



December 3, 2021

Tennessee Public Charter School Commission Office:

Although Purpose Prep is now part of MNPS's ReimaginED plan aimed to serve 5th grade as approved by MNPS, we are challenging the Board's decision to approve 5th grade while denying the expansion of the additional seats that make this initiative possible. The decision made by MNPS grants us the opportunity to incorporate 5th grade within our instructional model, but without the added capacity to actually maintain a healthy enrollment for all grade levels within our school. As a result, we are not able to fully implement adding 5th grade to our model without having the increase of enrollment seats, as it is detrimental to our long-term success as a school.

Purpose Prep has a pattern over the course of our nine years for being fully enrolled as a result of consistent academic achievement. The approval to incorporate 5th grade without the addition of seats would negatively impact our enrollment cycle in our most critical enrollment grade, Kindergarten, as well as significantly reduce the quality of our instructional model and limit our ability to serve our students currently in 4th grade. Hence, we are submitting a formal appeal to the Nov. 23, 2021 decision. It is our goal to clearly explain to the State Commission why granting Purpose Prep 5th grade - but without the additional seats - makes it impossible to fulfill Purpose Prep's mission as outlined in its MNPS-approved charter. Our enrollment model fluctuates between grade-level cohort sizes of 90 or 60 students, and to fulfill seat demand sustainably over time, we ask that the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission Office grants us an additional 90 seats for 5th grade.

Per our current charter, Purpose Prep's maximum enrollment is 360 students, and our current enrollment is 352 in grades K-4. Due to the Covid-19 safety plan we created that has allowed us to return to our building safely this school year, we intentionally did not exceed our enrollment cap to focus on reacclimating current students to in-person learning, and to maintain a safe, socially distanced environment. Historically, our enrollment has averaged 365 to 375 students with robust waitlists. These trends emphasize our school's ability and capacity to meet and exceed our enrollment goals and targets.

Under the current stipulations, adding 5th grade for the 2022-23 school year is not feasible, and will negatively impact the success of Purpose Prep in the following ways:

- **Negatively impacts the enrollment cycle in the most critical enrollment grade, Kindergarten, with lasting implications:** Kindergarten is a crucial entry grade into Purpose Prep. This formative grade level anchors the long term success of our enrollment model, as along with our low attrition rate, it has historically provided a strong pipeline for us to meet our enrollment goals. By not receiving an increase in seats, we would have to reduce enrollment at the Kindergarten level. We require an allotment of up to 90 students for 5th grade next year and beyond. Refer to our enrollment table within our attached **charter amendment application**. As we proceed into next year expecting to maintain our current enrollment of 352 students for SY22-23, this would only provide us 8 available charter seats



given our maximum enrollment cap of 360 students. A cohort of eight students at our entry grade level would not be the sufficient number of seats to ensure long term fiscal capacity and staffing sustainability, and would also significantly reduce the quality of instructional capacity as it deviates from our proven instructional model.

- **Significantly reduces the quality of our school model:** While the approval to have 5th grade fulfills an aspect of what our families are demanding, without the approval of additional seats, we cannot effectively replicate our successful K-4th model without sacrificing instructional quality. Our two-teacher model allows us to maintain a 1:15 teacher to scholar ratio, which would not be fiscally possible without BEP funding to support this staffing approach. The two-teacher model allows for 135 minutes of differentiated, small group instruction to take place daily, which has been critical to our success. Other benefits of this staffing structure include increased intervention capacity, the ability for classroom teachers to content specialize, and increased planning time and support across grade-level teams. Without the funding that comes along with additional seats, we are not able to fulfill the model that has created our demonstrable track record of success.
- **Limits our ability to meet community demand and serve our current students & families:** Purpose Prep families have leveraged their influence, power, and voice to represent their investment in Purpose Prep adding 5th grade to best serve their children. During our first charter amendment submission in 2019-20, families went before MNPS' board petitioning for approval to expand enrollment, standing firm on the basis of achievement data, our prior Reward School status, and other merits of Purpose Prep's robust program. This past November, families presented to the board their rationale about why approving the addition of 5th grade to Purpose Prep's model creates a positive impact, scaling Purpose Prep's ability to provide quality education throughout North Nashville. Furthermore, by adding 5th grade, families also expressed that having this option at Purpose Prep would eliminate the possibility of sending children to zone schools that are not in their best academic and social-emotional interests. Families did not leave the November 23, 2021 meeting feeling as though their voices were valued because what they [families] requested, the 5th grade and the accompanying seats to accommodate it, was only partially addressed. While we had the support of some board members, their collective decision to approve adding 5th grade - but not the seats - was clearly a fraction of what families and North Nashville need. Our families need a strong Kindergarten through 5th grade foundation to prepare them for a quality middle school experience.

Purpose Prep has strong alignment to the goals of the ReimaginED initiative, specifically “to improve academic outcomes for all students,” and we believe that Purpose Prep should be provided the same opportunity of educational attainment through the 5th grade - along with the approval of the capacity to achieve this goal. Moreover, we anticipate several important benefits of this initiative, which will hold great value for our district and school community:



- **As the first elementary school in North Nashville to earn Tennessee Reward School Status for academic achievement, ranking in the top 5% of schools in the state, our impact is transformational to our community:** We were created to provide quality education to families who did not otherwise have access, and our proven results reflect the significant strides we have made in delivering upon this mission. Without 5th grade, our scholars would leave fourth grade at Purpose Prep, attend 5th grade at another elementary school in their zone - most often a low-performing school - and then matriculate to middle school thereafter: attending three schools in three years. Adding 5th grade would positively impact the school experience, academic success, and middle-school readiness of our current students.
- **The family and the community demand for additional seats is strong:** As the highest performing elementary school in the North Nashville area and with literacy results that are unprecedented for our community, families consistently advocate for the work at Purpose Prep to expand. Through surveys, individual discussions with families, and school-wide family engagement events, families have supported efforts to increase enrollment to accommodate the addition of 5th grade. By not providing them an option for 5th grade, we would force them to go to their zoned elementary school for one year and negate the choice options provided for them by the district, potentially reassigning them to the same school that they opted out of for Kindergarten through fourth grade.
- **Our financial and operational model can fulfill the needs of our school if granted the requested additional 90 seats, specifically given the required purchase of several fixed operational costs:** Our operational framework is effectively supported through compliant and transparent systems and governed closely by our Board of Directors. These measures enable Purpose Prep's continued strength and sustainability to support the 5th grade and a total student body of 450 students.

As an elementary charter school, we have the space, capacity, and desire to ensure our 5th graders continue to be successful before transitioning to middle school, but Purpose Prep must be equipped with the capacity to add more students to make this transition possible. It is evident that after cultivating a successful school model, and given strong academic performance, including a record-breaking Reward School status honor and a sustainable operational and financial model, adding the 5th grade would have a profoundly positive effect on the success of our school district and community.

We appreciate your consideration of our request in ensuring our children and families in Nashville, Tennessee are served well.

With purpose,

Lagra Newman, Founder and Head of School
Darren Armstrong, Director of Public Engagement and Strategic Affairs
Shauna Russell, Director of Academics
Onya Parker, Family Engagement Coordinator