



## **Executive Director's Findings and Recommendation**

### **Charter School Application for LEAD Brick Church**

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 local education agency ("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.<sup>1</sup> On December 12, 2023, having earned priority exit status on the state's accountability system, the Governing Board of LEAD Brick Church ("Brick Church") applied to the Commission for continued authorization under the Commission. Based on the totality of the evidence presented and Review Committee Report, attached hereto, I recommend that the Commission deny the application for LEAD Brick Church.

### **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 the Brick Church 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."<sup>2</sup> In addition, the Commission is required to hold a public hearing in the district where the charter school is located.<sup>2</sup>

The Commission can approve the application, with authorization to continue under the Commission, or deny the application. A denial of the application will result in the school being returned to the authority of Metro Nashville Public Schools as of July 1, 2024.

### **PROCEDURAL HISTORY**

1. During the school year 2012-13, LEAD Public Schools assumed operations of Brick Church College Prep Middle under the authorization of the Achievement School District, initially serving grade 5, and adding grade levels through grade 8 in school year 2015-16.
2. On October 28, 2021, LEAD Brick Church submitted a request and the required parent petition to the Commissioner of Education requesting to remain in the ASD for two additional years, in accordance with T.C.A. § 49-1-613(k)(1)(C).
3. On November 10, 2021, the Tennessee Department of Education approved LEAD Brick Church's request to remain in the Achievement School District for two additional years, two years beyond its ten-year agreement.
4. On October 6, 2023, the Governing Board of LEAD Brick Church submitted a letter of intent to the Commission expressing its intention to file a charter school application, in accordance with Commission Rule 1185-01-03-.03(1).

---

<sup>1</sup> T.C.A. § 49-1-614

<sup>2</sup> Commission Rule 1185-01-03

5. The Tennessee Department of Education notified the Commission that Brick Church had met priority exit status on November 20, 2023.
6. The Governing Board submitted a charter application in writing to the Commission on December 12, 2023, including submission of all required documents per Commission Rule 1185-01-03.
7. The Commission’s Review Committee independently analyzed and scored the LEAD Brick Church application using the Commission’s charter application scoring rubric.
8. The Commission’s Review Committee conducted a capacity interview with key members of the LEAD Brick Church leadership team on January 19, 2024 via Microsoft Teams.
9. The Commission’s staff conducted a full day site visit at LEAD Brick Church on January 30, 2024 to interview stakeholders, observe classes, and discuss data with members of the LEAD Brick Church leadership team.
10. On January 30, 2024, the Commission staff held a public hearing at LEAD Brick Church in Nashville, Tennessee. At the public hearing, the Executive Director, sitting as the Commission’s Designee, heard presentations from the school and Metro Nashville Public Schools (“MNPS”) as well as took public comment regarding the LEAD Brick Church application.
11. After the capacity interview and site visit, the Commission’s Review Committee determined a final consensus rating of the LEAD Brick Church 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 LEAD Brick Church application. This review committee consisted of the following individuals:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Title</b>
Trent Carlson	Commission staff
Erin Conley	External reviewer
Beth Figueroa	Commission staff
Autumn Hillis	External reviewer
Rebecca Ledebuhr	Commission staff

The review committee conducted an initial review and scoring of the LEAD Brick Church application, a capacity interview with the LEAD Brick Church leadership team, a full day site visit, 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 LEAD Brick Church application was as follows:

<b>Sections</b>	<b>Ratings</b>
Academic Plan Design and Capacity	Partially Meets Standard
Operations Plan and Capacity	Meets or Exceeds Standard
Financial Plan and Capacity	Meets or Exceeds Standard

For information regarding the review committee’s evaluation of the LEAD Brick Church 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 January 30, 2024. The principal for Brick Church began opening presentations by describing the work of LEAD within the Nashville community over the last 15 years, with LEAD Brick Church being a part of their turnaround portfolio and efforts. The principal stated that LEAD has successfully provided turnaround work for other schools, including LEAD Cameron, and believes that the network can provide the same level of support to LEAD Brick Church. Additionally, with the recent transition of LEAD Neely's Bend to the Commission, she stated that leadership understands what is required to be a part of the Commission portfolio. The principal stated that since LEAD first took over Brick Church, they increased the school's performance, and this speaks to their ability to create results. Brick Church received priority exit status from the Department of Education based on the 2022-23 data, and with 55% of students coming from the feeder elementary school, the principal believes that it speaks to how parents are choosing Brick Church as an option.

A representative of MNPS made a statement on behalf of the geographic school district, and within the presentation, MNPS requested that the Commission deny the LEAD Brick Church application. The district representative stated that while Brick Church met the exit criteria based on school year 2022-23 data, it was subsequently re-identified as a Comprehensive Support and Intervention ("CSI") School by the Department of Education based on school year 2022-23 data, thus remaining within the bottom 5% of schools in the state. The district representative asserted that Brick Church has declining enrollment year over year, and the publicly available data shows that the school is struggling with attendance and chronic absenteeism. The representative stated that the LEAD network did not turn the school around and has not done so over its twelve years operating the school. In closing, the district representative stated that if the school were to transition to MNPS, the district would keep the school open as a zoned middle school, and it would align the school with other schools within the Whites Creek Cluster. In conclusion, MNPS stated that based on the twelve-year history of the school, multiple years of declining data, and the school remaining in the bottom 5% of schools in the state, the Commission should deny LEAD's application to continue to operate Brick Church.

