
BEFORE THE TENNESSEE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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) **State Board of Education Meeting**
) **October 19, 2018**
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IN RE:
BLUEPRINT AVODAH
Charter School Appeal

**FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATION REPORT
OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Pursuant to Tennessee Code Annotated (T.C.A.) § 49-13-108, sponsors proposing to open new charter schools may appeal the denial of their amended application by a local board of education to the State Board of Education (State Board). On August 31, 2018, Blueprint Avodah appealed the denial of its amended application by Shelby County Schools (SCS) Board of Education to the State Board.

Based on the following procedural history, findings of fact, and Review Committee Report attached hereto, I believe that the decision to deny the Blueprint Avodah amended application was not “contrary to the best interests of the pupils, school district, or community.”¹ Therefore, I recommend that the State Board affirm the decision of SCS to deny the amended application for Blueprint Avodah.

STANDARD OF REVIEW

Pursuant to T.C.A. § 49-13-108 and State Board policy 2.500, State Board staff and an independent charter application review committee (Review Committee) conducted a de novo, on the record review of Blueprint Avodah’s amended application. In accordance with the Tennessee Department of Education’s charter application scoring rubric, “applications that do not meet or exceed the standard in all sections (academic plan design and capacity, operations plan and capacity, financial plan and capacity, and, if applicable, past performance) . . . will be deemed not ready for approval.”² In addition, the State Board is required to hold a public hearing in the district where the proposed charter school seeks to locate.³

In order to overturn the decision of the local board of education, the State Board must find that the local board’s decision to deny the charter application was contrary to the best interests of the pupils,

¹ T.C.A. § 49-13-108.

² Tennessee Charter School Application Evaluation Rubric – Ratings and Sample Scoring Criteria, pg. 1.

³ T.C.A. § 49-13-108.

school district, or community.⁴ Because Blueprint Avodah is proposing to locate in a school district that contains a school on the current or last preceding priority school list, the State Board has the ability to approve the application, and thereby authorize the school, or to affirm the local board's decision to deny.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

1. On February 1, 2018, the Sponsor, Avodah International, Inc. (Sponsor), submitted a letter of intent to SCS expressing its intention to file a charter school application for Blueprint Avodah.
2. The Sponsor submitted its initial application for Blueprint Avodah to SCS on April 2, 2018.
3. SCS assembled a review committee to review and score the Blueprint Avodah application. The review committee recommended denial of the Blueprint Avodah initial application.
4. On April 12, 2018, a SCS panel, which included external expert reviewers, held a capacity interview with Blueprint Avodah.
5. On June 26, 2018, the SCS Board of Education voted to deny the Blueprint Avodah initial application based upon the review committee's recommendation.
6. The Sponsor amended and resubmitted its application for Blueprint Avodah to SCS on July 27, 2018.
7. SCS's review committee reviewed and scored the Blueprint Avodah amended application and again recommended denial.
8. On August 21, 2018, based on the review committee's recommendation, SCS voted to deny the Blueprint Avodah amended application.
9. The Sponsor appealed the denial of the Blueprint Avodah amended application in writing to the State Board on August 31, 2018, including submission of all required documents per State Board policy 2.500.
10. At the time of appeal to the State Board, the Sponsor submitted corrections to the application as allowed under T.C.A. § 49-13-108(a)(4)(C).
11. The State Board's Review Committee analyzed and scored the Blueprint Avodah amended application using the Tennessee Department of Education's charter application scoring rubric.
12. On September 25, 2018, the State Board staff held a public hearing in Memphis. At the public hearing, the Director of Charter Schools, sitting as the Executive Director's designee, heard

⁴ T.C.A. § 49-13-108.

presentations from the Sponsor and SCS and took public comment regarding the Blueprint Avodah application.

13. The State Board’s Review Committee conducted a capacity interview with the proposed governing board of Blueprint Avodah and key members of the leadership team on October 3, 2018, in Nashville.
14. After the capacity interview, the Review Committee determined a final consensus rating of the Blueprint Avodah amended application, which served as the basis for the Review Committee Recommendation Report.

FINDINGS OF FACT

- **District Denial of Application.**

The review committee assembled by SCS to review and score the Blueprint Avodah initial and amended applications consisted of the following individuals:

Name	Title
Felicia Alexander	Finance, Shelby County Schools (initial)
Sheena Hanserd	Communications, Shelby County Schools (initial)
Sonya Porter	Curriculum and Instruction, PD, Shelby County Schools (initial)
Natasha Howard	National Association of Charter School Authorizers (initial)
Dr. Pam McKinley	Exceptional Children and Health Services, Shelby County Schools (initial and amended)
Muhammet Turkey	Charter Leader (initial and amended)
Nancy Ballinger	Human Resources, Shelby County Schools (initial and amended)
Tiffany Bracy	Operations, Shelby County Schools (initial and amended)
Daphne Robinson	Office of Charter Schools, Shelby County Schools (initial and amended)
Jaclyn Snuffel	Communications, Shelby County Schools (amended)
Corey Strong	Finance, Shelby County Schools (amended)

