
BEFORE THE TENNESSEE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

)
)
) **State Board of Education Meeting**
) **November 15, 2019**
)
)

IN RE:
Nashville Collegiate Prep
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 October 4, 2019, Nashville Collegiate Prep (NCP) appealed the denial of its amended application by Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) 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 NCP amended application was not “contrary to the best interests of the students, LEA, or community.”¹ Therefore, I recommend that the State Board affirm the decision of MNPS to deny the amended application for NCP.

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 the NCP 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

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.

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 students, LEA, or community.⁴ Because NCP 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. The Sponsor, ReThink Forward (Sponsor), submitted its initial application for NCP to MNPS on March 28, 2019.
2. MNPS assembled a review committee to review and score the NCP application.
3. On May 15, 2019, a MNPS panel, which included external expert reviewers, held a capacity interview with the Sponsor.
4. The review committee recommended denial of the NCP initial application.
5. On June 25, 2019, the MNPS Board of Education voted to deny the NCP initial application based upon the review committee's recommendation.
6. The Sponsor amended and resubmitted its application for NCP to MNPS on July 17, 2019.
7. MNPS's review committee reviewed and scored the NCP amended application and again recommended denial.
8. On September 24, 2019, based on the review committee's recommendation, the MNPS Board of Education voted to deny the NCP amended application.
9. The Sponsor appealed the denial of the NCP amended application in writing to the State Board on October 4, 2019, including submission of all required documents per State Board policy 2.500.
10. At the time of appeal to the State Board, the Sponsor did not submit any corrections to the application as allowed under T.C.A. § 49-13-108(b)(4).
11. The State Board's Review Committee analyzed and scored the NCP amended application using the Tennessee Department of Education's charter application scoring rubric.
12. The State Board's Review Committee conducted a capacity interview with the proposed governing board of NCP and key members of the leadership team on October 30, 2019 in Nashville.

⁴ Ibid.

13. After the capacity interview, the Review Committee determined a final consensus rating of the NCP amended application, which served as the basis for the Review Committee Recommendation Report.
14. On November 6, 2019, the State Board staff held a public hearing in Nashville. At the public hearing, the Executive Director, sitting as the State Board’s designee, heard presentations from the Sponsor and MNPS and took public comment regarding the NCP amended application.

FINDINGS OF FACT

- **District Denial of Application.**

The review committee assembled by MNPS to review and score the NCP initial and amended applications consisted of the following individuals:

Name	Title
Katy Enterline	Director of Talent Management, HR, MNPS
Michelle Doane	Consultant
Rick Caldwell	SPED Coach, MNPS
Dan Killian	Project Coordinator Exceptional Education, MNPS
Dr. Joie Austria	Director, Office of English Learners, MNPS (initial)
Dr. James Starron	EL Coach, Office of English Learners, MNPS (amended)
Katy Pattullo	Director of MTSS, Office of Instructional Support, MNPS
Tyrunya Goodwin	District Lead Math Coach, Office of Instructional Support, MNPS
Dr. Megan Cusson-Lark	Executive Director, Office of School Counseling, MNPS
Lisa Ladd	Director of Operations, Valor Collegiate Prep
Brian Hull	Resource Strategy, MNPS

The NCP initial application received the following ratings from the MNPS review committee:

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 MNPS review committee completed its review and scoring of the initial application, its recommendation was presented to the MNPS Board of Education on June 25, 2019. Based on the review committee’s recommendation, the MNPS Board of Education voted to deny the initial application of NCP.

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

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

Sections	Rating
Academic Plan Design and Capacity	PARTIALLY MEETS STANDARD
Operations Plan and Capacity	PARTIALLY MEETS STANDARD
Financial Plan and Capacity	PARTIALLY MEETS STANDARD

After the MNPS review committee completed its review and scoring of the amended application, its recommendation was presented to the MNPS Board of Education on September 24, 2019. Since each of the major areas of evaluation only partially met standard, the amended application was recommended for denial. Based on this recommendation, the MNPS Board of Education voted to deny the amended application of NCP.

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

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

Name	Title
Scott Campbell	Executive Director, Persist Nashville
Ashley Davis	Independent Consultant, Memphis, TN
Dr. Diarese George	Director of Recruitment, Nashville Teacher Residency
Whitney O’Connell	Schools Implementation Manager, EVERFI, New York, NY
Nate Parker	Coordinator of Policy and Federal Programs, State Board of Education
Steve Robbins	Independent Consultant, Chicago, IL

The Review Committee conducted an initial review and scoring of the NCP 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 NCP 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	MEETS OR EXCEEDS STANDARD

The Review Committee recommended that the application for NCP be denied because the applicant failed to provide sufficient evidence in the academic and operational sections to demonstrate the application meets the required criteria of the rubric.

The academic plan presented by the applicant contained many strengths, particularly in the alignment of its mission and vision throughout its academic plan, its commitment to data and a robust assessment cycle to inform personalized learning, and its innovative learning space and learning

community model. However, the application did not provide enough evidence of an academic plan supported by appropriately licensed and highly qualified personnel or evidence that its plan would adequately serve special populations. Additionally, the application lacked a compelling student outreach plan to match its ambitious enrollment projections.

The operations plan had several notable strengths, including identifying Nobel Education Initiative (NEI), an experienced charter management organization (CMO), to manage the school's daily operations. NEI currently operates other schools in the Nashville area and other parts of the country, which demonstrates their capacity to adequately manage the operations of NCP. Further, in the capacity interview, the applicant indicated they had secured a lot with an existing building in their proposed school location. However, the application did not demonstrate a clear organizational structure or convincing governance model, a realistic start-up plan with a compelling plan to meet its ambitious staff and enrollment goals, or a comprehensive transportation plan that would lead the school to meet its enrollment projections.

The financial plan presented by the applicant provided the Review Committee with adequate evidence of a reasonable and sound financial plan that meets the standard outlined in the scoring rubric. The budget thoroughly laid out the costs with descriptive line items and realistic expectations. NCP's start-up plan is fully funded, and the budget shows the school operating with a positive balance each year from Year 0 through Year 5. Given that ReThink has a plan to ensure proper financial planning, the committee determined NEI has the capacity to provide such services and leverage its resources to support the school's financial plan.

In summary, the Review Committee determined that the Sponsor did not provide sufficient evidence in the academic and operational sections of the NCP 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 NCP 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 Executive Director was held in Nashville on November 6, 2019. MNPS's presentation at the public hearing focused on the argument that the denial of the NCP amended application was in the best interest of the students, school district, and community. MNPS grounded its argument in the deficiencies found by the MNPS review committee in the amended application after conducting a review process aligned to the State Board Quality Authorizing Standards and National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) best practices. Specifically, MNPS found the NCP amended application partially met the standard for approval in the academic plan because the Sponsor did not provide sufficient evidence to support the proposed

⁶ T.C.A. § 49-13-108(b)(4).

academic plan nor did it provide a clear picture of the logistics for successful implementation. Moreover, MNPS cited the Sponsor's Year 1 enrollment projections, which includes grades Kindergarten through 6th, to be unrealistic, and MNPS did not find evidence of a compelling recruitment strategy to meet the projected enrollment of 531 students in the first year. Furthermore, MNPS stated that the proposed plan to serve English Learners (EL) and special education students was undefined and questions remained about whether the proposed school could meet the required teacher-student ratios around EL services. MNPS also cited ongoing concerns about the relationships and potential conflicts of interest between the Sponsor, NCP, NEI, and Trevecca Nazarene University (Trevecca). In the operations section, MNPS found that the NCP amended application did not meet the standard for approval because the facility timeline was unclear and the transportation assumptions were unrealistic and unclear. In the financial section, MNPS rated the application as partially meeting the standard because of ongoing questions regarding the appropriate staffing for EL students and special education students, concerns around the competitiveness of the proposed teacher salaries, and the basis for the projected fundraising and philanthropic revenue. Lastly, MNPS stated that there is a lack of a defined community need in the areas NCP anticipated to recruit students from in Nashville, and MNPS provided data which showed that nine (9) of the twelve elementary schools in the community achieved an overall composite TVAAS level of 3, 4, or 5 in 2019.

In response to the MNPS argument, the Sponsor stated that the denial of the NCP amended application was contrary to the best interest of students, the school district, or the community because

- 1) The proposed charter management organization, NEI, has a demonstrated record of student achievement and growth in the charter schools it currently operates.
- 2) MNPS would be well-served by adding another academically successful charter school that has a partnership with Trevecca and is managed by an organization with a track record of success.
- 3) The achievement of schools in the southeast area on TN Ready are low which demonstrates the need for an additional high quality option.

The Sponsor also stated that the MNPS review committee had erred in noting some deficiencies in the NCP amended application when the application actually contained the required information. Specifically, the Sponsor highlighted that it has a strong plan to serve special populations, specifically ELs, has a strong and diverse proposed governing board, and has committed start-up funding. Finally, the Sponsor stated that an authorizer could not deny an application because of a transportation plan, and the Sponsor also asserted that the NCP amended application could be approved upon the contingency that it provide transportation to each student that it serves.

A portion of the public hearing was dedicated to taking public comment. A total of four (4) people made verbal comments in support of NCP at the hearing. In addition, the State Board received written public comments from thirteen (13) individuals in support of NCP's application as well as a petition with approximately 150 signatures.

