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Name	Viva Price
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Email	priceviva@gmail.com
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Please indicate which school or organization you are with if any.	The Gate School
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Please provide your written comment below.

To the Members of the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission:

My name is Viva Price, and I have the honor of serving as Board Chair of The Gate School. I am writing to share my deep conviction for our mission and to ask for your authorization of a school that our community desperately needs and warmly anticipates.

While we admire our founders and wholeheartedly believe in their vision, a school's success must never rest solely on a few individuals. Enduring, high-performing schools require strong organizational infrastructure-built in true partnership with the community and designed to support generations of students.

Our board combines professional wisdom with lived experience across academics, school operations, finance, and community engagement. Our duty is rigorous, ongoing oversight: holding our school leadership-and ourselves-accountable to clear, measurable benchmarks long after authorization. Just as we expect continuous growth from our educators, our board is committed to ongoing governance training and self-evaluation so that our oversight matures alongside the school. We are not a founding board that will step back once the doors open. We are built for sustained engagement because we know the stakes for our children could not be higher.

The urgent necessity of The Gate School is made clear by the reality our children face in the middle grades. Across our catchment area, elementary proficiency sits at roughly 36% in both ELA and math. But as students transition into middle school, proficiency drops to 28.8% in ELA and just 24.4% in math. That decline happens at the exact moment young people should be building confidence, discovering their voice, and gaining momentum toward high school.

Even more alarming, in the zoned middle schools within roughly three miles of our proposed site, proficiency drops to 11% in both ELA and math. That means nearly 9 out of 10 students are falling behind. Behind that 89% statistic are hundreds of real children with incredible potential who are being missed by the system. There is profound struggle in those numbers, but there is also a beautiful, urgent opportunity for triumph if we provide them with the right environment.

Families across our neighborhood are actively raising their hands for a better alternative. They are not simply agreeing with the concept of a new option-they are actively seeking enrollment at The Gate School for their own sons and daughters.

I approach this work through two deeply personal lenses. As a non-profit leader, I know that resilient, high-impact organizations require role clarity, fiscal discipline, and unwavering shared accountability. As the mother of a sixth grader in a Metro Nashville public academic magnet school, and someone who has spent nearly a decade working alongside low-income families across this district, I know what parents are asking for. They want a school where their children feel genuinely valued, where families are true partners, and where teachers are empowered to lead.

The combination of critical academic need and overwhelming family demand gives our board complete conviction in this school's purpose. Every child in our district deserves a learning environment governed with discipline, led with excellence, and grounded in care. On behalf of our board, our prospective families, and our future students, I respectfully ask for your approval of The Gate School's charter application.

Thank you for your time, service, and dedication to Tennessee's students.

Respectfully submitted,

Viva Price
Board Chair
The Gate School

Dear Tennessee Charter School Commission Members:

I appreciate the Commission's careful review of the Trimble Forward Alliance charter school application and the time invested throughout the application process. I have great respect for the Commission's responsibility to evaluate proposed charter schools and protect the interests of Tennessee students and families, and I have watched Tess serve students faithfully for years. **My dedication to Tennessee's public school students and to advancing education in our state through pioneering proven innovative approaches compels me to offer this additional perspective on the recommendation to deny the Trimble Forward Alliance's application for Trimble Academy.**

Because several conclusions in the recommendation to deny the application appear to involve interpretation of the application narrative rather than deficiencies clearly established by the application itself, I respectfully offer the following additional perspective.

I have led a Tennessee public charter school out of the bottom 10% statewide, and had increasing academic performance at any school where I was the leader while maintaining a record of continuous long term academic growth and compliant financial accountability for sixteen consecutive years in service to the families of our state. I offer this perspective not to challenge the Commission's process, but because practical experience developing and operating a Tennessee charter school may provide useful context as the Commission considers whether the concerns identified warrant denial or can reasonably be addressed through implementation and appropriate oversight.