During questioning by the Commission, Brick Church addressed questions surrounding its overall success rate of less than 10% proficiency in ELA and math and what steps or new approaches are being taken to increase student proficiency. LEAD shared that Brick Church has the highest success rate of schools in the area; however, they are not satisfied with where they are currently and implemented a more intensive reading intervention, doubled the number of students identified for Tier 2 and 3 interventions, hired a math interventionist, and partnered with MasteryConnect to be more data driven and analyze interim assessments to make decisions. The school acknowledged that its school year 2021-22 data would not meet the Commission's performance framework. However, to meet Commission standards, the school stated that it is doubling down on strategies to address chronic absenteeism, focusing on talent development, and maintaining strong retention rates for teachers. The school then addressed questions related to enrollment trends. Since the pandemic, LEAD shared that MNPS restructured grade bands resulting in a loss of fifth grade students. In 2021, LEAD Brick Church right-sized its enrollment to meet targets, and as of the date of the hearing, the school's enrollment was 250, which was above the 230 students initially projected in the application. The school then answered questions surrounding the financial position of Brick Church, particularly given that this school is in a much weaker financial position when compared to other LEAD schools. The operator shared that as a network, their larger schools are more efficient, and for LEAD Brick Church, adding to the school's fund balance is not the biggest priority. They stated that, as a network, LEAD operates at a net positive and has philanthropic support to help should it become necessary. Lastly, the operator addressed questions surrounding the potential loss of the school's facility lease. LEAD Brick Church shared that the primary focus would be to secure a



new ten-year charter term and to remain in the current building. This would be accomplished by engaging with MNPS on a lease or purchase of the building. Should this not materialize, they are prepared to purchase and develop a new site as the network has the funds to purchase a building if needed.

The public hearing concluded with closing statements by the school and the receipt of eleven in-person comments, ten speaking in support of LEAD Brick Church and one speaking in opposition of the approval of the application. The Commission also accepted written comments, and the Commission received twenty-one written comments, with nineteen writing in support of LEAD Brick Church and two in support of denying the application.

### **ANALYSIS**

Under T.C.A. § 49-1-614, the Commission is charged with determining whether a charter school currently under the authorization of Achievement School District will continue in operation under the Commission or transition back to the local school district. Pursuant to T.C.A. § 49-13-105, 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 and conclude as follows:

The work of school turnaround is challenging, and many charter operators choose not to engage in this work. It is resource- and time-intensive, and it is often a rollercoaster with ups and downs. LEAD Public Schools is a charter operator that has regularly taken on the work of school turnaround in Tennessee, and I commend them for embarking on this challenge with multiple schools in the Nashville area. My recommendation is not an evaluation of LEAD's ability to be a leader in the school turnaround space or whether LEAD should be granted the ability to turn around schools in the future. My recommendation is focused on Brick Church and whether the totality of the data available merits LEAD receiving a new, ten-year charter term under the Commission to continue to operate the school. It is my conclusion that the data does not support a new charter term, and I recommend the Commission deny the application of LEAD Brick Church.

In school year 2011-2012, the Tennessee Department of Education ("Department") assigned Brick Church Middle School to the Achievement School District because it fell in the bottom 5% of schools within the state, and the Department determined it should receive the state's most intensive school turnaround intervention. LEAD was selected to operate the school, and the network has spent more than a decade working to increase student academic achievement at Brick Church. LEAD first began its work at Brick Church in school year 2012-13 and is currently in its twelfth year of operating Brick Church. In 2021, Brick Church exercised the "parent trigger" which allows a school within the ASD that gets 60% of parents/guardians to sign a petition to keep the school within the ASD, in accordance with T.C.A. § 49-1-613(k)(1)(C). Through this avenue, LEAD's charter agreement with the ASD was extended for two years, two years beyond the original ten-year term. It is during this extended time that LEAD chose not to apply to MNPS for authorization through the new start application process under T.C.A. § 48-13-108. Based on school year 2022-23 data, Brick Church met the one-year exit criteria from the CSI list as developed by the Tennessee Department of Education and was "deemed eligible" under Commission rule to apply to the Commission for authorization. However, based on the same school year 2022-23 data, the school was re-identified for the CSI list by the Department. The CSI designation is a federal accountability measure that identifies schools in the lowest 5% of schools in the state. Therefore, from 2012-13 to 2023-24, there is little statistical difference in academic outcomes at Brick Church after twelve years of the state's most intensive intervention.