- **Alignment of Metro Nashville Public Schools' Application Process to State Board Quality Authorizing Standards**

State Board staff collected and analyzed detailed information regarding MNPS' application review process 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 MNPS regarding its authorization process

and alignment to the Quality Authorizing Standards. MNPS articulated that their application review process consists of utilizing a review committee made up of internal and external experts who are trained to use the state's scoring rubric. The review committee conducts individual reviews of the application, and then a capacity interview is held with the Sponsor. At the conclusion of the capacity interview, the review committee develops a consensus rubric grounded in the state's scoring rubric. Based on the information presented by MNPS, the district's process appears in alignment with State Board Quality Authorizing Standards.

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 students, LEA, or community."⁷ 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 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 Sponsor and MNPS, the arguments made by both the Sponsor and MNPS 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 NCP 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. While I appreciate the Sponsor's passion for serving the students of southeast Nashville, I agree with the Review Committee's assessment that the academic program remains underdeveloped. In particular, I am concerned regarding the Sponsor's plans to ensure all educators are appropriately licensed in accordance with State Board policy and rule as well as to meet the required teacher to student ratios. Although I believe the partnership with Trevecca to support teacher candidates in receiving the required licenses and endorsements is commendable, this established partnership does not outweigh the lack of evidence provided in the NCP application that the school will be able to meet the required staffing ratios within the proposed academic plan, particularly in serving special populations. Moreover, the lack of established community partnerships, outside of Trevecca, as provided in the application, does not meet the standard for approval. While there were several Tennessee-based individuals that submitted public comments during the appeal process, all letters of support included in the amended application came from organizations and individuals outside of Tennessee.

⁷ T.C.A. § 49-13-108.

Additionally, I agree with the Review Committee's concerns regarding the potential conflicts of interest that are present between the Sponsor, NCP, NEI, and Trevecca. The amended application did not provide further clarity regarding these relationships, nor did it provide further evidence to support the proposed governance structure of the school. A strong, robust, and diverse governing board is essential to ensure the proper oversight and monitoring of a charter school, particularly for a new organization, like the Sponsor, that has never operated schools before. The proposed governing board included four governing board members, two of which reside outside of Tennessee. While it is not a requirement for all members of the governing board to be local, the potential issue is exacerbated by the small size of the governing board (four members), the fact that the Sponsor has never opened a school before, and the short start-up timeline with an ambitious starting enrollment projection. I recognize the significant responsibilities, time, and efforts required of governing board members during the start-up phase of a school, and the Sponsor's proposed governing board composition did not provide sufficient evidence that it will be able to effectively oversee a new school, particularly without a stronger local presence.

Lastly, I agree with the State Board's and MNPS' review committees regarding concerns with the proposed transportation plan, particularly in the proposed location and with the projected student population. The Sponsor is correct that a transportation plan is not required for approval; however, the proposed transportation plan is a section of the state's scoring rubric and is evaluated when reviewing an application. Moreover, an applicant's transportation plan is directly linked to its enrollment plan and is integral when analyzing the feasibility of a school meeting its enrollment projections. In totality, I agree with the review committees' assessments that the plan to provide transportation to only 15% of the students in the school is unrealistic and does not align with the projected plan to enroll over 500 students in Year 1. Furthermore, I am concerned with the applicant's description of the walkability radius of two (2) to four (4) miles from the proposed location. This assumption is unrealistic for any grade span, but especially for Pre-Kindergarten through 8th grades. Finally, the Sponsor stated in the public hearing that the NCP amended application could be approved by the State Board on the contingency of providing transportation to all students. However, a decision to approve an application based on contingencies would directly conflict with T.C.A. § 49-13-108(e) which states, "an authorizer shall not base the authorizer's approval of a public charter school application on conditions or contingencies." Therefore, I agree that the operations section of the NCP amended application does not meet or exceed the standard for approval.

Therefore, because of the uncertainty regarding the academic and operations plans, I agree with the Review Committee's recommendation that the application not be approved. Additionally, after a review of the evidence of the record including the Review Committee's report, I cannot find that the MNPS Board of Education's decision to deny the NCP application was contrary to the best interests of the students LEA, or community. However, this recommendation does not diminish my belief in the Sponsor's passion and sincere desire to serve the students in the southeast area of Nashville.

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 Nashville Collegiate Prep was contrary to the best interests of the students, the LEA, or the community. Therefore, I recommend that

the State Board affirm the decision of MNPS to deny the amended application for Nashville Collegiate Prep.



Dr. Sara Morrison, Executive Director
State Board of Education

11/12/2019

Date



EXHIBIT A

Charter Application Review Committee Recommendation Report

November 8, 2019

School Name: Nashville Collegiate Prep

Sponsor: ReThink Forward, Inc.

Proposed Location of School: Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools

Evaluation Team:

Scott Campbell
Ashley Davis
Dr. Diarese George
Whitney O'Connell
Nate Parker
Steve Robbins

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



© 2014 National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA)

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

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

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

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

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



Introduction

Tennessee Code Annotated (T.C.A.) § 49-13-108 allows the sponsor 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 plans, operations plans, 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: Nashville Collegiate Prep

Sponsor: ReThink Forward, Inc.

Proposed Location of School: Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools

Mission:¹ Nashville Collegiate Prep’s (NCP) mission is to provide a personalized, engaged, supported, and challenging environment that will strengthen students academically, socially, and emotionally. Students will leave NCP with the skills and mindset necessary to not only face reality, but create improvements for the next generation.

Number of Schools Currently in Operation by Sponsor: 0

Proposed Enrollment:²

Grade Level	Year 1 (2020)	Year 2 (2021)	Year 3 (2022)	Year 4 (2023)	Year 5 (2024)	At Capacity (2025)
PreK	26	26	26	26	26	26
K	60	80	80	80	100	120
1	80	80	80	100	120	120
2	80	80	80	80	120	120
3	60	80	80	80	80	105
4	75	75	75	75	80	80
5	75	75	75	75	75	80
6	75	75	75	75	75	75
7	0	75	75	75	75	75
8	0	0	75	75	75	75
Total³	531	614	689	709	794	844

Brief Description of the Application:

ReThink Forward, Inc. (ReThink) is proposing to open a combined elementary and middle school in Nashville, Tennessee, to serve students in grades PreK through 8th. The school, Nashville Collegiate Prep (NCP), is a new-start school. NCP proposes to locate in the Downtown-Murfreesboro Road/Lafayette Avenue area, close to Trevecca Nazarene University (TNU).⁴ The school will employ personalized learning,

¹ Nashville Collegiate Prep Amended Application, pg. 4.

² Ibid. pg. 15.

³ The proposed total enrollment represents Table 4 in Nashville Collegiate Prep’s Amended Application. However, the actual total enrollments when each column is summed are as follows: Year 1 (531), Year 2 (646), Year 3 (721), Year 4 (741), Year 5 (826), and At Capacity (876).

⁴ Ibid. pg. 8.

social and emotional learning, and a learning community model to provide a unique elementary and middle school option to students in South Nashville.⁵

The proposed school will be organized under the existing non-profit entity of ReThink. ReThink projects that the school will have \$300,000 in revenue and \$270,011 in expenses in Year 0, resulting in a positive ending balance of \$29,989. ReThink projects that the school will have \$5,763,756 in revenue and \$5,738,994 in expenses in Year 1, resulting in a net income of \$24,762 and a positive ending fund balance of \$54,751. By Year 5, the school projects to have \$9,124,224 in revenue and \$8,889,370 in expenses, resulting in a net income of \$234,854 and a positive ending fund balance of \$1,102,123.⁶ The school anticipates that 51% of the student population will qualify as economically disadvantaged, 12% of the student population will be students with disabilities, and 34% of the student population will be English Learners.⁷

⁵ Ibid. pg. 6.

⁶ Ibid. Attachment O-Planning and Budget Worksheet.

⁷ Ibid. pg. 12.

Summary of the Evaluation

The review committee recommends denial of the application for Nashville Collegiate Prep because the applicant failed to provide sufficient evidence in the academic and operational sections to demonstrate the application meets the required criteria of the rubric.

The academic plan presented by the applicant contained many strengths, particularly in the alignment of its mission and vision throughout its academic plan, its commitment to data and a robust assessment cycle to inform personalized learning, and its innovative learning space and learning community model. However, the application did not provide enough evidence of an academic plan supported by appropriately licensed and highly qualified personnel or evidence that its plan would adequately serve special populations. Additionally, the application lacked a compelling student outreach plan to match its ambitious enrollment projections.

The operations plan also included strengths such as the identification of Nobel Education Initiative (NEI) as an experienced charter management organization (CMO) to manage the school’s daily operations. NEI currently operates other schools, which demonstrates their capacity to adequately manage the operations of NCP. Further, in the capacity interview, the applicant indicated they had secured a lot with an existing building in their proposed school location. However, the application did not demonstrate a clear organizational structure or convincing governance model, a realistic start-up plan with a compelling plan to meet its ambitious staff and enrollment goals, or a comprehensive transportation plan that would lead the school to meet its enrollment projections.

Conversely, the financial plan presented by the applicant provided the review committee with adequate evidence of a reasonable and sound financial plan that meets the standard outlined in the scoring rubric. The budget thoroughly laid out the costs with descriptive line items and realistic expectations. NCP’s start-up plan is fully funded and the budget shows the school operating with a positive balance each year from Year 0 through Year 5. Given that ReThink has a plan to ensure proper financial planning, the committee determined NEI has the capacity to provide such services and leverage its resources to support the school’s financial plan.