The Blueprint Avodah initial application received the following ratings from the SCS review committee:

Sections	Rating
Academic Plan Design and Capacity	DOES NOT MEET STANDARD
Operations Plan and Capacity	DOES NOT MEET STANDARD
Financial Plan and Capacity	DOES NOT MEET STANDARD

After the SCS review committee completed its review and scoring of the initial application, its recommendation was presented to the SCS Board of Education on June 26, 2018. Based on the review committee’s recommendation, the SCS Board of Education voted to deny the initial application of Blueprint Avodah.

Upon resubmission, the amended application received the following ratings from the SCS review committee:⁵

Sections	Rating
Academic Plan Design and Capacity	PARTIALLY MEETS STANDARD
Operations Plan and Capacity	PARTIALLY MEETS STANDARD
Financial Plan and Capacity	DOES NOT MEET STANDARD

After the SCS review committee completed its review and scoring of the amended application, its recommendation was presented to the SCS Board of Education on August 21, 2018. Based on the review committee’s recommendation, the SCS Board of Education voted to deny the amended application of Blueprint Avodah.

- **State Board Charter Application Review Committee’s Evaluation of the Application**

Following the denial of the Blueprint Avodah amended application and their subsequent appeal to the State Board, State Board staff assembled a diverse Review Committee of experts to evaluate and score the Blueprint Avodah amended application. This Review Committee consisted of the following individuals:

Name	Title
Sam Brobeck	8 th Grade Teacher, Grizzlies Prep, Memphis, TN
Ashley Foxx Davis	Residency Director, Relay Graduate School of Education, Memphis, TN
Allyson Hauptman	Lead Faculty, Lipscomb University College of Education, Nashville, TN
Earl Simms	Charter School Authorizing Consultant, St. Louis, MO
Tess Stovall	Director of Charter Schools, State Board of Education, Nashville, TN

The Review Committee conducted an initial review and scoring of the Blueprint Avodah amended application, a capacity interview with the Sponsor, and a final evaluation and scoring of the amended application resulting in a consensus rating for each major section. The Review Committee’s consensus rating of the Blueprint Avodah amended application was as follows:

Sections	Rating
Academic Plan Design and Capacity	PARTIALLY MEETS STANDARD
Operations Plan and Capacity	PARTIALLY MEETS STANDARD
Financial Plan and Capacity	DOES NOT MEET STANDARD

⁵ Please see **Exhibit B** for a copy of the SCS review committee report.

The Review Committee recommended that the application for Blueprint Avodah be denied because the applicant failed to provide sufficient evidence that it met the required criterion in the academic, operational, and financial sections of the rubric. Specifically the Review Committee found that the academic plan only partially met the standard because the academic model lacked clarity, the assessment plan and plan to serve special populations were vague, and the school lacked a compelling student recruitment and student discipline plan.

Moreover, the Review Committee found the operations plan and capacity section of the application lacked a comprehensive plan to recruit and train personnel, contained inconsistent staffing and transportation plans, and the startup and facility plans were incomplete, leaving out crucial components.

Finally, the Review Committee opined that the financial plan and capacity section of the application did not meet the standard because the Sponsor failed to provide documentation to support most funding commitments, and because the application contained an incomplete startup budget, unrealistic revenue projections, and conflicting information between the budget and the application itself.

In summary, the Review Committee determined that the Sponsor did not provide sufficient evidence in the academic, operational, and financial sections of their application to meet the required rubric ratings for approval. The capacity interview with the Sponsor did not provide further clarification that would have resulted in a higher rating. Therefore, the Review Committee recommended that the Blueprint Avodah application be denied.

For additional information regarding the Review Committee's evaluation of the application, please see **Exhibit A** for the complete Review Committee Report, which is fully incorporated herein by reference.

- **Public Hearing**

Pursuant to statute⁶ and State Board policy 2.500, a public hearing chaired by the Director of Charter Schools⁷ was held in Memphis on September 25, 2018. SCS's presentation at the public hearing focused on the argument that the denial of the Blueprint Avodah amended application was in the best interests of the students, school district, and community. SCS grounded its argument in the deficiencies found by the SCS review committee in the amended application after conducting a rigorous, transparent, and fair review process aligned to State Board Quality Authorizing Standards and national best practices. Specifically, SCS found that Blueprint Avodah's application did not meet the standard for approval based on a lack of detail regarding the connection between the school, High Tech High, and Big Picture Learning. Additionally, SCS expressed concern regarding a lack of clarity around assessments, the implementation of an RTI² plan, and supports for special populations given the uniqueness of the school's model. SCS also expressed concerns that the Sponsor would not be able to successfully implement the start-up plan which

⁶ T.C.A. § 49-13-108(a)(4)(B).