1. Integration of Outdoor Learning

Recommendation to deny based upon:

"The narrative fails to demonstrate how these models will be applied cohesively in daily classroom instruction. The application alternately describes outdoor learning as central and as a secondary add-on, creating ambiguity regarding its academic role."

Additional perspective:

I respectfully believe this conclusion may reflect an interpretation of the application rather than an actual ambiguity.

The application does not describe outdoor learning as an optional enrichment activity. It describes outdoor learning as an integral component of the instructional environment while appropriately recognizing that students will learn in both indoor and outdoor settings. The fact that outdoor instruction supplements indoor classroom instruction does not make it peripheral to the academic model.

The application specifically connects the outdoor environment to academic instruction. For example, page 75 of the amended application states:

"By having class outdoors, we instantly remove education from a 'laboratory or classroom type setting' into real world applications and problem solving. Although indoor classrooms do provide for some degree of integrated problem solving,

because each day should be a problem-solving adventure for any primary student, the outdoors take this to a whole new level.”

This example along with the research-based linked articles in the application demonstrate that outdoor learning is intended as an instructional methodology and environment, not simply an extracurricular activity. Daily class outdoors as allowed by weather is a cohesive daily treatment.

2. Least Restrictive Environment

Recommendation to deny based upon:

“The applicant confirmed special education instruction would occur **almost** entirely in general education classrooms, leaving it unclear how the school will ensure access to more restrictive placements...”

Additional perspective:

The applicants' emphasis on providing special education services primarily within the general education setting is consistent with the IDEA principle of educating students in the least restrictive environment to the maximum extent appropriate.

This should not be interpreted as an assertion that every student must remain in the general education classroom regardless of individual need. Placement must be determined through the IEP process based upon each student's needs, and an appropriate continuum of services must remain available.

The application describes an inclusive philosophy, not a refusal or inability to provide a more restrictive placement when an individual student's IEP requires one. Since the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals ruling which interpreted LRE as the regular education classroom for every student regardless of disability, *it would most certainly have been reason for denial if we stated anything other than planning for all students to be in the general education classroom with push in and pull out support as needed.*

3. Implementation Fidelity and Professional Development

Recommendation to deny based upon:

“The application contains insufficient evidence of how this model will be implemented with fidelity at Trimble Academy.”

Additional perspective:

The application recognizes that implementation fidelity requires professional development, leadership, and ongoing support. Professional development is specifically identified in the plan and included in the budget.

Because this is a proposed school, the application cannot demonstrate years of implementation experience or details on all the specifics. The relevant question is whether the applicants have identified the structures and resources necessary to implement the model successfully. *The application demonstrates that professional development and implementation support were considered and funded rather than overlooked.*

4. Special Education Staffing

Recommendation to deny based upon:

“Staffing allocations are insufficient to implement the necessary supports for students...”

Additional perspective:

I respectfully believe this concern should be considered in light of the projected enrollment and the actual student population previously served by Trimble Elementary.

The proposed staffing level was based upon the community's enrollment history and projected special education population. It was not selected arbitrarily.

More importantly, *denial should not be based on a hypothetical increase* in special education enrollment. A charter school's staffing must necessarily respond to the students who actually enroll and their individual needs. If enrollment or student needs require additional personnel or contracted services, the school has an obligation to adjust accordingly.

During the capacity interview, the applicants appropriately acknowledged that the population could differ from initial projections. Recognizing a potential staffing challenge should not necessarily be interpreted as an inability to comply with special education requirements.

5. Special Education Accommodations and the Outdoor Environment

Recommendation to deny based upon:

“Accommodations must be tailored to each student's unique needs rather than applied broadly across an entire diagnosis, meaning the outdoor setting cannot serve as an automatic accommodation for every child with ADHD.”

Additional perspective:

The application did not state that the outdoor environment would be the sole accommodation for students with ADHD or any other disability, nor did it propose replacing individualized IEP or Section 504 accommodations.