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,”⁸ 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	Meets or Exceeds Standard

⁸ 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 while the sponsor proposed a unique model that focuses on flexibility both in terms of staff and space, there was not clear evidence that the academic plan could be implemented with fidelity based on the proposed staffing structure. In addition, NCP's plan to serve at-risk students was insufficient and the school's proposed marketing, recruitment, and enrollment plan was underdeveloped.

First, it was unclear how the applicant would successfully staff its academic model to meet state requirements and best serve its target population. In grades 3 through 6, the number of general education teachers per grade level for the projected enrollments result in high student-to-teacher ratios which exceed those allowable under State Board rules. In the application, NCP outlined a staffing plan that relies on general education teachers and aides to rotate through direct instruction and small group instruction periods as part of its learning community model (Table 7, pg. 28). According to the applicant, the academic model would rely on "micro-credentialed" aides to reduce the classroom sizes; however, "micro-credentialing" does not exist within the State Board's rule or policy as an allowable licensure option. In Tennessee, only fully licensed classroom teachers count toward class size ratios; therefore, it is not clear how NCP's model would meet this standard. For example, according to Table 7 in the application, the Year 1 ratio of general education teachers to third grade students is 30:1, and in sixth grade is 37.5:1 (pg. 28). However, State Board Rule 0520-01-03-.03 Administration of Schools states that the maximum class size for grades K-3 is 25 and for grades 4-6 is 30. Further, average class size is determined by regular classroom teaching positions and excludes using special education (SPED) or other specialized positions.⁹ Thus, NCP is unable to count their "micro-credentialed" teachers towards this classroom ratio. Therefore, based on the information in the application, the model would far exceed the class size limits permitted in Tennessee.

During the capacity interview, the sponsor stated that direct instruction would only be provided by a licensed teacher, but noted that groups could be as large as 60 students during direct instruction. The review committee was provided insufficient evidence regarding the effectiveness of this type of direct instruction, particularly for the early grades. During the capacity interview, the applicant referenced that other schools operated by NEI in other states have used this model with success, but there was no demographic data, academic data, or other evidence provided to substantiate this claim or illustrate how it would be effective for their target population in Nashville. Furthermore, it was not clear how this model would work for the teaching staff, as evidenced by a lack of providing a daily schedule for a teacher (pg. 88) to illustrate time for planning, meetings, and breaks. During the capacity interview, the review committee asked for further clarification about how the daily schedule would look for a teacher, but the response focused on the student schedule. When pressed for details on when teachers would hold meetings or plan, the applicant said there would be time for co-planning and meetings during specials; however, NCP's plan uses unlicensed volunteers to lead specials, presumably with oversight provided by licensed teachers, so it is unclear how teachers would be available for meetings or receive a planning period during this time. Finally, the applicant submitted two waivers to allow the principal to oversee

⁹ Rules of the Tennessee State Board of Education, Chapter 0520-01-03, .03 Administration of Schools, Requirement B

physical education and fine arts classes “despite the use of non-certified instructional personnel” (pg. 173-175). The committee determined there was insufficient evidence that the academic plan is appropriate or effective for growing all students while also meeting basic licensing requirements.

In addition, the academic plan did not indicate a strong personnel plan to serve at-risk learners. According to NCP’s staffing model, the aides would be “micro-credentialed” as literacy, math, or behavior specialists to work with small groups of students. As noted above, this type of licensure option does not exist in Tennessee. Based on NCP’s assumptions, 12% of the student body will have special needs, and 34% will be English Learners. This amounts to 61 students and 172 students, respectively, in their first year. Based on the mandatory 1:35 ratio for English Learners (EL) and EL teachers, NCP would need five (5) full-time EL teachers in Year 1, which are not included in the budget or nor could this rational be legally met by the aides. Additionally, the budget does not account for a SPED Coordinator or an EL Coordinator, though these positions are referenced in the application. During the capacity interview, the applicant indicated that these positions are accounted for in the “Stipends” line item in the budget; however, this line item is \$15,000 in Year 1 and described as “Stipends lead teachers, coaches, and special duty” (Attachment O, pg.7). Additionally, in Year 1, NCP budgets \$94,000 for two (2) SPED teachers and \$61,000 for “Contracted SPED Services . . . Estimated from historical knowledge \$1,000 per SPED student” (Attachment P, pg. 160; Budget, pg. 7). This does not align with the applicant’s organizational chart, which highlights certain contracted positions, but none related to SPED (Attachment A, pg. 84). There are no specific budget line items associated with ELs. Without a full-time staff member dedicated to managing the school’s projected high EL population or a clear staffing plan, the committee determined NCP’s academic staffing plan would not be able to effectively monitor and serve its at-risk students and meet the specific staffing ratios requirement for EL students.

Finally, the committee found a lack of evidence to support existing community engagement and involvement beyond ReThink’s partnership with TNU, a private university. While the applicant describes an existing partnership between NEI and TNU, neither the application nor the capacity interview provided clear evidence of community support for the school beyond TNU. First, while the application mentions conducting a community survey to determine interest and needs of potential parents and families in their proposed community, the application does not include data regarding the volume or significance of the results. During the capacity interview, the sponsor was unable to cite evidence from the survey or describe the number of respondents. In addition, ReThink’s plan shows a lack of key community partners in their proposed neighborhood that directly serve their target population. While the partnership with TNU is a good start, there was no evidence that the applicant has identified or worked with organizations outside of TNU. Further, while the application included letters of pledged support, none of the letters came from individuals or organizations within Nashville or the state of Tennessee. In totality, these concerns led the review committee to rate NCP’s academic plan as partially meets standard.

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 this 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 demonstrated an impressive vision for a data-informed continuous improvement cycle with a robust assessment plan to offer individualized instruction in the daily schedule. There was a clear alignment in the applicant’s vision for the learning space, the learning



community model, and how their academic plan supports their innovative instructional strategies and unique schooling option.

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 the application lacked clarity in its governance and organizational structure, provided an unrealistic start-up plan, and included an inadequate transportation plan to meet its enrollment projections.

First, the committee found the relationship between ReThink, NEI, Nashville Collegiate Prep, and TNU complicated, unclear, and potentially prone to conflicts of interest. There was not sufficient evidence that the proposed structure would ensure effective governance or meaningful oversight. For example, the governing board is comprised of four (4) members, with two (2) members from the Nashville community and two (2) members from outside Tennessee. The lack of a strong local presence and its small size for a governing board without any current operating schools fails to provide evidence of the board's ability to contribute the community experience and expertise needed to oversee the launch of a successful charter school in their proposed location.

In addition, the leadership model provides insufficient evidence of proper monitoring and accountability. While the application names a Regional Director, this individual was not present or mentioned at the capacity interview. The Regional Director is listed as school leadership within the application (p. 143), but the section that follows describes the selection criteria for the school leader without stating a school leader has been chosen. The application also refers to a Superintendent as part of its leadership structure, further complicating the leadership model. The application states: "The principal will report to the Superintendent, will be accessible to the board and will be an employee of NEI" (p. 125). It is unclear if the Superintendent is the Regional Director, if the Regional Director is the principal, or if each of the three roles are entirely separate altogether. Further, it is unclear why the principal is an employee of NEI rather than the school itself. In addition, the President of the ReThink Governing Board is also the President of TNU, and in turn, the school plans to have an active partnership with TNU to certify teachers. With the overlap in contracts and oversight, the review committee is uncertain how the governing board will be able to objectively evaluate whether its contracts with NEI and TNU are in the best interest of NCP now and in the future. The capacity interview did not provide further evidence of managing these potential conflicts of interest.

The committee did not find evidence to support the feasibility of the start-up plan given the timeline and ambitious PreK-6 opening. The applicant plans to open eight (8) grade levels with over five hundred (500) students and fifty (50) staff members in Year 1. Without a strong local presence outside of TNU or a known brand in the community, the review committee did not find evidence of the plan's viability. While the application does cite current and future growth trends in the community that could substantiate a slow growth model, the enrollment of 531 students in Year 1 does not mirror a slow growth model. Moreover, none of the traditional public schools located within the proposed community are currently over capacity (pg. 11) and therefore, does not provide evidence to support the need to open eight (8) grade levels at once.

Furthermore, NCP's recruitment plan does not provide a clear pathway resulting in the hiring of a strong staff well suited to the school. Given the known shortage for teachers in the Nashville area, NCP's compensation plan is not likely to attract and retain the number of professional staff needed in Year 1 to sustain the school model. NCP's staffing model relies on a large number of aides projected to earn a low

salary of \$28,000. In Year 2, NCP is projecting a staff that includes 19 general education teachers and 30 aides for 695 students; it is unclear how the school will recruit this many aides at such a low compensation rate. During the capacity interview, the applicant did not provide evidence of NCP's ability to attract and retain properly licensed teachers and aides in the timeline provided. While the applicant's proposed partnership with TNU is promising, this partnership in and of itself does not provide evidence of the school being able to meet its ambitious staff recruitment goals.