⁷ The Executive Director of the State Board selected the Director of Charter Schools as her designee for the public hearing.

relied heavily on the CEO and Board. Lastly, the district noted that that the planning year budget was heavily reliant on unsecured funds with no contingency plan.

In response, the Sponsors highlighted the unique project-based learning model that the school would provide to the community. The Sponsor expressed that its established partnerships with High Tech High and Big Picture Learning would provide considerable resources to the proposed school, including curriculum resources, professional development, and community engagement support. In addition to national partners, multiple local businesses expressed support for Blueprint Avodah and their interest in providing internships to students. Blueprint Avodah believes that the project-based “learn by doing” model will help tackle poverty in Memphis by equipping students living in poverty with skills to be successful in a variety of fields through internships, projects, field studies, and postsecondary opportunities.

A portion of the public hearing was dedicated to taking public comment. A total of ten people made verbal comments in support of Blueprint Avodah at the hearing, including community members, business leaders, and parents. In addition, the State Board received written feedback on Blueprint Avodah’s application via email.

- **Alignment of Shelby County Schools’ Application Process to State Board Quality Authorizing Standards**

Detailed information regarding SCS’s application review process was collected and analyzed by State Board staff to determine alignment with State Board Quality Authorizing Standards as set forth in State Board policy 6.111. At the public hearing, State Board staff questioned SCS regarding its authorization process and alignment to the Quality Authorizing Standards. SCS articulated that its application process is fair, transparent, and focused on quality with rigorous criteria for approval. As evidence of this, SCS pointed to their use of the State Charter Application, the institution of capacity interviews with every applicant, and the use of both internal and external expert reviewers who are provided training and guidance to ensure a fair review. Additionally, SCS highlighted two new features of their application process that increase transparency: hosting information sessions for applicants, and soliciting public feedback on charter applications via their website.

Based on the information presented by SCS, it appears that the district’s process is in alignment with State Board Quality Authorizing Standards and is informed by National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) best practices. SCS’s commitment toward the continuous improvement of its charter authorization process is clear and worthy of recognition.

ANALYSIS

State law requires the State Board to review the decision of the local board of education and determine whether the denial of the proposed charter school was in the “best interests of the pupils, school district, or community.”⁸ In addition, pursuant to T.C.A. § 49-13-108, the State Board adopted Quality Charter Authorizing Standards, set forth in State Board policy 6.111, and utilizes these standards

⁸ T.C.A. § 49-13-108.

to review charter applications received upon appeal. One such standard is to maintain high but attainable standards for approving charter applications. In making my recommendation to the Board, I have considered the Review Committee Report, the documentation submitted by both the Blueprint Avodah and SCS, the arguments made by both Blueprint Avodah and SCS at the public hearing, and the public comments received by State Board staff and conclude as follows:

The Review Committee's report and recommendations are thorough and cite specific examples in the application and reference information gained at the capacity interview in support of its findings. For the reasons explicated in the report, I agree that the Blueprint Avodah amended application did not rise to the level of meeting or exceeding the standards required for approval.

Given the great responsibility of educating students and the amount of public funds entrusted to a charter school that is approved by a local district, the State Board expects that only those schools that have demonstrated a high likelihood of success and meet or exceed the required criteria in all areas will be authorized. The Sponsor's desire, passion, and dedication to serve students in the Memphis community is readily apparent, and their support from the community is clear. However, based on the merits of the application, I agree with SCS and the Review Committee that concerns remain about the ability of the Sponsor to successfully open and operate the proposed school in a manner that will improve academic outcomes for their target population.

CONCLUSION

For these reasons, and for the reasons stated in the Review Committee Report attached hereto, I do not believe that the decision to deny the amended application for Blueprint Avodah was contrary to the best interests of the students, the school district, or the community. Therefore, I recommend that the State Board affirm the decision of SCS to deny the amended application for Blueprint Avodah.



Dr. Sara Heyburn Morrison, Executive Director
State Board of Education

10/15/2018

Date



EXHIBIT A

Charter Application Review Committee Recommendation Report

October 12, 2018

School Name: Blueprint Avodah

Sponsor: Avodah International, Inc.

Proposed Location of School: Shelby County Schools

Evaluation Team:

Sam Brobeck
Ashley Davis
Allyson Hauptman
Earl Simms
Tess Stovall

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



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Introduction

Tennessee Code Annotated (T.C.A.) § 49-13-108 allows the sponsors of a public charter school to appeal the denial of an application by the local board of education to the State Board of Education. In accordance with T.C.A. § 49-13-108, the State Board of Education shall conduct a de novo, on the record review of the proposed charter school's application, and the State Board of Education has adopted national and state authorizing standards. As laid out in State Board policy 6.200 - Core Authorizing Principles, the State Board 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.

