
BEFORE THE TENNESSEE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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) **State Board of Education Meeting**
) **November 15, 2019**
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IN RE:
Rocketship Nashville #3
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, Rocketship Nashville #3 (Rocketship) appealed the denial of its amended application by Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) 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 Rocketship amended application was “contrary to the best interests of the students, LEA, or community.”¹ Therefore, I recommend that the State Board overturn the decision of MNPS to deny the amended application for Rocketship and approve the amended application for Rocketship.

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 Rocketship’s amended application. In accordance with the Tennessee Department of Education’s charter application scoring rubric, “applications that do not meet or exceed the standard in all sections (academic plan design and capacity, operations plan and capacity, financial plan and capacity, and, if applicable, past performance) . . . will be deemed not ready for approval.”² In addition, the State Board is required to hold a public hearing in the district where the proposed charter school seeks to locate.³

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

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

1. On February 1, 2019, the Sponsor, Rocketship Public Schools (Sponsor), submitted a letter of intent to MNPS expressing its intention to file a charter school application for Rocketship.
2. The Sponsor submitted its initial application for Rocketship to MNPS on April 1, 2019.
3. MNPS assembled a review committee to review and score the Rocketship application.
4. On May 15, 2019, a MNPS panel, which included external expert reviewers, held a capacity interview with the Sponsor.
5. On June 25, 2019, the MNPS Board of Education voted to deny the Rocketship initial application based upon the review committee's recommendation.
6. The Sponsor amended and resubmitted its application for Rocketship to MNPS on July 26, 2019.
7. MNPS' review committee reviewed and scored the Rocketship amended application and recommended approval of the application.
8. On September 24, 2019, contrary to review committee's recommendation, the MNPS Board of Education voted to deny the Rocketship amended application.
9. The Sponsor appealed the denial of the Rocketship 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 Rocketship 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 Rocketship and key members of the leadership team on October 29, 2019 in Nashville.

⁴ Ibid.

13. 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 Rocketship application.
14. After the capacity interview, the Review Committee determined a final consensus rating of the Rocketship amended application, which served as the basis for the Review Committee Recommendation Report.

FINDINGS OF FACT

- **District Denial of Application.**

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

Name	Title
Shereka Roby Grant	Title I Facilitator, Federal Programs, MNPS
Gay Burden	Consultant
Diane Denney	SPED Coach, Exceptional Education, MNPS
Diane Chumley	EL Coach, Office of English Learners, MNPS (initial)
Alyssa Udovitsch	EL Coach, Office of English Learners, MNPS (amended)
Ryan Mathis	District Lead Literacy Coach, Office of Instructional Support, MNPS
Courtney Wilkes	District Lead Literacy Coach, Office of Instructional Support, MNPS
Adrienne Useted	Director of Operations, LEAD Public Schools
Tisa Bear	Senior Accountant, Financial Reporting and Budgeting, MNPS
Gerry Alteri	Principal, Harris Hillman, MNPS

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

Sections	Rating
Academic Plan Design and Capacity	MEETS THE STANDARD
Operations Plan and Capacity	MEETS THE STANDARD
Financial Plan and Capacity	MEETS THE STANDARD
Portfolio Review/Performance Record	PARTIALLY MEETS THE 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 Rocketship.

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

Sections	Rating
Academic Plan Design and Capacity	MEETS THE STANDARD
Operations Plan and Capacity	MEETS THE STANDARD
Financial Plan and Capacity	MEETS THE STANDARD
Portfolio Review/Performance Record	MEETS THE 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. Contrary to the review committee’s recommendation, the MNPS Board of Education voted to deny the amended application of Rocketship. MNPS provided a written notification to Rocketship regarding the denial vote, but this notification did not state the objective reasons for denial as required by T.C.A. § 49-13-108(b)(3).