Finally, the transportation plan does not adequately serve its target population or its proposed community. The application cites a "2 – 4-mile walkout radius of the school" and only budgets for two buses to provide transportation for 110 students, or roughly 20% of its Year 1 enrollment. The assumptions made by the applicant do not align with community expectations, since the local district uses a 1.25 walkout radius for K-8, nor does the plan align with its target enrollment of just over 500 students in Year 1. By accepting transportation funds, NCP would receive approximately \$240,000 in addition to the base BEP, yet only budgets \$105,000 for transportation services. The committee did not find further detail for how the remaining transportation funds would be spent. Further, the projected number of students receiving busing does not increase with enrollment in the budget, resulting in only 15% of students receiving transportation in future years. The application acknowledges NCP's plan disproportionately impacts low-income families: "ReThink understands that transportation may be a barrier to providing families with school choice, especially for those families living in poverty" (p. 163), but does not provide an alternative plan to ensure students are able to attend the school. With a community comprised of 51% economically disadvantaged students, the application offers no contingency plan for how to address this discrepancy, which conflicts with their commitment to diversity as outlined in their diversity plan. In totality, these concerns led the committee to rate NCP's operational plan as partially meets the standard.

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, ReThink's decision to contract with a CMO that currently operates numerous schools across the country and has the capacity to manage the operations for NCP is a strength of the application. In addition, the applicant shared during the capacity interview that they were able to secure a lot with an existing building in their proposed neighborhood, therefore securing a facility for the school.

Analysis of the Financial Plan and Capacity

Rating: Meets or Exceeds Standard

Strengths Identified by the Committee:

The Financial Plan and Capacity meets or exceeds the standard because the applicant provided a sound financial plan with adequate evidence of proper financial management and oversight. The provided budget and budget narrative were thorough, reasonable, and based on realistic assumptions.

The application stated that the school has access to a \$300,000 open line of credit at an 8% interest rate during Year 0. While this interest rate is high, the budget provided means to repay the loan. During the capacity interview, the applicant discussed the development team's capacity to secure additional grants nationwide. Additionally, NEI described its plan to have sound systems in place for accounting, payroll, and annual financial and administrative audits. NEI also demonstrated strengths in their procedures and experience in selecting vendors and securing contracted services. During their initial review of the application, the review committee noted a discrepancy regarding the CMO fee for NEI and, when asked during the capacity interview, NEI clarified the CMO fee and explained how the 10% CMO fee fits within the scope of the budget. NEI currently manages the financial operations of schools in a number of states and has the capacity and resources for implementing the financial plan successfully; NEI's capacity includes areas such as financial management, fundraising and development, and accounting.

The applicant's budget in Years 1 through 5 showed positive end-of-year revenues. This, paired with thoroughly described budget items, indicated a clear plan able to ensure the financial success of the school. For example, the budget included the anticipated number of students who will receive free or reduced-price lunches and the impact that has on the budget. Thus, there were complete, realistic, and viable start-up and five-year operating budgets.

During the capacity interview, the applicant demonstrated the capacity to overcome any prior concerns the committee had from its initial review of the application. ReThink and NEI have extensive experience managing and overseeing the finances of educational organizations. This was demonstrated by the applicant's ability to execute a letter of intent for a new school facility. During the capacity interview, NEI stated that the budget did not include receipt of any grant funding, which is a conservative assumption. If approved, it is likely NCP would qualify for certain grants. Overall, the proposed budget was sound, there was positive operating income every year in the budget with a healthy cash balance, and the assumptions were detailed and reasonable.

Given these factors, the review committee found sufficient evidence that the applicant's budget was appropriate, realistic, and viable and that the applicant could adequately secure the start-up revenue and ongoing revenue needed to support the school's operation.



Evaluation Team

Scott Campbell is the Executive Director of Persist Nashville, a 501c3 non-profit that empowers Nashville students to earn a college degree. Persist Nashville Inc. currently coaches over 471 Nashville college students. Before starting Persist Nashville, Scott was the Principal of RePublic High School in Nashville, Tennessee. At RePublic, he led his school to a Bronze Medal ranking by the US News and World Report as one of the top 6 schools in Nashville. Under his leadership, they improved the ACT average of his students by 4.42 points, which contributed to over \$3 million in scholarships offered for his first graduating class of 115 students. Prior to serving at RePublic, Scott spent two years in Nashville helping develop Valor Collegiate Academies as a lead teacher, 6th Grade chair, and department chair. Before the move to Nashville, he was the Assistant Principal at Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology in Alexandria, Virginia, one of the top high schools in America. Scott previously spent ten years in the classroom teaching AP United States history, AP United States government and politics, world history, United States history, economics, civics, and ethical leadership. He has coached varsity level soccer, volleyball, and cross-country, and served as the sponsor for leadership retreats, policy debate, philosophy club, student government, and philosophy club. He has served at urban, rural, and suburban districts as well as traditional public, magnet, and charter schools in five different states. Scott received his Master of Science in Secondary Education and Bachelor of Arts in Political Science with minors in History and Secondary Education from the University of Tennessee. He also received his Education Specialist degree from George Washington University in Washington, D.C. in Educational Leadership and Administration.

Ashley Davis is an Educational Consultant and provides instructional support to charter schools and nonprofits in Memphis, Tennessee. She most recently served as the Residency Director for the Relay Graduate School of Education, where she worked in partnership with numerous schools and networks across Memphis to coach and develop teacher residents. Prior to joining Relay, she served as a Lead Teacher and later as Principal at Memphis College Prep. Ashley received a dual Bachelor of Arts in Communication and English from the University of Pennsylvania and a Master of Science in Digital Media from Columbia University.

Dr. Diarese George serves as the Director of Recruitment for the Nashville Teacher Residency and the founder and President of the Tennessee Educators of Color Alliance (TECA), a nonprofit aimed at supporting educators of color across the state. Previously, he taught for five years as a high school teacher, with a focus on business. Additionally, he has completed education leadership fellowships for Education Pioneers, the State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE), Hope Street Group, and the Mosaic Fellowship, which connects and empowers education leaders of color across the state of Tennessee. Dr. George holds a bachelor degree in business administration, master's degrees in corporation communications and business administration, and a doctorate in education leadership.

Whitney O'Connell is currently working as a Schools Implementation Manager for EVERFI in Manhattan and as a curriculum consultant for Mosa Mack Science and the Big History Project. She has five years of teaching experience in a variety of schools, most recently at Explore! Community School in East Nashville. Prior to working at Explore!, Whitney acted as an intern at the International Bureau of Education (UNESCO) in Geneva, Switzerland, collaborating on projects with the Malaysian Ministry of Education regarding gender-responsive STEM education. She was previously a corps member with Teach For America, acting as a kindergarten teacher in Connell, Washington and has taught early childhood



education internationally in Peña Blanca, Honduras. Ms. O’Connell earned her Bachelor of Arts degree at Gustavus Adolphus College in Spanish and History and her Master of Education degree at University of Washington in Curriculum and Instruction.

Nate Parker serves as the Coordinator of Policy and Federal Programs for the Tennessee State Board of Education. In this role, he manages local education agency (LEA) compliance and federal programs for State Board authorized charter schools. He is also currently enrolled in Vanderbilt University’s Doctor of Education program in K-12 Education Leadership and Policy. Prior to joining the State Board staff, Nate worked in regional operations at KIPP Nashville. Nate is a former Teach For America alum with a decade of experience as a secondary teacher, assistant principal, and principal, working in both traditional public schools and charter schools in Arizona, Connecticut, Ohio, and Tennessee. He is twice a graduate of Ohio State University earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in Integrated Social Studies and a Master of Public Administration Degree. Nate is also a graduate of Arizona State University, earning a Master of Education Degree in Secondary Education.

Steve Robbins is a Chicago-based education consultant who provides school finance expertise and charter school evaluation services. He has served as an independent evaluator of charter school applications in several jurisdictions including New Orleans; Mississippi; Spokane, Washington; Florida; New Mexico; New York; and Illinois. He has evaluated applications related to new school proposals, renewal and appeal processes, and Charter School Program grant allocations on behalf of charter school authorizers. Prior to serving as an independent consultant, Steve was a founding member of Wolcott School, a high school in Chicago for students with learning differences, as their first ever Director of Finance and Operations. Previously, he worked in New York City as a corporate finance advisor and hedge fund analyst for eight years, specializing in mergers and acquisitions. He earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in Engineering Sciences and Master of Education degree from Harvard University.