In accordance with T.C.A. § 49-13-108, the State Board adopted State Board policy 6.111 - Quality Charter Authorizing Standards. The State Board has aligned the charter school appeal process to these high standards to ensure the well-being and interests of students are the fundamental value informing all State Board actions and decisions. The State Board publishes clear timelines and expectations for applicants, engages highly competent teams of internal and external evaluators to review all applications, and maintains rigorous criteria for approval of a charter school. Annually, the State Board evaluates its work to ensure its alignment to national and state standards for quality authorizing and implements improvement when necessary.

The State Board of Education's charter application review process is outlined in T.C.A. § 49-13-108, State Board policy 2.500 – Charter School Appeals, and State Board policy 6.300 – Application Review. The State Board assembled a charter application review committee comprised of highly qualified internal and external evaluators with relevant and diverse expertise to evaluate each application. The State Board provided training to all review committee members to ensure consistent standards and fair treatment of all applications.

Overview of the Evaluation Process

The State Board of Education'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 amended charter application, attachments, and budget submitted by the sponsor. 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 and Capacity, Operations Plan and Capacity, and Financial Plan and Capacity.
2. **Capacity Interview**: Based on the independent and collective review of the application, the review committee conducted a 90-minute in-person interview with the sponsor, members of the proposed governing board, and identified school leader (if applicable) to address the concerns, weaknesses, and questions identified in the application, and to assess the capacity to execute the application's overall plan.

3. Consensus Judgment: At the conclusion of the review of the application and the capacity interview, the committee submitted a final rubric and developed a consensus regarding a rating for each section of the application.

This recommendation report includes the following information:

1. Summary of the application: A brief description of the applicant's proposed academic, operations, and financial plans.
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 and goals; enrollment summary; school development; academic focus and plan; academic performance standards; high school graduation standards (if applicable); assessments; school schedule; special populations and at-risk students; school culture and discipline; marketing, recruitment, and enrollment; community involvement and parent engagement; and the capacity to implement the proposed plan.
 - b. Operations Plan and Capacity: governance; start-up plan; facilities; personnel/human capital; professional development; insurance; transportation (if applicable); food service; additional operations (if applicable); waivers; and the capacity to implement the proposed plan.
 - c. Financial Plan and Capacity: budget narrative; budget; cash flow projections; related assumptions; financial policies and procedures; and the capacity to implement the proposed plan.

The State Board's charter application review committee utilized the Tennessee Department of Education's Charter School Application Evaluation Ratings and Sample Scoring Criteria (the rubric), which is used by all local boards of education when evaluating an application. The rubric states:

An application that merits a recommendation for approval should present a clear, realistic picture of how the school expects to operate; be detailed in how this school will raise student achievement; and inspire confidence in the applicant's capacity to successfully implement the proposed academic and operational plans. In addition to meeting the criteria that are specific to that section, each part of the proposal should align with the overall mission, budget, and goals of the application.

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

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

Summary of the Application

School Name: Blueprint Avodah

Sponsor: Avodah International, Inc.

Proposed Location of School: Shelby County Schools

Mission:¹ Blueprint Avodah is an equity project with a mission to disrupt multi-generational poverty in Memphis by empowering students to earn a college degree or industry certification in a career of their choice, and enter into the workforce with the skills and preparation to enjoy a successful career and obtain livable wages.

Number of Schools Currently in Operation by Sponsor: 0

Proposed Enrollment:²

Grade Level	Year 1 (2019)	Year 2 (2020)	Year 3 (2021)	Year 4 (2022)	Year 5 (2023)	At Capacity (2024)
9	150	150	150	150	150	150
10	100	143	143	143	143	143
11	0	95	139	139	139	139
12	0	0	91	133	133	133
Total	250	388	523	565	565	565

Brief Description of the Application:

Avodah International, Inc. is proposing to open a high school in Memphis, Tennessee and serve students in 9th through 12th grades. The school, Blueprint Avodah, is a new-start school. The school proposes to locate in the South City/Central Business District of Memphis.³ The school will employ project-based learning, personalized learning, and work-based learning to provide a unique high school option to high school students in South Memphis.⁴

The proposed school will be organized under the existing non-profit entity of Avodah International, Inc. (Avodah), and Avodah projects the school will have \$407,000 in revenue and \$234,090 in expenses in Year 0, resulting in a positive ending balance of \$172,910. Avodah projects the school will have \$2,731,133 in revenue and \$2,487,675 in expenses in Year 1, resulting in a net income of \$243,458 and a positive ending fund balance of \$416,368. By Year 5, the school projects to have \$6,343,700 in revenue and \$5,766,408 in expenses, resulting in a net income of \$577,292 and a positive ending fund balance of \$2,966,905.⁵ The school anticipates that 90% of the student population will qualify as

¹ Blueprint Avodah Amended Application, pg. 4.

