

Memorandum



Date: July 28, 2023

To: Tess Stovall, Executive Director, Tennessee Public Charter School Commission

From: Jocquell Rodgers, Executive Director, Green Dot Public Schools Tennessee

RE: Fairley High School Reauthorization Notice of Appeal

Green Dot Public Schools Tennessee, GDPST, has been operating Fairley High School since 2014 in partnership with the Achievement School District. Since coming to Memphis, GDPST has refined its model to effectively meet the needs of Fairley High School families, as well as the Lakeview Gardens community. We have worked to build resilient relationships with students, families, community members, and alumni. These stakeholders have consistently supported GDPST's mission to transform public education to prepare all students for success in college, leadership, and life. Our collective partnership has become interwoven into the fabric of the Lakeview Gardens community.

Green Dot Public Schools specializes in school transformation, especially that of middle and high schools. GDPST has worked with a vision of partnering with Memphis-Shelby County Schools (MSCS) to strengthen the feeder school pattern for Fairley High, providing better academic outcomes for all students. Several years ago, Green Dot Tennessee offered to work in partnership with MSCS at Geeter K-8, the primary feeder school for Fairley; however, the partnership never materialized. This is disheartening when one considers that Geeter K-8 remains one of the lowest performing schools in MSCS despite various interventions implemented by Memphis-Shelby County, including: iZone, Empowerment Zone, and changing the format of the school to a K-8 model. The long-term success of any school is deeply impacted by the academic preparedness of its incoming students, and Fairley is no exception. A full assessment of Fairley's progress must also consider the academic success of students from nearby Chickasaw Middle, another feeder into Fairley, which has also been a long-standing, underperforming iZone school. The chart below provides the proficiency rates of Geeter K-8 and Chickasaw Middle, highlighting academic areas of opportunity of students entering Fairley High School in the 9th grade.

	Feeder Pattern Academic & Culture Data								
	TVAAS			TCAP Proficiency				Culture	
	Composite	Literacy	Numeracy	ELA Prof.	8th Grade	Math Prof.	8th Grade	Chronic. Abs.	Suspension
Geeter K-8	1	3	1	6%	<5%	<5%	<5%	36.9%	15.2%
Chickasaw 6-8	1	1	2	9.8%	6.7%	<5%	<5%	51.1%	21.6%

Green Dot Public Schools Tennessee has continued to adjust systems to meet the unique needs of our students who enroll in ninth grade after attending MSCS feeder schools. Data on nationally normed assessments (iReady) show many of Fairley's incoming students enter reading between kindergarten and third grade levels. The Green Dot difference has resulted in these students achieving a year and one half to two years growth each school year in math and reading when students stay at Fairley High from ninth grade through graduation.

MSCS Feedback & GDPST's Response

- In explaining the probation of Bluff City High by the Commission, the applicant does not provide a detailed explanation of how they are attempting to address the deficiencies found by the Commission.***

Bluff City High School, GDPST's independent charter with the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission, is currently on academic probation after experiencing one year at TVAAS 2 in 2021-22. For all years prior to SY21-22, for which TVAAS was calculated, Bluff City was a TVAAS Level 5 school. Green Dot has a comprehensive plan to address the academic areas of opportunity raised by the Commission. [Bluff City's Plan of Corrective Action](#) was developed in collaboration with TPCSC and is linked here. The plan provides a detailed course of action to ensure improved academic outcomes for Bluff City's students. TPCSC and Green Dot Tennessee meet regularly to monitor progress.

- Applicant does not provide a detailed strategy as to how it will ensure academic success, student achievement or growth, or an approach to coming off the priority list.***

Effective teaching is at the heart of student academic growth and school improvement, and our academic strategy prioritizes individual teacher coaching, improved curricular resources, and professional development. As part of its work, GDPST reflects regularly to ensure we are effectively serving our unique demographic. As students returned to the building full-time after distance learning, Green Dot Tennessee identified academic and social-emotional needs that presented or were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and adjusted its academic strategy to ensure these gaps and needs were addressed.

Green Dot has seen successful growth from its adoption of double-blocked English and Math, which research has shown helps to make up for learning loss and serves as a response to intervention for tiered instruction. These adjustments will facilitate continued progress, on par with MSCS’s iZone high schools, the anticipated new home for Fairley High.

III. The applicant is inconsistent with data that is used in this section in comparison to what is used across the application. The applicant selectively chooses data and fails to include all MSCS/TPCSC/ASD as part of a comparative analysis.