It is important to note that there are two distinct differences in the application from Brick Church that are factored into my analysis and the Commission must consider. First, when the Commission considered previous applications from charter schools applying to exit the ASD, the schools achieved priority exit status before the final

year of their charter agreements. Therefore, the schools had at least one or more remaining years on their charter agreements with the ASD. The Commission's decision on those applications was whether to allow the schools to complete the remaining years on their initial ten-year charter agreements under the Commission prior to considering a new, ten-year agreement. In the case of Brick Church, LEAD is in its final year of its charter agreement with the ASD, and the agreement ends on June 30, 2024. The decision of the Commission is not only to allow the school to complete its agreement with the ASD but to renew the agreement for a new, ten-year charter term beginning July 1, 2024. Second, the schools from previous application cycles achieved priority exit status based on a different, more rigorous criterion. For Brick Church to achieve the one-year exit criteria, the school had to outperform only its school year 2021-22 success rate. Previous exit criteria, for example, required schools to have a success rate that exceeds the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile of the state on the two most recent years of data. As noted above, based on the same school year 2022-23 data, Brick Church was re-identified as a school in the bottom 5% of schools in the state.

I believe that this operator is invested in the success of the middle school students attending Brick Church, and there is community support for the school. Additionally, LEAD has demonstrated school turnaround success at Cameron College Prep and LEAD Neely's Bend. However, the track record of success is not as clear at Brick Church, and that is why I believe the evidence does not support a trajectory for the school's success such that a new ten-year charter term should be granted. Throughout the twelve-year charter term at Brick Church, there has been significant school leadership turnover that hindered progress toward success. Like most schools, Brick Church was impacted academically by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, a larger concern to me is that LEAD struggled to achieve academic success at Brick Church before the COVID-19 pandemic's impact. There have been inconsistent, mixed academic results experienced by Brick Church, as evidenced in **Exhibit B**, which is incorporated by reference into my recommendation. The complete application record shows that LEAD has attempted many strategies throughout the life of the charter agreement to improve the school's performance data. While appreciated, those attempts have not resulted in academic results that have moved the school out of the lowest 5% of schools while other schools within the ASD, including one operated by LEAD, have moved out of this designation.

For school year 2022-23, Brick Church's ELA success rate was 8.7%<sup>3</sup> and the TVAAS for literacy was 3, which slightly exceeds the other two zoned middle schools. However, when compared to other charter schools in the area, Brick Church is well below those success rates. Three charter schools within three miles of Brick Church have ELA success rates of 22% or higher (see **Exhibit B**). In math, there are similar trends. For Brick Church, the success rate for school year 2022-23 was 9.7%<sup>4</sup> with a TVAAS of 2. Two other zoned middle schools scored under 9.7% in success rate but had higher Numeracy TVAAS than Brick Church. When compared to other charter schools in the area, Brick Church is well below those success rates. Three charter schools in the area have math success rates of 29% or higher. In totality, Brick Church has been under the state's most intensive intervention since 2012; however, there is a lack of clear academic performance that distinguishes Brick Church from the two other zoned schools in the area. Three other public charter school options in the vicinity far outperform the academic outcomes at Brick Church.

Additionally, when the Commission staff evaluated Brick Church against the Commission's School Performance Framework, Brick Church failed to meet the academic standard. This is particularly noteworthy given that the Commission rebuilt its School Performance Framework to account for schools that would join the portfolio

---

<sup>3</sup> The publicly available data for subject success rates as of February 21, 2024 only represent grades six through eight. LEAD Brick Church's actual success rates will fluctuate with the inclusion of the full student population as the currently available data does not include fifth grade students.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

from the ASD, and currently all schools within the Commission's portfolio that exited the ASD met the framework's academic standards for school year 2022-23.

Looking at non-academic data, Brick Church has similarly had mixed results. The school's chronic absenteeism has fluctuated over time. Based on school year 2021-22, the chronic absenteeism rate at Brick Church was lower than the two other zoned middle schools but higher than other charter schools in the area. Although the data is still embargoed, the school's chronic absenteeism rate increased in school year 2022-23. In school year 2021-22, the most recent data available, Brick Church had a suspension rate that equated to the zoned middle schools and was higher than the traditional charter schools in the area.

Another factor for consideration by the Commission in this decision is the school's enrollment. Over the past few years, the school's enrollment has declined, and there are currently about 250 students in grades five through eight. There are fewer than seventy-five students in each grade, with only thirty students in grade 5. On the whole, the Whites Creek cluster has experienced an overall decline in enrollment, and MNPS has closed two other middle schools in the area to consolidate enrollment. Brick Church is not immune to the impact of declining enrollment patterns, and if the school were to transition to the Commission, it would no longer be a zoned school. Therefore, the school and network would be responsible for recruiting and retaining students outside of the traditional feeder pattern. While the network states that its overall financial model is based on the school always having a lower enrollment than other schools in the area, I believe that enrollment will regularly be a challenge if the school is approved for a new, ten-year charter term.

I believe that LEAD Public Schools is a leader in school turnaround work in Tennessee, as evidenced by its work both at Cameron College Prep (authorized by MNPS) and LEAD Neely's Bend (authorized currently under the Commission). LEAD has a strong governing board and solid systems for accountability. The diverse members of the board and parental involvement as well as experience with a change in authorizers are all strengths of the operator. Financially, LEAD has a strong network financial plan, and the school and network budget conservatively and have strong philanthropic support.