² Ibid., pg. 21.

³ Ibid., pg. 128.

⁴ Ibid., pg. 24.

⁵ Ibid., Attachment O-Planning and Budget Worksheet.



economically disadvantaged, 11% of the student population will be students with disabilities, and 3% of the student population will be English Learners.⁶

⁶ Ibid., pg. 21.

Summary of the Evaluation

The review committee recommends that the application for Blueprint Avodah be denied because the applicant failed to provide sufficient evidence in the academic, operational, and financial sections that the application meets the required criteria of the rubric. The academic plan presented by the applicant lacked clarity regarding implementation and alignment to Tennessee State Standards and did not fully address how the school will implement assessments and serve special populations. Additionally, the academic plan did not provide a thorough and detailed marketing and enrollment plan or discipline plan.

The operations plan presented by the applicant did not demonstrate comprehensive and realistic startup and facility plans, a compelling plan to recruit and train staff, or a consistent transportation plan that would lead the school to meet its enrollment projections.

Finally, the financial plan presented by the applicant provided the review committee with little evidence of confirmed startup revenue, and the startup expenses outlined in the budget lacked several key budget line items. The school’s proposed operating revenue assumed full enrollment and no student attrition, and there was insufficient contingency plans if revenue did not meet projections. The application and budget were misaligned in several areas which did not provide evidence of a complete, realistic, and viable financial plan for the school.

Summary of Section Ratings

In accordance with the Tennessee Department of Education’s charter application scoring rubric, “applications that do not meet or exceed standard in every area...will be deemed not ready for approval,”⁷ and strengths in one area of the application do not negate material weaknesses in other areas. Opening and maintaining a successful, high-performing charter school depends on having a complete, coherent plan and identifying highly capable individuals to execute that plan. The review committee’s consensus rating for each section of the application are as follows:

Sections	Rating
Academic Plan Design and Capacity	Partially Meets Standard
Operations Plan and Capacity	Partially Meets Standard
Financial Plan and Capacity	Does Not Meet Standard

⁷ Tennessee Charter School Application Rubric – Evaluation Ratings and Sample Scoring Criteria, pg. 1.

Analysis of the Academic Plan Design and Capacity

Rating: Partially Meets Standard

Weaknesses Identified by the Committee:

The applicant's Academic Plan Design and Capacity partially meets the standard because the academic model lacks clarity, the assessment plan and the plan to serve special populations are vague, the student recruitment plan is not compelling, and the school's proposed discipline plan is underdeveloped.

The application lacks a clear and comprehensive explanation of how the school's academic focus aligns to Tennessee State Standards. The applicant proposes a project-based learning academic focus that is infused with personalized learning and work-based learning. While the applicant demonstrates a clear passion for this academic focus, there is insufficient evidence of how the Tennessee State Standards will align with the curriculum and how these three learning strategies will be implemented within the school. The applicant plans to partner with High Tech High to support the implementation of the school's curriculum, but there is not a clear and compelling plan to ensure this curriculum aligns to the standards and assessments in Tennessee. Additionally, the applicant's plan to implement Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI²) in the school is underdeveloped and lacks clarity of how the advisor/teacher will implement all tiered interventions in the classroom at one time. The applicant's assessment plan includes NWEA MAP assessments and interim assessments; however, there is not clear evidence of how these assessments align to the academic plan, who will be responsible for developing the interim assessments, and how data from the assessments will be analyzed and used within the school. Altogether, the applicant's proposed academic plan is vague and lacks compelling evidence that the program will be implemented with fidelity.

The review committee did not find compelling evidence that the applicant's plan to serve special populations is viable and would ensure access to the general education curriculum. When asked about the plan to ensure students with disabilities have access to the academic plan, the applicant stated that the academic model will be fully inclusive. However, the applicant did not provide evidence of a staffing structure to support this approach as the staffing structure described in the capacity interview did not align to what is presented in the application. Therefore, the review committee could not assess the viability of the plan to hire qualified personnel to serve this population of students. The applicant also did not present compelling evidence of a plan to serve English Learners. The staffing plan presented in the application did not align with what was discussed within the capacity interview, and the applicant stated that the plan to serve English Learners is still in development. As such, the committee does not have compelling evidence of a comprehensive plan to serve all students within the proposed school.

The applicant also did not provide a compelling marketing, recruitment, and enrollment plan to meet the school's enrollment projections, and the discipline policy remains under development. The applicant stated that it will utilize community partners, local college students, and representatives from Big Picture Learning for recruitment. However, Big Picture Learning does not currently have a physical presence in Memphis so there is a lack of evidence for how this organization will successfully support the student recruitment efforts. The application contains the student handbook from another project-based learning school as well as the Shelby County School's discipline policy, and the applicant stated that the school was still in the process of developing its own handbook and discipline policy. As a result, the review committee lacks clear and compelling evidence of what the school's discipline policy and student



handbook will look like, who will develop them, how they will align to the school's mission and vision, and how they will be implemented.