Exhibit B



METRO
NASHVILLE
PUBLIC
SCHOOLS

Exceeding Great Expectations

Charter School Original Application Recommendation Report

Submitted By: ReThink Forward

Evaluation Team

Office of Charter Schools

Dennis Queen, Executive Officer, Office of Charter Schools, MNPS

Dr. John Thomas, Coordinator, Office of Charter Schools, MNPS

Dr. Mary Laurens Minich, Director, Office of Charter Schools, MNPS

Review Team

Katy Enterline, Director of Talent Management, HR, MNPS

Michelle Doane, Consultant

Rick Caldwell, SPED Coach, MNPS

Dan Killian, Project Coordinator Exceptional Education, MNPS

Dr. Joie Austria, Director, Office of English Learners, MNPS

Katy Pattullo, Director of MTSS, Office of Instructional Support, MNPS

Tyrunya Goodwin, District Lead Math Coach, Office of Instructional Support, MNPS

Dr. Megan Cusson-Lark, Executive Director, Office of School Counseling, MNPS

Lisa Ladd, Director of Operations, Valor Collegiate Prep

Brian Hull, Director, Resource Strategy, MNPS

Charter School Amended Application Recommendation Report

Submitted By: ReThink Forward

Evaluation Team

Office of Charter Schools

Dennis Queen, Executive Officer, Office of Charter Schools, MNPS
Dr. John Thomas, Coordinator, Office of Charter Schools, MNPS
Dr. Mary Laurens Minich, Director, Office of Charter Schools, MNPS
Brittany Lee, Accountant III, Financial Reporting & Budgeting, MNPS

Review Team

Katy Enterline, Director of Talent Management, HR, MNPS
Michelle Doane, Consultant
Rick Caldwell, SPED Coach, MNPS
Dan Killian, Project Coordinator Exceptional Education, MNPS
Dr. James Starron, EL Coach, Office of English Learners, MNPS
Katy Pattullo, Director of MTSS, Office of Instructional Support, MNPS
Tyrunya Goodwin, District Lead Math Coach, Office of Instructional Support, MNPS
Dr. Megan Cusson-Lark, Executive Director, Office of School Counseling, MNPS
Lisa Ladd, Director of Operations, Valor Collegiate Prep
Brian Hull, Director, Resource Strategy, MNPS

Introduction

Charter schools are public schools operated by independent, non-profit governing bodies that are granted greater autonomy in the areas of curriculum, calendar, staffing, methodology, and pedagogy in return for greater accountability in achieving high quality academic results with their students. In Tennessee, public charter school students are measured against the same academic standards as students in other public schools and are required to use the same state-approved assessments as all other public schools. Charter schools are required to serve all eligible students, with the education of at-risk students being of utmost importance.

Based on a study by the Thomas Fordham Institute and Basis Policy Research, charter schools that exhibit low performance in their first year of operation are less than 1% likely to improve after five (5) years. Therefore, it is the authorizer's responsibility to create and apply a rigorous, fair, and thorough authorization process in order to ensure only those charter schools who can offer and sustain high quality educational options for all students are recommended and approved to open. Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools is interested in charter applicants who demonstrate the capacity to educate the most at-risk students in highly diverse and personalized settings.

Charter schools in Nashville are required to provide appropriate curriculum, aligned professional standards, engaging models of parental and partnership programs, and strategic planning to leverage and grow resources for the school. Schools are held accountable for academic results, responsible school leadership, sound fiscal and operational management and adherence to the laws and rules that govern education in the state of Tennessee.

Evaluation Process

The Office of Charter Schools worked closely with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) to create an evaluation process that embodies best practices from authorizers throughout the country and has gained both statewide and national recognition as rigorous, thorough, fair and impartial.

A core team specifically trained to assess the quality and sustainability of a proposed school reviews each application. In addition, individuals with specific expertise in special education, English Language learners, business and finance, curriculum, facilities and transportation also review each application to provide the needed expertise in those areas. Finally, the review teams also may include community stakeholders and others who have experience and expertise in specialized areas.

The Office of Charter Schools exercises additional oversight of the process.

Evaluation Process

This recommendation report from the Office of Charter Schools is the culmination the three stages of review:

- **Proposal Evaluation** – The evaluation team conducted independent and group assessment of the merits of each proposal against the published evaluation criteria.
- **Capacity Interview** – The evaluation team conducted an interview with the applicant group to provide applicants an opportunity to address questions from the written proposal and to evaluate the applicants' capacity to implement their proposed program effectively and with fidelity.
- **Consensus Conclusion** – The evaluation team came to a consensus regarding whether to recommend the proposal for approval or denial to the MNPS Board of Education.

Rating Characteristics

Meets Standard – The response reflects a thorough understanding of key issues and alignment within all areas of the proposal – academic, operational, and financial. It shows thorough preparation; presents a clear and realistic picture of how the school expects to operate at a high level; and inspires confidence in the applicant's ability to carry out their plan effectively.

Partially Meets Standard – The response meets the criteria in some respects but lacks detail and/or requires additional information in one or more areas.

Does Not Meet Standard – The response has substantial gaps in a number of areas and the review team has no confidence the applicant can deliver a high-quality educational option to the students in Davidson County.

Evaluation Contents

This evaluation report includes the following:

- **Proposal Overview** – Basic summary of the proposed school as presented in the application
- **Recommendation** – an overall judgment, based on extensive analysis of all evidence presented by the applicants, regarding whether the proposal meets the criteria for approval
- **Evaluation:** Analysis of the proposal is based on four primary areas of plan development:
 - › **Executive Summary** – Provides a comprehensive review of all three major areas of the application with emphasis on the reasons for the recommendation from the review team.
 - › **Academic Plan** – Describes the applicant’s model in regard to curriculum and instruction, assessment, working with at-risk and special populations, goals, discipline and logistics (school calendar, daily schedule, etc.).
 - › **Operations Plan** – Outlines operational support for the academic program, including staffing and human resources, recruitment and marketing, professional development for teachers, community involvement, and governing board structure and membership.
 - › **Financial/Business Plan** – Provides budgeting and financial plans to ensure both initial and on-going fiscal compliance, including budget assumptions, transportation, fundraising, payroll and insurance functions.

Opening a successful, high-performing charter school depends on having a complete, coherent plan. It is not an endeavor for which strength in one area can compensate for weakness in another. Therefore, to receive a recommendation for approval, the application must **meet or exceed the standard in all three major areas** of the capacity review.

Proposal Overview

Operator/Applicant – Rethink Forward, Inc.

School Name – Nashville Collegiate Prep

Mission and Vision:

Mission: Nashville Collegiate Prep’s (NCP) mission is to provide a personalized, engaged, supported, and challenging environment that will strengthen students academically, socially, and emotionally. Students will leave NCP with the skills and mindset necessary to not only face reality but create improvements for the next generation.

Vision: NCP’s vision is to inspire and equip a generation of self-directed critical thinkers to influence the world around them. Our mission provides the roadmap to ensuring all students are equipped as critical thinkers and primed to lead efforts they are passionate about in the world.

Proposed Location – Finding a location close to TNU (Trevecca Nazarene University) was a priority during our search for a school site. Being in close proximity to TNU will ease the process of collaboration and allow us to maximize our partnership by providing NCP students and their families easy access to the services that will be provided by the university. This would include the zip codes of 37206, 37208, 37210, 37215.

Enrollment Projections (as presented by applicant in the written proposal)

Number of Students

Table 4

Grade Level	Year 1 2020	Year 2 2021	Year 3 2022	Year 4 2023	Year 5 2024	At Capacity 2025
PreK	26	26	26	26	26	26
K	60	80	80	80	100	120
1	80	80	80	100	120	120
2	80	80	80	80	120	120
3	60	80	80	80	80	105
4	75	75	75	75	80	80
5	75	75	75	75	75	80
6	75	75	75	75	75	75
7	0	75	75	75	75	75
8	0	0	75	75	75	75
Totals	531	614	689	709	794	844

Executive Summary

Original Recommendation from the Review Team:

Authorize

Do Not Authorize

Original Summary Analysis – The Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) Office of Charter Schools has established itself over the past several years as an authorizer of national prominence, with an application process that is fair, transparent, and aligned with national standards. As a result, our charter sector is one of the strongest in the nation, and we always welcome new and innovative applications that serve our students and families well.

The lens through which our review team evaluates an application is one that looks for innovative instruction that produces high quality academic outcomes for all students, school operations that support those academic outcomes and sustainable fiscal practices that ensure strong financial stability.

A summary of the qualities we have identified as present in a high-quality application is as follows:

- Academic Program Design and Capacity
 - Detailed curriculum and instructional strategies that align with the mission, target population, and state standards
 - Thorough current research that supports the curriculum and instructional strategies
 - Articulation of a sound rationale for the application
 - Detailed plans for meeting all student needs, including accelerated learners, remediation, special education, and English Language Learners
 - Demonstrated internal alignment including scheduling and calendar
 - Sound plans for family and community engagement
 - Description of a school culture that reflects alignment to the school’s mission and goals.
- Operational Plan and Capacity
 - Sound and reasonable plan for staffing that is likely to attract and retain top talent
 - Thorough and reasonable plan for start-up operations
 - Compelling detail on the school’s plan for performance management
 - Organizational chart aligned with the leadership and staffing structure
 - Viable employment practices
 - Articulation of clear roles and appropriate responsibilities for governance and management
 - Founding Board members with diverse skills needed to govern effectively
 - Potential facilities and outline of the costs within the financial document
 - Solid transportation plan that is reasonable and equitable to attract a diverse group of students
 - Plan for compliance with all federal and state requirements

- Financial Plan and Capacity
 - Realistic projections with clear assumptions from start-up through full enrollment
 - Spending priorities that align with the school’s mission, support the academic program, support the management structure, professional development needs and growth plan
 - Cash flow projections that align to the MNPS Performance Frameworks and align with the overall budget
 - Sound financial controls to ensure appropriate use of public funds and long-term viability
 - Demonstrated financial planning and management capacity
 - Reasonable and transparent fundraising goals with disclosure of funders
 - Disclosure of all anticipated loans, gifts, and grants, including letters from funders confirming their investment should the school become approved.

After a thorough review of the Nashville Collegiate Prep’s (NCP) written application by the review team and along with the Office of Charter Schools, a recommendation of denial for this application is presented to the board. The reasons for this denial are based upon the school’s partial meeting of standards in academics and operations and failure to meet standards in the financial section.

ReThink Forward is a Florida based non-profit organization that currently does not oversee any schools. The team also determined that ReThink Forward is heavily reliant on a charter management organization (CMO), Noble Education Initiative (NEI), for all its curriculum, instructional practice, professional development, operations, and financial advice. NEI was formed in 2017 and their experience has only been in school turnaround since that time.

