



THE OFFICE OF CHARTER SCHOOLS

160 South Hollywood Street, Room 138 • Memphis, Tennessee 38112
901-416-5321 • www.scsk12.org/charter

Submitted October 4, 2023, for the October 6, 2023 Quarterly Commission Meeting

Dear Members of the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission:

First, Memphis-Shelby County Schools (“MSCS”) would like to recognize the thorough planning and execution of the Tennessee Public Charter Commission staff and Commission members throughout a robust appellate cycle, while also engaging in the Commission’s normal authorizing duties. MSCS appreciates the commitment of the team to upholding the Tennessee Quality Charter Authorizing Standards and ensuring transparent practices throughout the process.

MSCS believes in transparent standards for our charter schools based on the Tennessee Quality Charter Authorizing Standards. As an authorizer, we use this as our rubric to ensure consistency and equality in meeting the appropriate standards for approval and authorization. The appellate cycle and the recommendation from the Executive Director affirm our standard of review to ensure a fair and rigorous process for all our applicants.

As an authorizer, MSCS wants to ensure that these fair practices are implemented for strong outcomes in our communities. Principle 1 of the Tennessee Quality Authorizing Standards states, “A quality authorizer. . . [s]ets high but attainable standards for approving charter applicants.” Standard 2 states that “A quality authorizer. . . grants charters only to applicants who demonstrate strong capacity to establish and operate a quality charter school.” The rigorous review and approval are based on the Tennessee Department of Education’s (“TDOE”) Application and Rubric, in which an applicant must meet or exceed standards in each of the required sections.

In following the TDOE scoring rubric, MSCS determined that Empower Memphis Career & College Prep (“Empower Memphis”) provided sufficient evidence of capacity in the academic, operational, and financial sections, and, thus, met the standards for approval based on the TDOE application and scoring rubric. However, the applicant did not meet local board policy due to saturation in the identified neighborhoods. As noted by the Executive Director’s report, the evidence that was provided in the application does meet or exceed the standard, but the risk of oversaturation in the identified area is of consideration in the final appeals decision.

This application process and subsequent appellate review by the Commission reaffirms that MSCS has provided a strong application process that directly aligns with the required standard of review. As an authorizer, it is MSCS’ responsibility to ensure that the plan articulated in the proposed charter school’s application can be executed to fidelity to provide strong outcomes for students. In the case of Empower Memphis, the application met standards in each of the three sections but concern remains around oversaturation in the intended location and dilution of support and resources of schools in the community. Based on the MSCS footprint, there is a lack of students in the proposed neighborhood. As an established authorizer we have seen on multiple occasions that initial enrollment for a school becomes a problem – both to run the academic program that the application has committed to do, and financially - and many have yielded closure due to this.

Memphis-Shelby County Schools appreciates the Commission’s time and respectfully requests that the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission overturn the Executive Director’s recommendation and affirm the Shelby County Board of Education’s decision to deny the charter application for Empower Memphis Career & College Prep.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brittany Monda". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Brittany Monda
Assistant Superintendent of Charter Schools