in alignment with their instructional model.

The governing board of Promise Academy Spring Hill is comprised of 14 board members including the Executive Director, and board members commit to three-year terms although several board members are founding members of the charter network. The board includes individuals with a diverse set of expertise including finance, human resources, business development, law, leadership development, education, philanthropy, and community. Board members played an active role in the capacity interview with the review committee demonstrating a comprehensive understanding of the school's academic program, finances, and day-to-day operations.

Promise Academy Spring Hill is a staple within the Raleigh and Frayser communities of Memphis, and the school intends to stay within its current facility to continue serving its community. Promise Academy Spring Hill has been the sole occupant of their building since 2016 and has covered the cost of all repairs and routine maintenance. The school will work with Memphis-Shelby County Schools to acquire the facility either through purchase or lease to ensure that the building can become its permanent home. During the capacity interview, the applicant confirmed that the network has philanthropic funds built into its budget to cover this cost. Promise Academy's Hollywood facility also has space to house students from Promise Academy Spring Hill as a contingency plan should the school and Memphis-Shelby County Schools not come to an agreement on the current facility. During the capacity interview, the Executive Director spoke about a recent strategic planning session that took place at the governing board level that included a complete review of operations and finances to ensure they have adequate funds available for emergencies or to execute any necessary contingency plans. Due to the delay in reimbursements from the Achievement School District, the school has had to access more philanthropic funds to cover typical expenses and cash flow. However, once these reimbursements are processed, the school will have adequate reserves to cover additional costs that may arise with the impending change in authorizer should the school be approved by the Commission. Some of these contingency costs include additional transportation costs, food service costs, and additional costs for services of students with disabilities.

Analysis of the Financial Plan

Rating: Meets Standard

Strengths Identified by the Committee:

The applicant's financial plan meets the standard because the budget and projections are complete, and the documentation provided demonstrates ongoing sources of philanthropic support for the school. Promise Academy Spring Hill provided conservative estimations within its two-year projections and provided information regarding the transition from BEP to TISA.

Within the application, Promise Academy Spring Hill provided budgetary information that reflected a limited net income margin of \$19,673 for the 2022-2023 school year and an overall decline in the school's cash position in the last two years. When the review committee asked about this decline and limited margin during the capacity interview, the board and executive leadership team provided further clarity explaining that the school is experiencing unprecedented delays in receiving reimbursements from the Achievement School District. As a result of this delay, the school has utilized philanthropic funds received from the Fleetwood Foundation and founding board members to cover operational costs and ensure continuation of its mission. Additionally, through the philanthropic commitments Promise Academy Spring Hill has garnered over the years, the school is committed to spending roughly \$15,000 per student, which is higher than its BEP allocations of roughly \$10,000 per student. The board also clarified that the organization has a \$1 million line of credit that it can utilize as needed, and the board reiterated that the school's cash position will improve upon receiving the needed reimbursements from the Achievement School District.

Additionally, during the capacity interview, the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) for Promise Academy Spring Hill, shared how costs were split between the two Promise Academy schools as the review committee noted that there were missing costs associated with school administration within the budget. The CFO stated the schools do not operate as a network of schools, but rather two individual schools and that the majority of costs are covered at the school level. There is an internal spreadsheet that is used to track this spending and revenue between schools to ensure an adequate split for any shared positions. Furthermore, board members clarified that the philanthropic and support funds support both campuses, though the board does not have a set formula as to how these are allocated. These funds are instead allocated based on need outside of the traditional funding sources. Upon receipt of letters of commitment, the review committee determined that the levels of philanthropic support and commitment is sufficient to ensure the schools long term financial sustainability.

Weaknesses Identified by the Committee:

During the review process of the application, the review committee became aware of the departure of the Chief Financial Officer for Promise Academy Spring Hill. The review committee mentioned during the capacity interview that this was a concern given the impending loss of her longstanding institutional knowledge combined with the liquidity challenges that the school is currently facing and asked if there were succession plans in place for her departure. Promise Academy Spring Hill has partnered with a back-office provider that will work with the school to manage finances and oversee the payroll system. While the school believes this will be a seamless transition, there will need to be an organizational focus by the governing board and Executive Director to ensure success in this transition, particularly given the nuanced financial position of the school.

Analysis of Past Performance

Rating: Meets Standard

Strengths Identified by the Committee:

Promise Academy Spring Hill earned priority exit status from the ASD by earning a 17% success rate for the 2021-2022 school year. In this same year, Promise Academy Spring Hill ranked in the top 10% of charter schools in Tennessee and achieved a TVAAS composite of a Level 5. Post pandemic, between the 2021 and 2022 TN Ready tests, Promise Academy Spring Hill more than doubled their proficiency rates for ELA and Math jumping from 6% proficiency in ELA in 2021 to 19% in 2022 and jumping from less than 5% proficiency in Math in 2021 to 14% in 2022. Additionally, data for the Black, Hispanic, and Native American subgroup, along with the economically disadvantaged subgroup of students, demonstrated proficiency gains in the same TNReady tests.