The application lacked specificity of the population of students targeted within identified zip codes. All identified zip codes, with exception of 37215, have traditional elementary and middle schools with enrollment below capacity and charter schools with short or no wait lists. The traditional elementary and middle schools located within 37215 have been historically high performing. There are currently no charter schools located within 37215. While ReThink Forward does indicate they would focus on the recruitment of private school students, the description of their marketing strategy and associated recruitment tools is unclear.

Plans for serving special populations were unclearly defined other than services would be provided in an inclusive setting. The application lacked a clear description of the continuum for SPED services. The RTII description was unclear on how the state-required skills-based interventions would be administered.

The governing board consists of four members. Two members are locally based while two members are based in Florida. The two members in Florida have K-12 experience while the two locally based members have higher education and law expertise. At this time, it appears that ReThink Forward does not have board members with specific human resources, facilities, or operations experience.

The financial model showed inconsistencies that caused the review team concern. One such example was the revenue for year 0. While in the interview process, ReThink Forward and NEI indicated NEI would cover the cost of year 0 and be reimbursed during year 1, there was no formal written agreement between the two entities in the application. Additionally, the applicant left out significant portions of the budget that are required under state and federal law, primarily the Medicare tax, benefits, and TCRS retirement employer contributions. Lack of these calculations caused additional issues with the finances as presented by the applicant. ReThink Forward indicated they would provide transportation and based calculations on two 55 passenger buses; however, the BEP funding calculations showed a lack of understanding of the distribution for charter schools choosing to provide transportation.

In conclusion, ReThink Forward did not present a clear, comprehensive, and effective plan for successful instruction for students within MNPS. The review team found errors, inaccurate details, and lack of understanding in the operation and financial sections. The review team has concerns regarding the reliance ReThink Forward has placed on NEI, the proposed CMO. Not only does NEI hold the MOU for the partnership with TNU, it also proposes to front the initial funding for the school. This led the review team to lack confidence that ReThink Forward would be able to oversee the opening of a new school while also holding NEI accountable.

The Office of Charter Schools respectfully recommends that the MNPS Board of Education deny this application.

Section Summaries

Original evaluation

Only applicants who score “Meets Standard” in all three major areas on the evaluation rubric are recommended for authorization.

Academic Plan	<input type="checkbox"/> Meets Standard <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially Meets Standard <input type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet Standard
Operations Plan	<input type="checkbox"/> Meets Standard <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially Meets Standard <input type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet Standard
Financial Plan	<input type="checkbox"/> Meets Standard <input type="checkbox"/> Partially Meets Standard <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet Standard

Executive Summary

Amended Recommendation from the Review Team:

Authorize

Do Not Authorize

Original Summary Analysis – The Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) Office of Charter Schools has established itself over the past several years as an authorizer of national prominence, with an application process that is fair, transparent, and aligned with national standards. As a result, our charter sector is one of the strongest in the nation, and we always welcome new and innovative applications that serve our students and families well.

The lens through which our review team evaluates an application is one that looks for innovative instruction that produces high quality academic outcomes for all students, school operations that support those academic outcomes and sustainable fiscal practices that ensure strong financial stability.

A summary of the qualities we have identified as present in a high-quality application is as follows:

- Academic Program Design and Capacity
 - Detailed curriculum and instructional strategies that align with the mission, target population, and state standards
 - Thorough current research that supports the curriculum and instructional strategies
 - Articulation of a sound rationale for the application
 - Detailed plans for meeting all student needs, including accelerated learners, remediation, special education, and English Language Learners
 - Demonstrated internal alignment including scheduling and calendar
 - Sound plans for family and community engagement
 - Description of a school culture that reflects alignment to the school’s mission and goals.
- Operational Plan and Capacity
 - Sound and reasonable plan for staffing that is likely to attract and retain top talent
 - Thorough and reasonable plan for start-up operations
 - Compelling detail on the school’s plan for performance management
 - Organizational chart aligned with the leadership and staffing structure
 - Viable employment practices
 - Articulation of clear roles and appropriate responsibilities for governance and management
 - Founding Board members with diverse skills needed to govern effectively
 - Potential facilities and outline of the costs within the financial document
 - Solid transportation plan that is reasonable and equitable to attract a diverse group of students
 - Plan for compliance with all federal and state requirements

- Financial Plan and Capacity
 - Realistic projections with clear assumptions from start-up through full enrollment
 - Spending priorities that align with the school’s mission, support the academic program, support the management structure, professional development needs and growth plan
 - Cash flow projections that align to the MNPS Performance Frameworks and align with the overall budget
 - Sound financial controls to ensure appropriate use of public funds and long-term viability
 - Demonstrated financial planning and management capacity
 - Reasonable and transparent fundraising goals with disclosure of funders
 - Disclosure of all anticipated loans, gifts, and grants, including letters from funders confirming their investment should the school become approved.

After a thorough review of the Nashville Collegiate Prep’s (NCP) written amended application by the review team and along with the Office of Charter Schools, a recommendation of denial for this application is presented to the board. The reasons for this denial are based upon the school’s failure to adequately address concerns, and to only partially meet standards in academics, operations, and financial sections.

ReThink Forward is a Florida based non-profit organization that currently does not oversee any other schools. The team still determined that ReThink Forward is heavily reliant on a charter management organization (CMO), Noble Education Initiative (NEI), for all its curriculum, instructional practice, professional development, operations, and financial advice and support. NEI is a nonprofit entity that was formed in 2017, and their experience has only been in school turnaround since that time.

While ReThink Forward did identify the eight (8) core beliefs and six (6) core values that drive the vision of the school and provides and in-depth details on how the school will prepare students to embody the vision, it was still unclear how this connects and supports the mission and what skills and mindset is needed to “face reality”.

The amended application still lacked specificity around the population of students targeted within identified zip codes. All identified zip codes, with exception of 37215, have traditional elementary and middle schools with enrollment below capacity and charter schools with short or no wait lists. The traditional elementary and middle schools located within 37215 have been historically high performing. There are currently no charter schools located within 37215. While ReThink Forward does indicate they would focus on the recruitment of private school students, the description of their marketing strategy and associated recruitment tools remains unclear.

Plans for serving special populations remains loosely defined other than services would be provided. The amended application lacked a clear description of the continuum for SPED and EL services. The RTII description in the amended application included a description of math intervention that will happen during math block and Tier 3 interventions can happen during literacy or math blocks as needed but provides no further detail.

The governing board consists of four members. Two members are locally based while two members are based in Florida. The two members in Florida have K-12 experience while the two locally based members have higher education and/or law expertise. The amended application did indicate that Dr. Boone (board chair) has financial expertise as the TNU president and Ms. Dinda has expertise in start-up, facilities, and HR; however, still does not sufficiently address community experience specific to the start-up of a new charter school. It does mention that Mr. Lee has experience in “forging relationship” so he can lead community partnership, but the description is vague and does not demonstrate expertise in community engagement and/or partnership.

The financial section in the amended application was considerably improved; however, the review team still felt various areas of the budget were unclear. ReThink Forward did include a letter from Tascaso Equity Partners lending company that specializes in loans for charter schools, for an open line of credit in the amount of \$325,000. NEI indicated they would not receive funds for operating the school in the areas of academics, operations, and finance in year one (1). The review team still had concerns regarding the transportation plan.

In conclusion, the review team felt the amended application for ReThink Forward did not present a clear, comprehensive, and effective plan for successful instruction for students within MNPS and felt there were unanswered questions remaining in the operation and financial sections. Concerns remained for the review team regarding the reliance – operationally, academically, and financially - ReThink Forward has placed on NEI, the proposed CMO.

The Office of Charter Schools respectfully recommends that the MNPS Board of Education deny this amended application.

Section Summaries

Amended evaluation

Only applicants who score “Meets Standard” in all three major areas on the evaluation rubric are recommended for authorization.

Academic Plan	<input type="checkbox"/> Meets Standard <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially Meets Standard <input type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet Standard
Operations Plan	<input type="checkbox"/> Meets Standard <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially Meets Standard <input type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet Standard
Financial Plan	<input type="checkbox"/> Meets Standard <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially Meets Standard <input type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet Standard

Original Academic Plan Detail

Rating: Partially Meet Standard

Summary as Presented in Proposal: ReThink Forward submitted an application for a Pre-K – 8 school in southeast Nashville. They propose to partner with a CMO, Noble Education Initiative (NEI). NEI proposes to partner with Trevecca Nazarene University (TNU). At capacity, the school would have 844 students. NCP’s vision is to inspire and equip a generation of self-directed critical thinkers to influence the world around them. The mission provides the roadmap to ensuring all students are equipped as critical thinkers and primed to lead efforts they are passionate about in the world.

Review Team Analysis: The application partially meets standard for the academic plan. Overall, there was a lack of detail in this section. While the applicant responded to most prompts with high level explanations, there was not enough evidence or research to support the presented academic plan. The presented plan did not provide a clear picture of logistics for successful implementation of the academic plan. In each section, there were a number of weaknesses identified, leading to a lack of confidence that this group has a strong, comprehensive academic plan in place.