When GDPST compared Fairley’s academic performance to that of three MSCS schools that entered the iZone in 2014-2015, the year Green Dot began operating Fairley High School, data showed that Fairley outperformed Hamilton High, Melrose High and Trezevant High in ACT, Graduation Rate, Discipline Rate (fewer incidents) and Expulsion Rate (fewer expulsions). These schools remain in the iZone, on the Priority list, and perform similarly or lower than Fairley High School. Comparing Fairley High to all schools in MSCS is far from equitable. GDPST serves a specific demographic of students who have various degrees of trauma, poverty, and years of academic neglect from the local district. GDPST performed a comparative analysis of schools that are in proximity to all three Green Dot Tennessee high schools to obtain a more complete, accurate picture of GDPST’s progress, rather than comparing Fairley High in isolation. Only one TPCSC school is included because Bluff City High is the only high school in Memphis authorized by TPCSC. There are no ASD high schools near any of the communities we serve.

The table below compares the student achievement and performance portion TPCSC’s rubric between MSCS iZone schools and schools located in the same geographic area as Green Dot schools, including optional schools.

High School	Classification	TPCSC Framework Score*
Whitehaven	MSCS - Optional	2.96
Oakhaven	MSCS - iZone	2.77
Westwood	MSCS - iZone	2.19
Hillcrest	Green Dot	2.13
BTW	MSCS - iZone	2.06
Trezevant	MSCS - iZone	2
Fairley	Green Dot	1.88
Mitchell	MSCS	1.88
Southwind	MSCS	1.85
Bluff City	Green Dot	1.72
Wooddale	MSCS - iZone	1.69
Ridgeway	MSCS	1.56
Sheffield	MSCS - iZone	1.56
Kirby	MSCS	1.5
Manassas	MSCS - iZone	1.5
Hamilton	MSCS - iZone	1.38

The only two schools that would receive an acceptable rating of ‘meets’ on the TPCSC rubric achieved so due to rounding (framework scores of 2.51+ round up to a 3) are Whitehaven High, an optional school with selective enrollment, and Oakhaven, the top performing iZone high school that is no longer on the priority list. Westwood High has also been removed from the priority list. Fairley High School outperformed or performed similarly to more than half of the schools in the comparison, including several iZone schools. It’s worth noting that Frayser Community Schools has data that falls far below Fairley High’s; however, Frayser Community Schools was allowed to remain as the operator for their schools, Humes, and MLK Prep during the most recent MSCS board meeting.

IV. Fairley HS is designated as a priority school and has been designated since they transitioned to the ASD with Green Dot Public Schools as the operator. Four of five Green Dot Schools TN have the priority designation.

When comparing Fairley High School’s 2021-22 TVAAS performance to that of priority schools in the iZone, as well as schools in the same geographic area as Fairley High and Hillcrest High, both GDPST schools have strong growth

data. Additionally, the TPCSC Framework score discussed above is included. Both Hillcrest and Fairley are at the top of this comparison and outperform all but one iZone school in every category.

High School	Classification	Priority Status	TPCSC Framework Score*	TVAAS Composite	TVAAS Literacy	TVAAS Numeracy
Hillcrest	Green Dot	Priority	2.13	5	4	4
Trezevant	MSCS - iZone	Priority	2.00	3	5	1
Fairley	Green Dot	Priority	1.88	3	4	1
Mitchell	MSCS	Priority	1.88	3	4	1
Wooddale	MSCS - iZone	Priority	1.69	1	2	1
Sheffield	MSCS - iZone	Priority	1.56	1	4	1
Manassas	MSCS - iZone	Priority	1.50	1	3	1
Hamilton	MSCS - iZone	Priority	1.38	1	1	1

- V. ***Although the applicant addresses and explains in more detail the default of the two loan agreements, it does not provide an explanation as to how there are systems in place to ensure all schools are complying with the terms of the loan agreements.***

The terms of the two loan agreements only consider the results of Bluff City High School’s actions. However, we apply a rigorous framework of financial and academic requirements for all schools that echo the terms of the loan agreements. This includes monthly data reviews by finance and accounting experts to ensure continual compliance and guide our decision making to ensure compliance to the loan terms.

The other four GDPST schools currently occupy buildings that belong to MSCS; therefore, there are no loans related to property acquisition attached to GDPST. All investments Green Dot has made to upgrade the buildings, including repairing Fairley’s roof that was 30 years past repair when GDPST first partnered with Fairley, came through our fundraising efforts. Further, GDPST has no outstanding long-term debt obligations outside of the two loan agreements that only consider the results at Bluff City HS.

Green Dot Public Schools TN is the best option for students in the Lakeview Gardens community in Memphis. GDPST understands the challenges that come along with transforming high schools, and believes it is the best fit to continue the work in the Lakeview Gardens community, using research-based strategies for continuous improvement. The Lakeview Gardens community trusts GDPST to hold students to the highest standards, in a city where it has built a reputation for academic excellence, access, and opportunity. Green Dot Public Schools Tennessee has demonstrated it is the best option to continue preparing Fairley High students for college, leadership, and life.

Attachments:

1. Fairley High School initial and amended reauthorization application
2. Summary of application timeline
3. Denial letter from Memphis-Shelby County Schools
4. Memphis-Shelby County Schools reauthorization rubric with scoring and feedback
5. Amended application without any tracked changes