Rather, the application described characteristics of the outdoor environment that will naturally support students. An educational environment can provide natural supports while the school simultaneously provides the individualized services and accommodations required for each student.

The outdoor environment is beneficial for students without being represented as a diagnosis-based, or a sole accommodation for a need. The linked research articles confirm this.

6. Measurable Goals for Outdoor Learning and Virtue

Recommendation to deny based upon:

“The proposal lacks measurable goals, benchmarks, or assessment rubrics to evaluate student learning in outdoor spaces or progress toward moral and civic virtues.”

Additional perspective:

I respectfully suggest this concern may establish a standard beyond what is necessary for approval.

In the application narrative, it cited research-based articles supporting the academic benefits of outdoor learning and the development of character and civic virtues. The proposed school remains accountable for student achievement through the same Tennessee academic standards and assessments applicable to other public schools.

The application did not propose that outdoor learning replace the state's accountability system. Rather, it proposed a particular environment and instructional methodology through which students would pursue required academic outcomes. I am not aware of a general requirement that a charter application establish a separate rubric for every instructional methodology used to reach those outcomes, nor would it be the norm to do so in an application.

Likewise, the intentional cultivation of virtue does not necessarily require a separate numerical assessment rubric to demonstrate that it is an intentional component of the school's educational philosophy. That is part of the appropriate development of a human, often neglected in solely assessment-based educational models, that needs to be restored.

7. Assessment Framework

Recommendation to deny based upon:

“The application lacks standardized, nationally normed benchmark assessments **beyond** universal reading screeners and TCAP testing...”

Additional perspective:

I respectfully believe this concern warrants additional consideration.

The application identified state-provided assessment tools (no need to budget for them) and the state's accountability system, including universal reading screeners and TCAP. These are established assessment mechanisms used throughout Tennessee public education. The absence of a particular commercial benchmark assessment should not necessarily be equated with the absence of an adequate assessment framework. Additional diagnostic tools were also discussed during the capacity interview.

The more important question is whether the school has a credible system for identifying student needs, monitoring progress, adjusting instruction, and demonstrating academic growth. The application establishes that framework, while particular diagnostic tools can reasonably be refined as the school develops its assessment system.

Conclusion

I respectfully ask the Commission to distinguish between a fundamental deficiency in the proposed educational program and an area in which the application could reasonably be interpreted differently.

The applicants have proposed a distinctive educational model, but the application should be evaluated based on what it actually presents and the research provided to support the model's efficacy, rather than on interpretations that extend beyond the narrative itself. The application explains the model and provides research-based evidence supporting its effectiveness. The fundamental questions should remain whether the applicants have demonstrated the capacity to operate a legally compliant public school, provide an academically sound program, meet the needs of students, and be accountable for student outcomes.

Where additional implementation detail could reasonably be developed through professional development, pre-opening requirements, conditions of approval, or ongoing oversight, I respectfully suggest that this be distinguished from a fundamental deficiency warranting denial.

I recognize and respect that the Commission must exercise independent judgment. The very best application presentation is still subject to interpretations and hypotheticals, but should those be reasons to deny a community of the school they so much desire and have worked tirelessly to plan and develop? My purpose in providing this response is simply to ensure that the Commission has the benefit of an alternative interpretation grounded in practical experience with Tennessee charter school development and operation before making its final determination.

Thank you for your service to Tennessee students and families and for your consideration of these additional perspectives.

Respectfully,

Angie Markum

Dear Chairperson and Members of the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission:

On behalf of Trimble Academy and the Trimble Forward Alliance, we respectfully submit this response to the Executive Director's recommendation to deny our charter application.

We appreciate the Commission staff's thorough review and share the Commission's commitment to ensuring that approved charter schools are academically, operationally, and financially prepared to serve students successfully. However, we respectfully disagree that Trimble Academy has failed to demonstrate readiness.