The mission and vision for NCP described preparing children to influence the world around them but lacked description of what this would look like in practice. The review team found the mission statement to be broad and generic (to provide a personalized, engaged, supported, and challenging environment that will strengthen students academically, socially, and emotionally). The vision did not clearly describe what the school will look like when it is achieving its mission (to inspire and equip a generation of self-directed critical thinkers to influence the world around them). As the language around the need for the school was vague, the review team found no compelling argument for its establishment.

NCP’s enrollment projection did not appear realistic to the review team. In the area that ReThink Forward proposed to provide services, traditional schools’ current enrollment is low and existing charter schools do not have wait lists. This is the case in all zip codes provided except 37215. Currently in this zip code there are no charter schools and traditional schools are both high performing and at capacity. During the capacity interview, Rethink Forward presented the intention to focus recruitment efforts on students who currently attend or may attend private schools. It is important to note that the application did not indicate a robust marketing process for drawing this particular demographic back to public education.

ReThink Forward did identify the intended curriculum to be used; however, the review team found little to no compelling evidence that the proposed academic plan was appropriate and effective for the anticipated student population, nor that it will close achievement gaps. The applicant did identify several instructional methods/strategies (direct instruction; flexible, small group instruction; cooperative learning; strategic formative assessment; learning stations); however, it was unclear what the proposed strategies would look like in the classroom or how they work together in a cohesive model. An example of this was the mention of using blended learning primarily in K-2 using a station rotation model. They included a photo of children

sitting around a laptop but did not explain what the students are doing or how, specifically, blended learning will be implemented. In grades 3-8, they indicated the device to student ratio is 1:1 and students will use technology as a “way to get to a place of higher order thinking and creating.” The description of blended learning did not provide a strong picture of impact on academic gains. ReThink Forward went on to state that differentiated instruction would be used by adjusting content, process, product, and/or environment (e.g., cooperative learning, digital resources, verbal support, student goal setting, student choice). While they named multiple strategies, it was unclear how these strategies would work together in the classroom and how teachers would be trained.

The review team was unable to determine how ReThink Forward will deliver skills-based interventions as required through state mandated RTII. Intervention service minutes did not meet state guidelines and lacked clarity in the middle school. The SPED and EL service models were not clearly defined other than inclusion, and there is not strong evidence of a continuum of service for SPED. The review team had questions regarding ReThink Forward’s understanding of the state requirement of teacher-pupil ratio that must be met to provide the needed services to eligible EL students. Little information was provided regarding plans for the universal screening process and progress monitoring of interventions or for the role of the named curricular resources.

While the application indicated a partnership with TNU, it is important note NEI holds the MOU with TNU. It is stated in the application, “In partnership with TNU and other community partners, we will seek services that respond to each family’s needs and appropriately coach them in key areas that will help them in best supporting their student’s, and their family’s success.” The review team was unable to ascertain who the partners are and the specific support they are expected to provide. TNU’s role in provision of the described family support was also ambiguous.

Since NEI’s inception in 2017, they have had experience with school turnaround; however, they did not provide evidence of achieving positive academic outcomes for students using their continuous improvement model with a fresh start/new start enrolling K-5 in year 1.

Amended Academic Plan Detail

Rating: Partially Meet Standard

Summary as Presented in Proposal: ReThink Forward resubmitted an application for a Pre-K – 8 school in southeast Nashville. They propose to partner with a CMO, Noble Education Initiative (NEI). NEI proposes to partner with Trevecca Nazarene University (TNU). At capacity, the school would have 844 students. NCP’s vision is to inspire and equip a generation of self-directed critical thinkers to influence the world around them. The mission provides the roadmap to ensuring all students are equipped as critical thinkers and primed to lead efforts they are passionate about in the world.

Review Team Analysis: The amended application partially meets standard for the academic plan. Overall, there remained a lack of detail in this section. There was not enough evidence or research to support the presented academic plan. The presented amended plan did not provide a clear picture of logistics for successful implementation. In each section, there were a number of weaknesses identified, leading to a lack of confidence that this group has a strong, comprehensive academic plan in place.

The vision identifies eight (8) core beliefs and six (6) core values and explains how they will prepare students to embody the vision; however, questions remained around the skills and mindset needed to “face reality” and what does this mean.

NCP’s enrollment projection was unchanged and still appears unrealistic to the review team. In the area that ReThink Forward proposed to provide services, traditional schools’ current enrollment is low. During the capacity interview, Rethink Forward presented the intention to focus recruitment efforts on students who currently attend or may attend private school. The amended application did not indicate a robust marketing campaign for students who attend private school.

ReThink Forward provided additional information around how instructional methods/strategies will work together and what they will look like in action; however, they only address some methods/strategies and it remains unclear how all identified methods/strategies will work cohesively together. It was also unclear how teachers will be trained to implement these additional methods/strategies. They did explain how the station rotation model in K-2 will work; however, rationale and research evidence of success for the proposed model is not provided. ReThink Forward indicated they would use the Continuous Improvement Model (CIM). The cycle occurs monthly at a school level and daily at the classroom level, but there is no detail on what the CIM model is really like when implemented. Who is leading process? What is the protocol? How will feedback be given, and adjustment made?

The SPED and EL service models still remains undefined other than inclusion, and there is not strong evidence of a continuum of service for SPED. The review team’s questions remain regarding ReThink Forward’s understanding of the state requirement of teacher-pupil ratio that must be met to provide the needed services to eligible EL students. Little information was provided regarding plans for the universal screening process and progress monitoring of

interventions or for the role of the named curricular resources. While ReThink Forward indicated that RTII for math would happen during math block and that RTII tier three (3) intervention for math and literacy would happen during their blocks. No other further detail was provided.

After reviewing the amended application, the review team found their concerns regarding NEI holding the MOU with TNU was not address; therefore, the concern is still relevant. Furthermore, the amended application did not address the additional partnerships outside of TNU and what they would look like. This section remains vague at best. TNU's role in provision of the described family support remained ambiguous.

Since NEI's inception in 2017 as a nonprofit entity, they have had experience with school turnaround; however, they did not provide evidence of achieving positive academic outcomes for students using their continuous improvement model with a fresh start/new start enrolling K-5 in year 1.

Original Operations Plan Detail

Rating: Partially Meets Standard

Summary as Presented in Proposal: The application listed a four-member governing board and indicated an ongoing process to actively search for qualified candidates. Two board members are based locally while the other two are based in Florida. The applicant proposed to locate within an area serving students in the following zip codes: 37206, 37208, 37210, and 37215. A transportation plan was provided. By-laws indicated governing board members will serve one year.

Review Team Analysis: The Operations Plan partially meets standard because each section lacks detail to provide a clear picture of the school's proposed operations plan and the founding team's capacity to execute it. Facilities plans are unclear other than potential land locations and narratives describing potential space.

The governing board consists of four members, two locally based and two based in Florida. It is important to note that the two members in Florida have K-12 experience while the two local members have higher education and law experience. While the board was very knowledgeable and able to answer most of the questions that were presented in the capacity interview on the subject of governance, the review team still has concerns since it did not appear that the board had members with financial, facilities, operations, human resources, or community engagement experience specific to the start-up of a new charter school in a competitive market.

The application outlined the creation of an Advisory School Council whose purpose is to help guide the school, NEI and the ReThink Forward Board. There was little to no indication of the make-up of the Advisory School Council other than the one individual that would interact with the entities listed above. It was unclear if this council member would be part of a larger PTA or NCP's equivalent organization.

ReThink Forward's application did include an MOU with NEI. This MOU would provide a pathway for NEI to manage all aspects in the area of academics, operations, and finances. While a chartering board may hire a CMO, it is essential that an evaluation process is included to hold them accountable. There did not appear to be a plan to evaluate the school leader, the CMO, or the governing board itself. The application provided general board goals that were more task oriented. While the application also indicated there would be an annual report, a detailed description of what the process would look like was not offered.

The start-up plan lacked specificity around the funding source for year 0, the teacher hiring process, and the board's participation in the process. The review team found the facilities timeline to be unrealistically tight given the current building and development climate in Nashville. While it was indicated in the interview that NEI would provide funding for the initial year, a formal written agreement indicating such is not evident in the application. ReThink Forward realistically anticipated challenges in the areas of initial community engagement, build out of the facility, and recruitment of both students and qualified teaching candidates. They

seemed heavily reliant on TNU and other partnerships that have not yet been identified to help meet the deadlines.

The applicant mentioned securing a suitable facility within 60 days of approval. The review committee found this unrealistic in the current real estate market. Additionally, no description is given of facility requirements such as space, number of rooms, and build-out costs. The application includes reliance on an unnamed partner to build out a facility. ReThink Forward would then rent the building from said unnamed partner. This left the review team with questions regarding realistic building timelines and the ability for completion within the timeframe needed to open the school.

There were conflicting staffing charts presented in the application that do not appear to include special education or EL staff. The review team could not discern whether the staffing model would meet the needs of the school as written. Additionally, there was no staffing mentioned for Pre-K students, although the enrollment chart indicates there would be 32 Pre-K students in year one (1) if approved. Though Pre-K would not be funded through local and state education dollars, as the application included pre-K, the reviewers expected to find more information regarding its place within the school model.

ReThink Forward indicated they will use PLCs structured by departments, grade levels, or teams to provide professional development based on students need. The review team was unable to discern the criteria to form the PLCs and how impact on student achievement would be measured.

ReThink Forward indicated they will provide transportation; however, the cost assumptions were low, and they proposed to provide only two 55 passenger busses. Minimal details surrounding the oversight of the transportation plan were evident. They indicated the business manager would serve as the transportation supervisor.