I also want to acknowledge the support that parents and community members have demonstrated through this process for LEAD to continue to operate Brick Church. There has been clear evidence of this support at the public hearing and through the public comments the Commission received, and I do not discount the parents' and students' clear desire to have LEAD remain the operator of Brick Church. However, my recommendation must consider more than the community support for LEAD's operation of Brick Church. I cannot recommend approval of this application for a new, ten-year charter agreement when the historical data does not show a trajectory for success. At the end of twelve years of the state's most intensive intervention, the school remains in the bottom 5% of schools in academic performance. While I commend LEAD's commitment to school turnaround work, I cannot state that the school has achieved such clear academic success that it merits operation for another ten years.

If the school were to move into the Commission's portfolio, it would be amongst the lowest performing schools in the Commission's district and would need to be placed immediately on a corrective action plan. Unless the school's data under the Commission changes dramatically after twelve years' worth of operations under the ASD, the Commission would likely consider revocation prior to the end of the ten-year term for failure to meet the Commission's academic standards. I believe that LEAD has exhausted its efforts to turnaround Brick Church and to move the school out of the bottom 5% of schools in the state. Therefore, I believe that the evidence supports my recommendation to return this school to the resident district. The Commission commits to being a thoughtful partner with MNPS and, should the Commission uphold my recommendation, will work appropriately with the district to support the students and families at Brick Church during this transition.



### CONCLUSION

For these reasons, and for the reasons stated in the Review Committee Report attached hereto as **Exhibit A**, I do not believe that the application for LEAD Brick Church supports a decision to transition the school from the Achievement School District to the Commission's portfolio. Therefore, I recommend that the Commission deny the application for LEAD Brick Church.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tess Stovall". The signature is written in a cursive style.

---

Tess Stovall, Executive Director  
Tennessee Public Charter School Commission

February 21, 2024  
Date



## EXHIBIT A

### Charter Application Review Committee Recommendation Report

February 21, 2024

School Name: LEAD Brick Church

Charter Management Organization: LEAD Public Schools

Location of School: Nashville, Tennessee

Evaluation Team:

- Trent Carlson
- Erin Conley
- Beth Figueroa
- Autumn Hillis
- Rebecca Ledebuhr



This recommendation report is based on a template from the National Association of Charter School Authorizers.



© 2014 National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA)

This document carries a Creative Commons license, which permits noncommercial re-use of content when proper attribution is provided. This means you are free to copy, display and distribute this work, or include content from the application in derivative works, under the following conditions:

**Attribution** You must clearly attribute the work to the National Association of Charter School Authorizers, and provide a link back to the publication at <http://www.qualitycharters.org/>.

**Noncommercial** You may not use this work for commercial purposes, including but not limited to any type of work for hire, without explicit prior permission from NACSA.

**Share Alike** If you alter, transform, or build upon this work, you may distribute the resulting work only under a license identical to this one.

For the full legal code of this Creative Commons license, please visit [www.creativecommons.org](http://www.creativecommons.org). If you have any questions about citing or reusing NACSA content, please contact us.

## 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 December 12, 2023, having earned priority exit status on the state's accountability system, the Governing Board of LEAD Brick Church applied to the Commission for continued authorization under the Commission. As laid out in Commission Policy 3.000 – Core Authorizing Principles, 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.

The Commission's charter application review process is outlined in Commission Rule 1185-01-03, 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 review 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 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 three sections of the application: Academic Plan Design, Operations Plan, and Financial Plan.
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. Site Visit: Commission staff held a day-long site visit at the school, at which they met with school and network leadership, observed classrooms and special education services, and conducted stakeholder interviews. Findings from the site visit were shared with the review committee as part of the review process.
4. 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 three 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; historical operational information; charter management organization (if applicable); and waivers.
- c. Financial Plan and Capacity: budgeting; budget narrative; and network financial plan.

The Commission’s charter application review committee utilized the Commission’s Charter Application Rubric for use by ASD Charter Schools applying to the Commission<sup>1</sup>, which is used by the Commission when evaluating an application from the ASD. 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:

<b>Rating</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
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 school; or otherwise raises significant concerns about the viability of the plan or the applicant’s ability to carry it out.

<sup>1</sup> This rubric was updated in June of 2023 by the Commission.



### Summary of the Application

School Name: LEAD Brick Church

Charter Management Organization: LEAD Public Schools

Location of School: Nashville, Tennessee

Mission: Preparing all of our students with the knowledge and skills to succeed in college and in life.<sup>2</sup>

Number of Schools Currently in Operation by Governing Board: There are six schools in the LEAD network.