The applicant also provided 2022 internal assessment data with its application demonstrating both growth and proficiency. Within the internal benchmark assessment data provided, 15% of scholars in grades 3-5 are on grade level and 37% were approaching grade level in ELA. In Math, only 4% of scholars in grades 3-5 were on grade level and 19% were approaching grade level. Promise Academy Spring Hill states within its application that the school is aware that its proficiency rates are not currently meeting Commission standards within the framework. In response, the school will continue to leverage its robust RTI programs to ensure as many students are able to reach grade level as possible by the end of the year. When asked about gaps in proficiency during the capacity interview, the principal of Promise Academy Spring Hill pointed to the school's 150-180 minutes of ELA instruction daily for students along with the low student to teacher ratios to ensure students can get one-on-one support from teachers to move students closer to grade level and proficiency.

Promise Academy Spring Hill has not been the subject of any litigation, has not had its charter revoked, and has had clean past performance reports from the ASD. The school is in adequate financial standing with the caveats discussed in the financial performance section and has had clean audits for the past two years. The school provided unaudited financial statements for SY21-22 reflecting no major concerns outside of those already addressed by the committee.

Weaknesses Identified by the Committee:

Although the review committee deemed that Promise Academy Spring Hill met standard for their past performance as the school has adequately grown students toward proficiency in recent years, earning priority exit status, there were noted concerns regarding the level of detail provided within the past performance section and capacity interview. Within the application, the applicant did not sufficiently respond to questions about how the school will continue to adjust its instructional model to address clear gaps in proficiency in math. Within the provided internal assessment data, math proficiency rates in students are much lower than in ELA, and it was not clear to the review committee how the leadership team was planning to adjust its instructional strategies and program to address these gaps. Additionally, the school's TVAAS scores were low in the 2020-2021 school year with a TVAAS 1 in both ELA and math, which was not addressed within the past performance section.

Additionally, the school did not respond to prompts within the past performance section regarding how the school on how the school would adjust its instructional plan and operations to address challenges and ensure the school meets standards under the Commission's School Performance Framework. This is particularly concerning when it comes to subgroup performance as this is a section of particular focus within the Commission's framework.



Publicly available TNReady data demonstrates low proficiency rates for students with disabilities and English Learners, lower than the proficiency rates for the same subgroups in Memphis-Shelby County Schools. The Commission's expectations and thresholds for academic performance are different than what Promise Academy Spring Hill was held to when authorized by the Achievement School District. While the review committee acknowledges the successes of the school in recent years to earn priority exit status, the intent of the questions within the past performance section of the application is to prepare the applicant for this potential change in expectations and encourage reflection on future adjustments that may need to be made to meet the new set of standards. The review committee did not penalize the school's overall academic performance despite the lack of detail provided by the applicant regarding the questions in this section, however this will be an area of focus for the Commission.



Evaluation Team

Trent Carlson is the Authorizing Coordinator for the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission. Prior to joining the Commission, Trent worked in Nashville schools as a middle school teacher in both the public school district and a local public charter school. Trent was a Teach for America corps member and a Leadership for Educational Equity policy and advocacy summer fellow, in which he co-authored the American Federation for Children — Tennessee's report, *The Warmth of Other Schools: Supporting Underrepresented Students in Private Schools*. Trent received an M.Ed. from Lipscomb University and a B.A. from the University of Alabama, where he studied Journalism, Political Science, and History.

Nancy Dickson is the Project Director for Peabody's partnership with American University of Iraq, Baghdad (AUIB) to design and launch a new college of education focused on teacher training and development. Nancy also teaches in the Department of Leadership, Policy and Organizations (LPO). Previously, she led the Humphrey Fellowship Program, a Fulbright exchange program for educational leaders from around the globe. Additionally, she has served as the Project Director for the Abu Dhabi Leadership Induction Program as well as the program manager for the Tennessee/Shanghai Leadership Collaborative here at Peabody.

Before working at Vanderbilt, she was the Director of Operations and a founding team member of LEAD Academy, a charter school network in Nashville. While teaching 4th grade in Washington, D.C. public schools, Nancy collaborated with National Geographic, Meridian International, and George Washington University to provide citywide professional development and teacher preparation programming.

As an active member in the community, Nancy has served as the board chair for many of Nashville's educational organizations. She holds a Doctorate of Educational Leadership and a Master of Public Policy degree from Vanderbilt, and a Bachelor of Art degree in Elementary Education from Penn State University.

Beth Figueroa 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. Prior to working at the Commission, Beth worked as an administrator and charter school authorizer on behalf of the Riverside County Board of Education. 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 received her B.S. in Business Administration and MBA from California Baptist University, where she is an adjunct professor teaching Government and Non-Profit Accounting.

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 the Director of Family Engagement at STEM Prep Academy where she led all community engagement efforts for two schools along with enrollment, school culture, and operations pieces. Maggie holds a BA 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.