Strengths Identified by the Committee:

While the Academic Plan Design and Capacity partially meets the standard because of the weaknesses described above, the review committee did find evidence of strengths within the section. Specifically, the applicant outlined a compelling mission for the school as well as a unique model to serve the targeted students. Additionally, the applicant is clearly passionate about education and serving students in the community, and the applicant has demonstrated compelling student, parent, and community engagement when developing the proposed school.

Analysis of the Operations Plan and Capacity

Rating: Partially Meets Standard

Weaknesses Identified by the Committee:

The applicant's Operations Plan and Capacity partially meets the standard because of concerns with the startup and facility plans, the lack of a comprehensive plan to recruit and train personnel, and inconsistent staffing and transportation plans.

In the application, the applicant did not identify a facility nor are facility costs (rent or renovations) included in the pre-opening year budget. At the capacity interview, the applicant stated that a facility had been identified and produced evidence of an agreement with the building's owner to cover rent costs of the facility during the pre-opening year. However, there is no evidence of the projected renovation costs, who would cover these renovation costs, or that the location is suitable for the operations of the proposed school. Without this information, the review committee did not find evidence of a sound plan and timeline for financing, renovating, and ensuring code compliance for the facility. In addition to the lack of compelling evidence of a sound facility plan, the startup plan was vague and lacked detail regarding the responsible parties. In the application, all startup responsibilities are assigned to the Chief Executive Officer and governing board. However, two of the six founding governing board members are located in California, and there was no evidence provided of how the governing board could fulfill all of the assigned responsibilities given the geographic distance. In the capacity interview, the applicant stated that Big Picture Learning would support the startup responsibilities, but evidence of the specific division of responsibility was not provided nor was it clear how Big Picture Learning would fulfill any assigned responsibilities without an existing presence in Memphis. Overall, the review committee did not find evidence within the application or capacity interview of a clear, comprehensive, and viable startup and facility plan.

The applicant also did not present evidence of a clear and compelling staffing plan including the recruitment and retention of staff. The staffing projections presented in the application did not align with what was discussed in the capacity interview. In the application and proposed budget, the applicant stated the school would hire two special education teachers, but in the capacity interview, the applicant stated that they would hire three special education teachers which does not align with the application or the budget. The applicant stated that the staffing projections to support English Learner students are still in development. Additionally, the applicant did not provide a compelling strategy to recruit teachers to serve in the unique academic focus. The applicant stated that Big Picture Learning would support the staff recruitment efforts, but there was no evidence provided of how Big Picture Learning would recruit the staff without a physical presence in Memphis. Additionally, the review committee found the professional development plan vague and underdeveloped. There is not a clear plan of when professional development would occur or who would provide it on an ongoing and consistent basis. While the applicant demonstrated clear evidence of an established relationship with Big Picture Learning, there is no clear evidence of how the school and Big Picture Learning would support recruitment and training of teachers.

Finally, the applicant presented a transportation plan that was not aligned with the budget. In the application, the transportation plan details the use of bus passes for public transportation. However, in the budget narrative and budget, the transportation plan described is to contract with a third-party vendor to run two buses for students. In the capacity interview, the applicant clarified that the projected transportation plan is to utilize public transportation and bus passes, but the applicant did not provide a



projected budget for this plan. The lack of a clear and aligned transportation plan did not give evidence to the review committee that the school had a viable plan to meet its enrollment and budgetary projections.

Strengths Identified by the Committee:

While the Operations Plan and Capacity partially meets the standard because of the weaknesses described above, the review committee did find evidence of strengths within the section. Specifically, the applicant's proposed school leader has significant educational experience and participated in a fellowship program through High Tech High. The applicant does have established relationships with High Tech High and Big Picture Learning which would be unique to the community, and the Memphis-based members of the governing board bring significant skills and experience to their roles.

Analysis of the Financial Plan and Capacity

Rating: Does Not Meet Standard

Weaknesses Identified by the Committee:

The Financial Plan and Capacity does not meet the standard because the applicant has no documented commitments of most philanthropic funds, an incomplete startup budget, unrealistic operational revenue projections, and insufficient and shifting information in the budget and corresponding narrative.

The applicant states that the school will receive \$325,000 through the Walton Family Foundation for the startup year which makes up 80% of the startup year revenue. During the capacity interview, the applicant stated that they are nearly guaranteed this funding, but there is no evidence of a written guarantee that the school will receive this funding. While the committee recognizes the difficult nature of securing startup funding without the approval of a charter school, the committee did not find evidence of a strong contingency plan if the Walton philanthropic grant was not received. Additionally, the startup budget did not include any facility related expenses including rent, renovations, or furniture. There was no evidence of the projected revenue to cover any anticipated or unanticipated costs or that the applicant had a firm understanding of the renovations required for the facility. In totality, the review committee did not find evidence of a sound startup budget that would likely result in a successful start for the school.