Proposed Enrollment:<sup>3</sup>

Grade Level	Year 1 2024-25	Year 2 2025-26	Year 3 2026-27 Fully Enrolled
5	30	45	45
6	75	75	75
7	65	75	75
8	60	70	70
Total	230	265	265

Brief Description of the Application:

LEAD Brick Church is a charter school currently operating within the ASD in Davidson County, Tennessee and serves fifth through eighth grade students in the Whites Creek cluster of Metro Nashville Public Schools (“MNPS”). If approved by the Commission, the school intends to continue operating in its neighborhood and will expand its reach outside its current cluster to the greater Whites Creek region. The school’s mission is focused on "preparing all of our students with the knowledge and skills to succeed in college and in life."<sup>4</sup> To support this mission, the school has its students spend extra instructional and small group time focused on literacy and numeracy development to enhance problem-solving and critical thinking skills necessary for college- and career-readiness.<sup>5</sup>

The LEAD Brick Church governing board is long standing, offers diverse skillsets, and has overseen the school for the last twelve years. If approved, LEAD Brick Church intends to stay in its current facility upon completion of its charter term as the facility is an integral part of their community. The school currently has a lease with Metro Nashville Public Schools, and the school will engage with MNPS to negotiate a longer lease if approved by the Commission. LEAD Brick Church is operating in a positive financial position with projected net incomes of \$105,118 for SY23-24, \$34,310 for SY24-25, and \$480,471 for SY25-26.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> LEAD Brick Church Application – pg. 4

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, pg. 15

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, pg. 4

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, pg. 5

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, School Budget Excel Documents



## Summary of the Evaluation

The review committee recommends denial of the application for LEAD Brick Church because while the application meets or exceeds the standards in the operations and financial sections of the rubric, it partially meets standards in Academic Plan Design and Capacity.

The academic section partially meets standard because over the past twelve years, there is little correlation between the school's academic model and a positive trajectory of student academic results. While the review committee acknowledged the context provided by the application, including the fact that the school performed comparably to its surrounding zoned middle schools, overall student proficiency levels have remained low since LEAD Public Schools took over operations in SY2012-13. Moreover, the school remains in the bottom 5% of schools in the state. Since the implementation of the updated TNReady assessments in 2016, Brick Church's proficiency levels were at their highest in SY16-17 at 10.5% in ELA and 12.4% in math. Since the pandemic, the school has shown a slight trajectory of proficiency growth since SY20-21 but has not reached pre-pandemic levels. In the publicly available data for SY22-23, the school's success rate was 8.7% in ELA and 9.7% in math<sup>7</sup>. While the school provided the review committee current, mid-year internal assessment data that demonstrated some positive trends compared to the previous school year's data, concerns remained regarding the trajectory of the academic performance of the school's student population. Additionally, the review committee noted the declining student enrollment as a concern for the school's overall sustainability. While the school and network stated that they have systems in place to support student enrollment, there is evidence that enrollment throughout the school's zone is declining, raising questions about long-term enrollment sustainability.

The applicant's operations plan meets or exceeds standard as the LEAD network has a track record of success supporting its schools, systems in place to manage and oversee operations, and a strong governing board. The review committee noted that the network's experiences supporting a variety of schools, including a school that transitioned authorizers, was demonstrated through the proactive planning and contingency planning that was included within the application. Board members represent diverse professional expertise and effectively oversee the organization through structured committees and regular academic updates from each of its schools. Additionally, the network has developed and strengthened its internal pipeline for developing future leaders, and school staff spoke to the positive staff culture current leadership has created.

The financial plan meets or exceeds standard because there is a history of stable financial health, clean audits, and the network's significant financial reserves. Within the application, the review committee found clear alignment between expenditures in the budget and the detailed budget narrative. The committee also noted that due to the significant financial reserves, the network can cover the contingency planning included in the application, as necessary. While the section was deemed to meet or exceed standard, there was remaining concern within the review committee regarding the long-term impacts the declining student enrollment might have on the school and network, particularly given that Brick Church operates on a much tighter margins than other schools within the LEAD network.

---

<sup>7</sup> The publicly available data for ELA and math success rates as of February 21, 2024 only represent grades six through eight. LEAD Brick Church's actual success rates will fluctuate with the inclusion of the full student population as the currently available data does not include fifth grade students. Data source: Tennessee Department of Education's A-F Letter Grade Dashboard

### Summary of Section Ratings

In accordance with the Commission's charter application scoring rubric, applications that do not meet or exceed the standard in all sections will be deemed not eligible for approval.<sup>8</sup> The review committee's consensus ratings for each section of the application are as follows:

<b>Sections</b>	<b>Rating</b>
Academic Plan Design and Capacity	Partially Meets Standard
Operations Plan and Capacity	Meets or Exceeds Standard
Financial Plan and Capacity	Meets or Exceeds Standard

---

<sup>8</sup> Commission ASD Application Scoring Rubric

## Analysis of the Academic Plan Design

*Rating: Partially Meets Standard*

### **Weaknesses Identified by the Committee**

The review committee found the overall trajectory of academic performance of the school to be a significant concern. Since LEAD assumed responsibility for the school in SY12-13, there is little correlation between the school's academic model and a positive trajectory of student academic results. For example, since the implementation of the updated TNReady assessments in 2016, Brick Church's proficiency levels were at their highest in SY16-17 at 10.5% in ELA and 12.4% in math. The school struggled academically pre-pandemic, and, like most schools, the school saw a dip in proficiency due to the pandemic. While the school has shown a slight trajectory of proficiency growth since SY20-21, it has not reached pre-pandemic levels. In the publicly available data for SY22-23, the school's success rate was 8.7% in ELA and 9.7% in math<sup>9</sup>. Additionally, the Tennessee Department of Education re-identified Brick Church as a Comprehensive Support and Improvement School ("CSI"), indicating that the school fell in the bottom 5% of schools in the state. There remain gaps in the performance of subgroups of students, including economically disadvantaged students and Black, Hispanic, Native American students, and many of the strategies discussed to support low academic achievement of all students have been used in the past at the school with limited results. The school provided the review committee current, mid-year internal assessment data. While containing some positive trends in comparison to the previous year's data, it did not alleviate the overarching concerns regarding the school's ability to boost the academic performance of its student population. Overall, the review committee could not find enough evidence to indicate that the school could improve to the point of meeting the Commission's framework requirements and moving out of the bottom 5% of schools.