Since the amended application, capacity interview, and public hearing, we submitted through written public comment process how we have strengthened our financial position, clarified our operational plans, and addressed concerns raised during the review. We believe any remaining items can be appropriately addressed through the Commission's pre-opening process rather than through denial.

Financial Viability

The recommendation places significant weight on the loss of the Charter Schools Program (CSP) grant. While we were disappointed that the most recent CSP cycle did not have sufficient funding for new start-up appeal charters, Trimble Academy has taken steps to ensure that we are not dependent upon CSP funding to open. Since the application was submitted, we have secured:

1. **More than \$257,000 in fundraising commitments and community and alumni contributions**, with additional grants and corporate sponsorships being pursued.
2. **Four lender letters of interest totaling \$1.8 million**. Based on current fundraising, our revised start-up budget, and updated facility estimates, we anticipate borrowing approximately **\$500,000**.
3. The donated **27,000-square-foot former Trimble Elementary School building and 11 acres**, which will provide substantial collateral.

Our financial model includes funding for required operational costs, including transportation, food service, special education, English Learner services, technology, audits, accounting, payroll, financial management, and facility expenses, as well as required academic costs. Budgeted amounts are based on recommendations of our mentor school consultant, vendor service estimates, and former Trimble School service levels. The original \$120,000 annual facility budget is sufficient to cover anticipated debt service for facility repair and start-up costs, insurance, and maintenance while preserving approximately \$20,000 in additional operating cash flow.

These resources demonstrate multiple viable pathways to a financially sustainable launch.

Educational Program and Compliance

Several concerns identified in the recommendation involve items that were addressed in the application, capacity interview, public hearing, written public comments, or can be finalized during pre-opening.

Our mentor relationship with Skillern/TN Classical Academies was described in detail in the application, including curriculum development, staff training, hiring support, policy

development, and implementation of the classical and outdoor-learning model. The budget includes funding for these services. We intend to formalize the agreement following charter approval.

Our assessment plan includes Tennessee's universal reading screener, local benchmark assessments, curriculum and teacher-created assessments, TCAP, and a budget for purchase of commercially available assessments mentioned in the capacity interview..

We acknowledge that RTI² was not sufficiently detailed in the sample schedule and will make any necessary revisions. Likewise, we are fully committed to all state and federal special education requirements, including IDEA, Section 504, Child Find, evaluations, accommodations, and IEP services. Outdoor learning is an instructional strategy and will never replace required special education services.

We also clarify that only appropriately certified/licensed personnel will provide student instruction. Volunteers may assist with activities and enrichment but will not replace certified teachers.

Trimble Academy will implement all TN required English Learner screening, identification, instructional, monitoring, and reporting procedures.

Governance, Operations, and Facilities

Trimble Academy's founding board includes local leaders with professional experience in accounting, higher education, mental health, facilities, municipal government, and school safety. We are committed to clearly defined governance, accountability, and oversight and will revise reporting structures, organizational documents, bylaws, and other governance materials as required by the Commission before opening.

Transportation and food-service arrangements will be finalized based on student need and the appropriate state procurement process. The related costs and funding approach are reflected in our budget and application.

Regarding facilities, the LEA denied access to the building after it closed June 2025 through June 2026, which delayed final facility planning until after the amended application was submitted. Since receiving access, Trimble Forward Alliance has obtained input from two (2) architects, three (3) structural engineers, the State Fire Marshal, and five (5) contractors to date. Based on this input, we respectfully disagree with the characterization "The vacant building requires extensive code and life-safety upgrades." Our August 2026 engineering reports states "We did not observe the building to be in a dangerous condition, nor did we observe a portion of the building in a state of imminent collapse. The building needs repairs to isolated conditions to maintain structural integrity and we are prepared to complete those necessary repairs prior to opening.

As presented in the capacity interview, we believe it would be imprudent to incur substantial final architectural, engineering, and legal costs before charter approval; therefore, we will provide all required documentation before opening, including an executed facility agreement, proof of financing, architectural approvals, Fire Marshal approvals, and occupancy approval.