The applicant's budget in years one through five relies on revenue calculated with the least conservative enrollment projections that do not align with the enrollment projections provided in the application. Additionally, the budget assumes the school can backfill all students who leave the school. This difference in enrollment counts leads to an over assumption of students in the budget beginning in Year 2 (12 students) through Year 5 (35 students), and the projected populations of students with disabilities and English Learners differ from what is stated in the application. Since the budget relies on the least conservative enrollment projections, there is evidence that the revenue is overstated and may fall short of projections as the school grows. Furthermore, when asked about contingency planning during the capacity interview, the applicant stated that it would fundraise from local philanthropies and the community. While there is evidence of community support for the proposed school, there is no written evidence of fundraising support from the community. Therefore, there is no evidence that the applicant could make up for the lost revenue exclusively through fundraising within the community, and there were no additional compelling contingency plans presented. Therefore, there is no evidence that the revenue projections are sound, realistic, and viable, and the applicant did not provide evidence of a sound contingency plan if the revenue fell short of projections.

Finally, there are multiple instances in the budget where the projected costs differ from what is described in the application or where costs are not included within the budget. The totality of these instances does not provide the review committee with evidence of a complete and realistic budget. For example, the transportation plan for the proposed school does not align with what was presented in the budget, and although the applicant explained the transportation plan for the school in the capacity interview, the applicant did not provide a cost projection for this plan. Additionally, the applicant stated in the capacity interview that the school plans to hire a third-party vendor to support the implementation and oversight of the financial operations in the first few years of the school's operations, but the applicant did not provide an estimated cost for this support nor is this included in the budget. Additionally, there were several places where the projected staffing in the budget did not align with what was presented in the application or the capacity interview. For example, the applicant states in the budget narrative that



the school will hire a Director of Finance in Year 3, but this role is not included in the staffing chart or in the proposed budget. In the application, the applicant stated that it would hire one staff member to serve English Learners, but in the interview, the applicant stated that its projected staffing to support English Learner students was still in development. Altogether, the inconsistencies and vague cost projections within the school's budget did not provide evidence of reasonable and well-supported cost assumptions that roll up into a complete and realistic budget.

Given these issues, the review committee found insufficient evidence that the applicant's budget was appropriate, realistic, and viable or that the applicant could adequately secure the startup revenue and ongoing revenue needed to support the school's operation.



Evaluation Team

Sam Brobeck is the 8th Grade Math and Algebra 1 teacher at Grizzlies Prep, a public charter middle school in Memphis, Tennessee. Additionally, Sam serves as the Chair of the Math Department at Grizzlies Prep. He is a 2018-2019 SCORE Tennessee Educator Fellow and has previously served as a mentor teacher through Memphis Teacher Residency, a Policy Fellow with Stand For Children, and an Aspiring School Leader Fellow with Teach For America—Memphis. Sam graduated from Rhodes College with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Economy and Urban Studies.

Ashley Foxx Davis currently serves as the Residency Director for the Relay Graduate School of Education where she works in partnership with numerous schools and networks across Memphis to build an innovative new support system for brand-new teachers within their schools. Prior to joining Relay, she returned to her native city of Memphis to join Teach For America, as a 2010 corps member, and as a kindergarten teacher at Memphis College Prep charter school. In her second year, she was promoted to Lead Teacher and nominated for Teach for America's Sue Lehmann Award for Teaching Excellence. She then went on to serve as principal of Memphis College Prep and led a student body of nearly 300 students. Ashley received a Bachelor of Arts in Communication and English from the University of Pennsylvania. She then attended Columbia University in New York where she graduated with a Master of Science in Digital Media in 2010. She was a 2014-2015 participant in the Leaders for Emerging Networks of Schools program with Building Excellent Schools and a 2015-2016 participant in the National Principals Academy Fellowship with the Relay Graduate School of Education. She plans to pursue her EdD in Organizational Change and Leadership from the University of Southern California's Rossier School of Education in 2019.

Allyson Hauptman is the Lead Faculty for Instructional Practice at Lipscomb. She has a Ph.D. in Teaching, Learning, and Teacher Education from the University of Nebraska, and has taught first and fifth grades as well as Special Education. She also has experience as a literacy and math coach. Her research interests include reading and writing motivation and effective practices in literacy instruction.

Earl Simms is a charter school authorizing consultant and advocate in St. Louis, Missouri. He is the former Director of the Division of Charter Schools at the Kentucky Department of Education and the St. Louis Director for the University of Missouri's charter school office. Simms also previously served as the Senior Director for the Missouri Charter Public School Association.