The review committee also noted concerns regarding the school's enrollment trends. Through the application and capacity interview, the applicant gave context to the declining enrollment and plans for supporting and stabilizing enrollment numbers; however, the fact that two of the areas zoned schools have closed in recent years gave the review committee concern for the sustainability of student recruitment and enrollment from the area. In the application, the applicant included tables of declining enrollment for the middle schools in both the Whites Creek and Maplewood Clusters despite the closure of the two zoned middle schools. The application listed full enrollment would be 265 students for Brick Church, and the school had 251 students enrolled in November 2023, down from 326 in 2021. Additionally, it is highly likely that the school would see an enrollment dip moving from a zoned school under the ASD to an open enrollment school under the Commission. Although some of the school's enrollment declines are attributable to MNPS moving 5<sup>th</sup> grade from middle schools to elementary schools, it was not clear to the review committee how the school will stabilize enrollment long-term.

While LEAD Brick Church had consistent leadership in their founding principal from 2012 to 2016, the school experienced continuous principal turnover between 2016 to 2021. The turnover of this key position and the lack of continuity in leadership at the school site undoubtedly impacted the school's turnaround efforts. While the current principal for Brick Church has demonstrated experience in school turnaround and the review committee found she has built strong relationships with staff through focus on staff culture and comprehensive talent strategy, she is only in her second year as principal. The lack of stability in the school leader role during the majority of the school's tenure resulted in inconsistent delivery of academic programs, interventions, and talent strategy to retain teachers. In addition to school leadership turnover, the school has also experienced significant teacher turnover through its

---

<sup>9</sup> The publicly available data for ELA and math success rates as of February 21, 2024 only represent grades six through eight. LEAD Brick Church's actual success rates will fluctuate with the inclusion of the full student population as the currently available data does not include fifth grade students. Data source: Tennessee Department of Education's A-F Letter Grade Dashboard

charter term. The network has received a grant allowing them to increase educator effectiveness by investing in an enhanced performance-based compensation program, including retention bonuses; however, the long-term results of the recent investment in human capital is yet to be seen at Brick Church. As such, it is unclear whether these efforts will directly result in continued strong leadership and retention of high-performing instructional staff members.

Additionally, the review committee found that while the school has recently implemented core intervention strategies into its academic program, the results of these changes have not yet been seen. For example, in SY21-22, the network implemented strategies to support students in literacy, based on the understanding that ELA drives success in all subject areas. Another example of added intervention strategies is the addition of a Director of Multi-Tiered System of Support (“MTSS”) to lead the work around expanded intervention in reading and mathematics. Additionally, during the capacity interview and site visit, leaders shared the recent shift to focusing on data-driven instruction and decision making through the refinement of assessment strategy and the development of their Student Needs Assessment Protocol (“SNAP”). As a part of SNAP, academic and culture data are regularly reviewed to ensure that data drives intervention strategies and refinement to academic plans and student interventions. While the review committee found that the recently implemented intervention strategies were representative of best practices, the school has not yet demonstrated a track record of academic success or increased student success rates in a way that outperformed neighboring schools or moved the school out of the bottom 5% of schools. As such, the review committee determined that the academic plan partially meets standard.

### **Strengths Identified by the Committee**

The review committee found that the application provided historical context. The school was the lowest performing middle school in Nashville when LEAD took over operation, and throughout the charter term, the school's results have been on par with, and in some cases slightly better than, the other public middle schools in its zone. Also, the review committee found evidence that the LEAD network has a track record of success supporting its other schools throughout Nashville. Through both the application and the capacity interview, the applicant spoke to how the academic model and plan was designed in response to the student population the school serves and ways in which the school has recently adjusted elements of the plan in response to academic data. For example, mid-year shifts were made this school year to the ELA program with an introduction of “Writing Wednesdays” to provide more direct writing instruction and practice for students.

The review committee also found that the current school leadership team, who began together at the school in SY22-23, demonstrated their capacity and experience overseeing and supporting a school turnaround. Leadership was able to speak clearly and directly to current academic data and the ways in which they were responding to that data. Additionally, through the site visit conducted by the Commission's internal review committee members, stakeholders interviewed spoke positively about the change in the school's staff and student culture under the current leadership.



## **Analysis of the Operations Plan**

*Rating: Meets or Exceeds Standard*

### **Strengths Identified by the Committee**

The review committee found that the applicant provided sufficient evidence demonstrating the operational stability and success of the school and network. The application outlined a strong operational plan and capacity, and the review committee noted the strength of the governing board and the systems it has in place to hold school and network leadership accountable. LEAD also has a track record of success supporting its other schools across Nashville, which include other turnaround schools. Due to the size and variety of its school portfolio, LEAD currently manages numerous third-party partnerships, relationships with three different authorizers, and oversight of each of the schools' operational and financial systems.