Community Need and Support

The closure of Trimble Elementary created a significant educational gap in Town of Trimble and rural northwest Tennessee surrounding communities. Students now face lengthy transportation times (up to an hour bus ride to and from school), and families have fewer public-school options.

Trimble Academy was created in direct response to this need. Community support has been demonstrated through the maximum **10 public speakers, 168 written comments, more than \$257,000 in financial commitments, a donation of the 27,000 square feet former school building and 11-acres and substantial volunteer support** from families, educators, community leaders, Town of Trimble officials and alumni.

Request for Approval

The record demonstrates that Trimble Academy has:

1. Significant community demand and support;
2. More than **\$257,000 in fundraising commitments**;
3. Approximately **\$1.8 million in lender letters of interest**;
4. A sustainable five-year financial model;
5. A committed and experienced founding board;
6. A clear commitment to state and federal compliance; and
7. A willingness to satisfy reasonable pre-opening conditions.

We respectfully submit that the concerns identified in the recommendation do not demonstrate that Trimble Academy is financially or operationally unviable. Rather, they are matters that can be addressed through the charter agreement and Commission oversight during the pre-opening period.

For these reasons, we respectfully request that the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission **approve the Trimble Academy charter application** and allow the school to proceed through the established pre-opening process.

Thank you for your consideration and for your commitment to expanding high-quality public education opportunities for Tennessee students, including the students and families of Trimble and the first rural charter school in Tennessee.

Respectfully submitted,

Margaret Prater
President, Trimble Forward Alliance
Sponsor, Trimble Academy

Dear Commissioners,

I am writing ahead of the October 9 Commission meeting to ask for your support of Nashville School of Excellence's appeal, and to share some context I believe is important as you prepare to vote.

Nashville School of Excellence is sponsored by Read Foundation, operating as Memphis School of Excellence, a network that has served Memphis students since 2010 and is now in its 17th year. When our Nashville application was first denied in 2024, the Executive Director and several commissioners were clear, on the record, that our Memphis academic results were a clear strength of the application (see the October 18, 2024 Commission meeting recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rGnJw-QHhN4>, beginning around the 33 minute mark). The three reasons given for denial that year were all about Nashville readiness: a clear demonstration of community support and demand, a clear identification of where we planned to locate, and a detailed plan for our presence in Nashville.

We have addressed all three of those points. We have an executed letter of intent on a facility at 5880 Nolensville Pike. Our founding principal has been living and working in Nashville since June 2025. And on community support, 539 families completed interest forms, 239 written public comments were submitted in our favor with zero opposed, roughly 95 people attended the public hearing in person, and 37 of the 46 nonprofit organizations we visited provided letters of support. This is more documented community engagement than either of the two applicants recommended for approval this cycle.

We would also point you to the academic record and recognitions behind our network. Our Class of 2025 high school graduation rate was 100 percent, and it has held between 97 and 100 percent every year for the past ten years. Our Class of 2025 college acceptance rate was also 100 percent. Three of our four Memphis campuses currently hold the Tennessee STEM School Designation, and all four hold the Tennessee Purple Star School Award, recognizing our support for military connected students and families. Memphis School of Excellence Cordova was named the 2025 State School of Character, the only Tennessee school to receive that honor that year, and Memphis School of Excellence Winchester was named a National School of Character for 2025 to 2026. All four schools operate as approved, active public charter schools in good standing.

We would recommend you view the recording of the September 25 public hearing, including our opening presentation, which lays out this record directly: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BBcJT0oQBFI>. We believe it speaks for itself.

This year's recommendation to deny our appeal rests primarily on our Educational Program Design and Addenda ratings, both tied to our Memphis campus academic data, the same body of results that was described as a strength in 2024. We take our 2025 TVAAS results seriously and have already made changes, including new instructional coaching

partnerships and more frequent data reviews. But we would ask you to weigh our full 17 years of results since 2010, not a single year, and to weigh it against applicants with no record at all to evaluate.