Tess Stovall serves as the Director of Charter Schools for the Tennessee State Board of Education. In this role, she manages the charter school application process and authorization duties of the State Board, and she was a member of the 2015 National Association of Charter School Authorizer's Leaders Program. Prior to joining the staff of the board, she served as the Transformation Facilitator at Cameron Middle School, the first district-led conversion of a traditional public school to a charter school in Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools. While in Washington, DC, Tess worked for Congressman Jim Cooper (TN-05) and a centrist think tank, Third Way, on economic and education policy. She is a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of The George



Washington University earning a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Political Science and Sociology and a graduate of the London School of Economics with a Master of Science Degree in Political Sociology.

Exhibit B

Shelby County Schools Recommendation Report



Blueprint Avodah

Amended Application Review Committee Recommendation: **Deny**

Proposed School Name	Proposed School Focus	Proposed Region/Location
Blueprint Avodah	Experiential, Project Based and Personalized Learning	South Memphis

School Mission:

Blueprint Avodah is “an equity project with a mission to disrupt multi-generational poverty in Memphis through high quality education.” They will “serve as a catalyst for economic development by empowering students to create sustainable communities as contributing members of the workforce.”

School Plan Summary

The proposed school hopes to address the achievement gap in Shelby County Schools by focusing on high drop out rates and unemployment gaps. The project based learning and personalized learning will be the chosen educational model to address these challenges. The proposed school also hopes to provide the opportunity for students to graduate with college credit and industry training.

Leadership and Governance

Full Name	Current Job Title and Employer	Position with Proposed School
Alexis E. Gwin-Miller	Founder of Blueprint Avodah	Academics, Management, personnel/Human resources, Professional Development
Russell James Walker	High Tech High, Teacher	Academics, Community Engagement, Strategic Planning
Lisa M. Watts, Ph.D	Education Consultant	Academics, Management, Personnel/Human Resources
David Arnold, MPA, PHR, CDFM	Capital Planning, Bureau of Naval Personnel, Director	Finance, Management, Strategic Planning, Facilities, Operations
Christina T. Faulkner-Rosenthal, DDS	Paradigm dental Center, LLC, Owner and CEO 516 Foundation, Founder/President	Academics, Management, Strategic Planning, Community Engagement, Special Education
Charles G. Elliott	The Juice Plus Company, Network and Telecom Administrator	Management, Strategic Planning, Operations
Lou Barrios	High Tech High, Teacher	Academics, Community Engagement, Strategic Planning, EL Education

Proposed Grade Structure and 5-year Enrollment Projections

Academic Year	Planned # of Students	Grades Served
2019-2020	250	9-10
2020-2021	400	9-11
2021-2022	450	9-12
2022-2023	600	9-12
2023-2024	600	9-12
2024-2025	600	9-12

Application Ratings and Comments by Section

This section should include a summary of comments from all reviewers.

Section/Rating	Strengths/Highlights	Concerns/Areas for Improvement
<p>Academic Plan Design and Capacity</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Meets or Exceeds</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially Meets</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet</p>	<p>The proposed school’s mission hopes to “disrupt multi-generational poverty” for the children of Memphis. The mission will be achieved through a collaborative effort with students, their families and the larger community. The proposed school will use two models with proven success to fulfill the mission of post-secondary success for their students.</p>	<p>The application proposed the use of two national models, High Tech High and Big Picture learning. It is unclear how these two programs will connect and enhance the learning experience for those students who enroll. The application lacks clarity regarding how the assessments, specific to the program will be evaluated. Finally, the application does not articulate on-going enrollment activities to keep families engaged, especially given the uniqueness of the program.</p>
<p>Operations Plan and Capacity</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Meets or Exceeds</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially Meets</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet</p>	<p>The applicant has identified several possible sites to open the school and benefits for each option. The founder included letters of support from High Tech High and has completed graduate work through their school of education.</p>	<p>The CEO and Board are undertaking all pre-opening activities which is unrealistic given all the responsibilities and tasks regarding opening a new school. The applicant has not been able to provide an explanation regarding how both the HTH and BPL models are connected and complement each other to serve the students of the proposed school. Even with the professional development support that will be provided by both organizations, it is unclear how all of this fit into an overall plan for professional development plan. Teacher will still need additional support and training in other critical areas to serve their students (e.g. special education, culture, ELL etc.)</p>
<p>Financial Plan and Capacity</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Meets or Exceeds</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Partially Meets</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet</p>		<p>The planning year budget is dependent on unsecured funds with no contingency plan should the funds not materialize. The budget narrative lacks a response that gives confidence that the proposed school will be able to effectively support all of the school’s priorities and fulfill on going needs critical to fulfilling the mission of the school.</p>