The review committee also noted that the application included contingency planning regarding external partnerships and provided services, particularly if Metro Nashville Public Schools does not continue providing services upon a potential change of authorizers. The application provides evidence that the network is in a financial place to support contingency planning if needed. Since LEAD has already experienced a change in authorizers for another school (LEAD Neely's Bend in school year 2023-24), the application references proactive planning the school and network took for this potential transition, which the committee found to be a strength. Included in this are contingency plans regarding transportation, facilities, and food services.

The governing board was identified as a strength of the application by the review committee. The board is comprised of a group of professionals with diverse experiences and expertise and includes a family representative. The board is divided into committees to oversee and support its schools and there is a clear outline of roles and responsibilities. As part of the site visit, Commission staff had the opportunity to interview the board chair directly, who provided evidence that the board is highly engaged, aware of the current state of each of its schools and engaged in future planning. The board and organization have a track record of successfully supporting schools throughout the city, which the review committee found to be a strength of the operation plan and capacity.

## **Analysis of the Financial Plan**

*Rating: Meets or Exceeds Standard*

### **Strengths Identified by the Committee**

The review committee found that Brick Church's financial plan meets the standard based on the strong financial position of the network and based on the submitted budget and financial projections within the application. The budget and financial projections incorporate reasonable cost assumptions and staffing projections while projecting that the annual revenues will exceed expenses year-over-year.

Within the application, Brick Church provided budgetary information that reflects positive net income, with financial margins increasing each year. The projected revenue is based on conservative estimates and only includes TISA and federal funds. While the network anticipates the receipt of philanthropic support consistent with prior years, the financial projections do not incorporate such funding, demonstrating financial stability and sustainability without having to rely on these additional sources of revenue. Further, the review committee noted that there is clear alignment between expenditures and the budget provided within the application, and the budget narrative contained detailed line items including personnel, transportation, facilities, and network management fee.

The LEAD network as a whole is also in a strong financial position, has a history of stable financial health, and the network has a history of clean audits, demonstrating strong internal financial practices are in place. Additionally, the LEAD network budgets include a contingency allowance to provide flexibility should revenue come in lower than anticipated or should an unexpected expense occur. This is particularly important for Brick Church because even though the school projects that it will operate with a positive net margin, the net margin is limited and having the Network's reserves accessible was deemed a strength by the committee.

Access to healthy reserve levels is also particularly important considering the declining enrollment trends. During the capacity interview, school leadership provided additional detail surrounding their recruitment strategy, which includes broadening the zone for engaging communities and families. Additionally, during the site visit, Brick Church confirmed that the school could continue to operate and be financially viable with as low as 200 students. Despite the clarification provided at the capacity interview and site visit, the review committee had remaining concerns with enrollment projections and the potential impact on the school's long term financial sustainability. Due to the overall network's financial health and significant reserves, these concerns did not rise to the level this section not meeting the standards, as the current reserve levels that are more than sufficient should Brick Church experience temporary shortfalls. However, the financial impact of enrollment trends remains a relevant point that the committee believes should be considered.



## 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. 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.

**Erin Conley** serves as an expert reviewer for a number of charter school authorizers across the country. Over the last 14 years in the field of education, she has served in roles focused on survey development, data analytics and visualization, research, board development, compliance, school operations, and policy analysis. Erin has expertise in charter authorization and laws that impact charters and networks. Erin began her career teaching in the Chicago Public School district. She has a Bachelor of Arts in English and Secondary Education from Michigan State University and a Master's in Public Policy from Vanderbilt University with a focus on K-12 education policy.

**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. 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 and serves as 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.

**Rebecca Ledebuhr** is the Data and Accountability Coordinator at the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission. Before taking on her role at the Charter Commission, Rebecca spent fourteen years working in public schools in North Carolina and Tennessee. Most recently, she served as an instructional coach for mathematics at an MNPS public charter school. Rebecca has served on the Nashville Public Education Foundation's and Mayor's Teacher Cabinet, as a mentor teacher for the Nashville Teacher Residency, and as a Tennessee Educator Fellow for the State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE). Rebecca holds a B.A. in Philosophy and Religion from James Madison University.

Exhibit B

Data from School Year 2022-2023							
Name	Grades Served	Type of School	SY22-23 ELA Success Rate	SY22-23 Math Success Rate	SY22-23 Composite TVAAS	SY22-23 Letter Grade	Approximate Distance from LEAD Brick Church
LEAD Brick Church	Grades 5-8	Applicant from ASD	8.7%*	9.7%*	3	D	n/a
Haynes Middle	Grades 6-8	MNPS - Zoned	5.1%	<5%	3	D	1 mile
Jere Baxter Middle	Grades 6-8	MNPS - Zoned	6.9%	<5%	1	F	1.7 miles
Alex Green Elementary	Grades PK-5	MNPS - Zoned	10.1%	15.6%	3	D	3.6 miles
Whites Creek High School	Grades 9-12	MNPS - Zoned	11.4%	5.1%	5	C	4.4 miles
KIPP Academy Middle School	Grades 5-8	MNPS - Charter	26.2%*	29.7%*	5	B	1.9 miles
KIPP Nashville College Prep	Grades 5-8	MNPS - Charter	23.6%*	31.6%*	5	B	1.7 miles
Liberty Collegiate Academy	Grades 5-8	MNPS - Charter	25.2%*	32.0%*	5	B	2.8 miles