In the operation plan, it was stated that a wireless infrastructure would be needed to ensure all devices are supported. The link between this important infrastructure and the budget lacked significant detail. Also, it is important to note ReThink Forward did not indicate a waiver from the state's required student teacher ratio. The purposed model exceeds the limits of current state requirements.

Amended Operations Plan Detail

Rating: Partially Meets Standard

Summary as Presented in Proposal: The amended application listed a four-member governing board and indicated an ongoing process to actively search for qualified candidates. Two board members are based locally while the other two are based in Florida. The applicant proposed to locate within an area serving students in the following zip codes: 37206, 37208, 37210, and 37215. A transportation plan was provided. By-laws indicated governing board members will serve one year.

Review Team Analysis: The Operations Plan partially meets standard because each section lacks detail to provide a clear picture of the school's proposed operations plan and the founding team's capacity to execute it. Facilities plans are unclear other than potential land locations and narratives describing potential space.

The governing board consists of four members, two locally based and two based in Florida. It is important to note that the two members in Florida have K-12 experience while the two local members have higher education and/or law experience. The amended application did provide more detail outlining Ms. Dinda, board treasure for ReThink Forwards, experience in Florida as the principal at a school in Miami. They indicated under her leadership; she moved the school form a grade of B to an A and show gain in ELA. It was unclear to the team why this in-depth information was provided since Ms. Dinda will be serving in a board oversight capacity and not the day to day operation. Also, it was indicated Dr. Boone, president of TNU, has financial experience since he is leading a university. The team still expressed concern since there are so differences in the types of funding sources between higher education and elementary education. Also, the amended application indicated Mr. Lee had experience in "forging relationship". He would be leading the community partnership. The team felt the description was very vague and lacked a description of expertise needed to create such partnerships. This left the team with reservation of the boards experience specifically when it comes to the start-up of a new charter school in a competitive market.

The amended application provided clarification as to the description of the Advisory School Council. ReThink Forward indicated the council would consist of parents, partners, and political reps. The council act as a community liaison with ReThink Forward and gather feedback and input from parents and community partners to increase community involvement. The council would also act as a local community rep for NCP. This cause the team to question why the council would be a conduit between the community and ReThink and why would they serve as the local community rep? It was still unclear how many members would be on the council, the expectations of each member, or what the reporting structure would look like.

ReThink Forward's application did include an MOU with NEI. This MOU would provide a pathway for NEI to manage all aspects in the area of academics, operations, and finances. While a chartering board may hire a CMO, it is essential that an evaluation process is included to hold them accountable. The amended application outlined information to be included in the annual report and indicated ReThink Forward plans to provide oversight for NEI and the Superintendent

via monthly and annual reports; however, it was not clear what information is assessed or what the expectations would be.

The amended application indicated that ReThink Forward has secured two possible sites, former Boys and Girls Club and a 5.88-acre site. It was still unclear to the review team the timeline or the cost for the buildout.

The amended application still left unanswered questions regarding ReThink Forward's understanding of the state requirements of providing services to EL students. While it was indicated that all teachers would be dually certified, it was unclear how teacher would be used to provide the required services while maintain the student teacher ratio.

ReThink Forward indicated in the amended application they will use PLCs structured by departments, grade levels, or teams to provide professional development based on students need. The review team still could not discern the criteria to form the PLCs and how impact on student achievement would be measured.

The amended application indicated the transportation expenses assumptions were established using actual budgetary cost of students at other schools managed by NEI. At the time of amended application, NEI did not manage a school in Tennessee. It was unclear to the review team how the assumptions were made and how reliable they are.

Original

Financial/Business Plan Detail

Rating: Does Not Meet Standards

Summary as Presented in Proposal: The proposed budget assumed \$9,400 per-pupil for students who do not use transportation and \$10,400 for students who qualify for transportation. They are anticipating 505 students in K-6 with an additional 26 Pre-K students for a total of 531 students in year 1. The assumptions did not include any grants in year 1 but indicated participation in all Federal Title funds. There are plans to pursue a variety of grant opportunities after the first year of operation. Average teacher salaries were assumed at \$43,500. ReThink Forward will contract with NEI for management services.

Original Review Team Analysis: The financial plan does not meet standards. The applicant left out important state-mandated requirements, and the review team is not confident that the financial plan will support and sustain the schools. In addition, the review team expressed concern regarding the following:

- District enrollment has been flat making the purposed projections unrealistic.
- No detail is provided in the Assumptions column making it impossible to fully evaluate the application.
- No costs for insurance are included in the year 0 expenses assumptions for the four employees.
- No detail is provided on how the \$257,620 in fundraising revenue to support Year 0 will be obtained.
- Plans provided for contingencies are lacking.
- Staffing assumptions do not comply with Tennessee education law. The application projects a 23 K-6 classes, plus four Pre-K classes, but only budgets 16 teachers.
- Average teacher pay is projected at \$43,500, and this is below the pay of a first-year teacher with no advanced degree in MNPS.
- The TCRS Hybrid rate is incorrect. It is budgeted at 2%, but the actual amount is higher.
- Assumptions about classified retirement are incorrect and insufficient. Classified employees are not part of TCRS. These employees are part of Metro Government's retirement program, and employer contributions are budgeted at 2% but the actual is higher.
- Budget for health insurance is insufficient. The application includes \$2,802 per employee, per year. The review committee found this to be underestimated, as the actual cost to MNPS is \$10,000 per employee. Of note, MNPS receives a discounted rate due to the number of employees within the district.
- Revenue for food service seems too high. The application states that 61% of students will qualify for free and reduced lunch and that all of the other 39% will choose to purchase lunch at full price.

- Before and after care revenue is inaccurate. Revenue of \$560,736 is included, at \$8/day (similar to MNPS) with 27.5% participation; however, when calculating the following information provided from the application; $505 \text{ students} \times 27.5\% = 139 \text{ students} \times \$8 \times 180 \text{ school days} = \$200,160$, this leaves the school \$360,000 short annually.
- The application assumes 12 BEP payments per year, there are only ten. The school will not have any revenue to operate in the month of July as the school is opening and getting off the ground.
- The budget assumes \$695,810 in Fundraising & Philanthropy with no explanation or detail.
- Expenses for staff recruiting seem unrealistic at \$1,000/year.
- Elective teachers are included in the application but not in the budget.

In conclusion, the review team had difficulty connecting the budget to specific sections of the application since conflicting and/or inaccurate information was provided. While the applicant revealed the importance for attracting private school students to fill seats, during the capacity interview, it was unclear how much of the marketing budget would focus on this task.

Amended

Financial/Business Plan Detail

Rating: Partially Meets Standard

Summary as Presented in Proposal: ReThink Forward made several of the recommended adjustments to the budget section of the amended application. They assumed \$10,400 per-pupil for all students since they will be providing transportation. They are anticipating 505 students in K-6 with an additional 26 Pre-K students for a total of 531 students in year 1. They did increase teachers' salaries from \$43,500 to \$46,000 in the amended application.

Original Review Team Analysis: The financial plan partially meets standard. While the amended application included several adjustments, these adjustments caused more questions to develop for the review team.

ReThink Forward added a letter from Tascosa Equity Partners for an approved \$325,000 line of credit. In the budget narrative, it was indicated that ReThink Forward would use approximately \$300,000 of the \$325,000 for year zero (0). When looking at year one (1) budget on the financial service line, it was indicated no payment would be made toward the amount used on the line of credit; however, on the budget spreadsheet for years two (2) through five (5) the financial service line indicated an amount of \$182,250. The assumption notes indicated this line item includes repayment of startup line of credit/NEI management fee. It was unclear to the review team the amount going toward repayment of the open line of credit used in year zero (0) and the amount paid toward NEI management fee. It is also important to note; the original application indicated a fundraising amount of \$695,000 while the amended application removed the full amount of fundraising.

It appears the required number of teachers to provide the required English Language (EL) services has not been budget. The amended application indicated that 34% of the purposed 505 student body would require EL services. The state student teacher ratio is 35 to 1. This was also apparent in the contingency budget where funding for teachers provided less teachers than was required.

The amended budget lowered the number of Special Education teachers from 5 to 2. It was indicated 12% of the student body, 61 students, would be receiving some type of services. The review team was concerned with the case load of each teacher. There did not appear to be a contingency plan if they received a higher percentage of students receiving special education services.

While the amended application assumed \$3,000 per PreK students, it was unclear the funding source or the type (state or DCS) of PreK was proposed. It is also important to note that several line items under supplies and material indicated these included items for PreK. The review team was concerned this included the use of BEP funding. It is important to note that BEP funding does not include PreK students.

The review team found a discrepancy in the student assumption tab for student lunches. They indicate 39% of the students will pay full price for school lunch; however, in the revenue section they assume 49% of the students will pay full price.

The original budget assumed \$695,810 in Fundraising & Philanthropy with no explanation or detail. The amended application removed this amount totally and in place added a line of credit in the amount of \$325,000. This cause the review team to be concerned about the community support for the school.

Teacher pay was increased from \$43,500 to \$46,000. While this is moving in the right direction, it still maybe hard to recruit teachers at this salary amount. The budget also indicated the budget for marketing would begin in January. It was unclear if this is for students or teachers. Charter school in the community start recruiting students in July and teachers in October or November for the next school year.