I have reached out to Executive Director Stovall directly (copied here) to ask for clarification on how this year's recommendation was reached given that history, and I want you to have that same context as you consider our appeal. We respect the work her office put into this review, and this outreach is not meant as a criticism of her or her team, only an honest effort to understand the reasoning and to make sure you have the full picture before you vote.

We would welcome the opportunity to speak with any of you directly before October 9, or to answer any questions in writing. Thank you for your time and consideration, and for your service to Tennessee's public charter school families.

Sincerely,
Samuel S Beyhan, Ed.D.
Executive Director
Read Foundation, dba | Memphis School of Excellence

Executive Director Stovall, commission staff, and commissioners . My name is Erin O'Hara Block, I serve as the elected representative for District 8 in Metro Nashville Public Schools and also as Vice-Chair of the Board. I'm here today to support our Board's decision that the establishment of this school would have a substantial negative fiscal impact on Metro Nashville Public Schools such that authorization would be contrary to the best interests of the students, the LEA, OR the community. Specifically, I'm focused on the school communities and the communities proposed for recruitment and enrollment.

I've been on the MNPS Board for 4 years, and this is only now the second time (in two days) that I have appeared in front of this body. I believe in the past when the MNPS board has talked about fiscal impact, we have often talked about that impact across the district. What was unique to me about this analysis is that it is concentrated on specific school communities and puts numbers to something that I have been trying to articulate in the past about both fiscal impact and the felt impact on existing schools and communities of new charter schools regardless of the proposed model or potential quality.

The reality is that when students leave a school, that community is impacted. As a board, and a district, sometimes student movement is outside of our control - it is about affordability or demographic shifts. But...whether or not we approve a new charter school, should be within our control and should broadly reflect the will of the entire community.

Students for a new charter school have to come from somewhere. And, more likely than not, they are coming from existing school communities. Moses McKissack Middle could lose a projected 55.4 percent of its enrollment — estimated at 60 of 108 students. Nashville Prep could lose an estimated 36.6 percent. H.G. Hill an estimated 14.2 percent, Bellevue Middle an estimated 12.3 percent, and critically important to my community — West End Middle could lose an estimated 20.9 percent.

The loss of individual students in a school community has a very real impact. And losses of the magnitude estimated here also have a very specific community impact. I can tell you having worked with West End Middle School in particular, a loss of 20 students, let alone potentially 60, has a very significant impact on the community. When funding follows enrollment at specific districts and schools, as it does with both TISA and SBB, a school like West End loses 20 kids and it results in a reduction of 2-3 teachers, which at a school off roughly 300 students means losing an arts program, results in higher student-teacher ratios, or the loss of college and career prep. Approving a new school that could have a negative fiscal impact on the community I am elected to represent is not in the best

interest of the students and families that I represent and who have exercised their choice to attend schools that are currently in existence in their communities.

So while I respect the need for choices, and I respect the folks in this room who are asking for something new, I also have to ask — what does it mean to have community support? How does it help the 320 students who have chosen and are currently enrolled at West End to potentially lose 3 or more teachers? How does it help the Bellevue community as a whole to potentially lose funding and end up with a higher student-teacher ratio at their local middle school? And how am I as a school board member, whose job it is to improve the quality of those schools supposed to do that when I am also being asked to approve something that I know will directly impact those schools and their communities by moving the funding, students, and resources I need to improve those schools?

I've always been open to conversations with potential charter leaders, but as of late, those conversations always going to start with - OK, but how are you going to deal with enrollment? As we add more seats, we directly impact the ability of existing schools - both charters and district schools - to provide a high quality experience for students. I'm asking the commission to consider - how do we define fiscal impact or substantial fiscal impact on a community generally, on a specific school communities? What fiscal impact should a community or a specific school be asked to bear to open a new school that a district has said no to?

Thank you