Data Source: Tennessee Department of Education's A-F Letter Grade Dashboard

\*Represents Grades 6-8, current publicly available data

ELA Success Rates Over Time							
Name	Grades in Success Rate	SY17-18	SY18-19	SY20-21	SY21-22	SY22-23	Literacy TVAAS for SY22-23
LEAD Brick Church	Grades 5-8	6.8%	8.6%	<5%	5.8%	8.7%*	3
Haynes Middle	Grades 6-8	6.4%*	<5%	<5%	<5%	5.1%	2
Jere Baxter Middle	Grades 6-8	6.2%*	5.8%	<5%	5.8%	6.9%	3
Alex Green Elementary	Grades 3-5	13.3%	14.0%	10.4%	14.4%	10.1%	2
Whites Creek High School	Grades 9-12	<5%	6.0%	7.8%	11.2%	11.4%	5
KIPP Academy Middle School	Grades 5-8	33.3%	28.5%	15.2%	24.6%	23.6%	5
KIPP Nashville College Prep	Grades 5-8	23.2%	26.2%	14.2%	27.8%	22.1%	5
Liberty Collegiate Academy	Grades 5-8	28.2%	27.8%	16.3%	25.9%	24.5%	5

Data Sources: Tennessee Department of Education's A-F Letter Grade Dashboard, School Report Card, and Data Downloads & Requests

\*Represents Grades 6-8, Grade 5 data was suppressed

Math Success Rates Over Time							
Name	Grades in Success Rate	SY17-18	SY18-19	SY20-21	SY21-22	SY22-23	Numeracy TVAAS for SY22-23
LEAD Brick Church	Grades 5-8	9.3%*	11.0%	<5%	5.8%	9.7%*	2
Haynes Middle	Grades 6-8	<5%	7.3%	<5%	<5%	<5%	3
Jere Baxter Middle	Grades 6-8	<5%	5.9%	<5%	<5%	<5%	3
Alex Green Elementary	Grades 3-5	8.8%	18.4%	<5%	12.7%	15.6%	4
Whites Creek High School	Grades 9-12	<5%	<5%	<5%	<5%	5.1%	4
KIPP Academy Middle School	Grades 5-8	49.6%	50.4%	5.2%	21.6%	28.9%	5
KIPP Nashville College Prep	Grades 5-8	41.2%	52.2%	<5%	19.8%	29.4%	5
Liberty Collegiate Academy	Grades 5-8	30.3%	44.5%	16.4%	38.8%	33.1%	5

Data Sources: Tennessee Department of Education's A-F Letter Grade Dashboard, School Report Card, and Data Downloads & Requests

\*Represents Grades 6-8, Grade 5 data was suppressed

Chronic Absenteeism Rates Over Time					
Name	Grades	SY18-19	SY19-20*	SY20-21	SY21-22
LEAD Brick Church	Grades 5-8	21.9%	17.7%	38.7%	29.4%
Haynes Middle	Grades 6-8	16.0%	18.4%	58.4%	45.1%
Jere Baxter Middle	Grades 6-8	17.9%	24.2%	60.1%	46.5%
Alex Green Elementary	Grades PK-5	18.0%	15.6%	44.3%	33.4%
Whites Creek High School	Grades 9-12	41.9%	41.7%	48.5%	50.2%
KIPP Academy Middle School	Grades 5-8	9.3%	9.5%	19.6%	24.7%
KIPP Nashville College Prep	Grades 5-8	11.0%	11.0%	27.9%	30.1%
Liberty Collegiate Academy	Grades 5-8	16.2%	12.6%	23.2%	22.9%

Data Sources: Tennessee Department of Education's School Report Card and Data Downloads & Requests

\*calculated through March 2, 2020, used for informational purposes only

Out-of-School Suspension Rates Over Time					
Name	Grades	SY17-18	SY18-19	SY19-20	SY21-22
LEAD Brick Church	Grades 5-8	26.9%	19.5%	28.6%	26.2%
Haynes Middle	Grades 6-8	16.8%	33.6%	12.3%	34.8%
Jere Baxter Middle	Grades 6-8	10.3%	27.5%	22.5%	26.9%
Alex Green Elementary	Grades PK-5	11.5%	<5%	<5%	<5%
Whites Creek High School	Grades 9-12	16.3%	30.0%	17.2%	15.2%
KIPP Academy Middle School	Grades 5-8	14.4%	20.6%	19.3%	19.7%
KIPP Nashville College Prep	Grades 5-8	21.0%	25.8%	17.1%	19.8%
Liberty Collegiate Academy	Grades 5-8	16.0%	17.6%	10.3%	<5%

Data Sources: Tennessee Department of Education's School Report Card and Data Downloads & Requests