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

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

Name	Title
Binh Doan	Director of Operations, Aurora Collegiate, Memphis, TN
Ali Gaffey	Deputy Director of Charter Schools, State Board of Education, Nashville, TN
Grant Monda	Executive Director, Aurora Collegiate, Memphis, TN
Stephanie Rizas	Classroom Teacher and Instructional Coach, Montgomery County, MD
Earl Simms	Charter School Authorizing Consultant, St. Louis, MO
Robert Wallace	Director of Operations, KIPP Antioch College Prep Elementary, Nashville, TN

The Review Committee conducted an initial review and scoring of the Rocketship 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 Rocketship amended application was as follows:

Sections	Rating
Academic Plan Design and Capacity	MEETS THE STANDARD
Operations Plan and Capacity	MEETS THE STANDARD
Financial Plan and Capacity	MEETS THE STANDARD
Portfolio Review/Performance Record	MEETS THE STANDARD

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

The Review Committee recommended approval of the application for Rocketship because of the applicant's demonstrated strengths and capacity in its academic, operational, and financial plans as well as a record of academic success among its existing schools.

The academic plan consisted of specific details regarding the applicant's intent to replicate one of its existing schools in South Nashville, Rocketship United Academy (RUA). The applicant identified the need for more high-quality school options in the Antioch and Cane Ridge communities and explained how its academic model can meet the unique needs of the students in these communities. Through the applicant's clearly defined academic model, intentional additions to support a growing English Learner population, and an extended timeline to recruit and enroll students for a 2021 start, the Review Committee found significant evidence to score the application with a "meets standard" in the academic plan.

The operations plan presented by the applicant included a detailed plan to recruit and retain teachers, efforts to build capacity among the regional support staff, and a flexible growth plan that is responsive to the needs of the community and region. Additionally, the Review Committee found evidence of a strong governance structure that provides sufficient support both regionally and nationally. As a result, the Review Committee scored the operational plan with a "meets standard" as well.

The financial plan presented by the applicant provided the Review Committee confidence in the Sponsor's ability to support the school financially. The proposed budget detailed the school's revenue through a federal grant, the Charter School Growth Fund, local philanthropy, and, if needed, internal loans from the national network. The applicant provided evidence of a self-sustaining region and the capacity to oversee the financial operations of the proposed school.

Finally, the evidence of past performance presented by the applicant detailed the success of the operator's two current Tennessee schools in academic proficiency and growth. Both of Sponsor's existing Nashville schools have earned the "Reward School" distinction and are outperforming the district and, at times, state averages in all assessed content areas. In addition, the applicant provided evidence of RUA's success with its English Learner population by demonstrating consistent academic and language proficiency scores for this population of students.

For these reasons, the Review Committee found clear and compelling evidence to recommend approval of an additional school within the network. 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' presentation at the public hearing focused on three key reasons for the denial of the Rocketship application: 1) Rocketship's past academic performance; 2) Concerns about Rocketship's practices and treatment of English Learner (EL) students,

⁶ T.C.A. § 49-13-108(a)(4)(B).

special education students, and homeless students, and 3) Funding structure at Rocketship and limited funding in the district. MNPS stated that the Sponsor's schools in Nashville have not yet proven to be an academic success worthy of replication. MNPS cited that the Rocketship Nashville Northeast Elementary school ranked in the bottom 10% of schools in 2017, and its proficiency rates in English language arts and math are historically below the district's averages. Second, MNPS cited multiple concerns from February 2017 regarding EL students, special education students, and homeless students that were raised through monitoring by the Tennessee Department of Education. Furthermore, MNPS cited a November 2017 notice of probation given to the Sponsor for not complying with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Third, MNPS stated that the Sponsor has a lack of transparency on spending and has a primary goal of generating profits for investors. Moreover, MNPS stated that the Sponsor wants an additional school for the funding, even though it has not produced the academic data warranting replication, and there is limited district funding available for new charter schools.

Since the MNPS Board of Education voted to deny the Rocketship application despite the MNPS review committee's recommendation to approve, the Executive Director asked several clarifying questions of the representatives of MNPS. First, in response to a question regarding the MNPS review committee's analysis of the Rocketship application, a representative from the MNPS Office of Charter Schools stated that the committee scored Rocketship's application a "meets or exceeds standard" in the past performance section because its current Nashville schools had two years' worth of academic proficiency and growth data demonstrating academic success. However, the MNPS Board of Education's representative stated that the board determined two years was not enough academic data to determine academic success. In response to questions from the Executive Director regarding how the MNPS Board of Education decision was grounded in the state's scoring rubric and the Quality Authorizing Standards, the representative for the MNPS Board of Education stated that during their discussion of the amended application, the board members spoke to concerns in key areas of the rubric and the standards. However, the MNPS representative stated that the local board could have been clearer about how the concerns specifically aligned to components of both documents. Finally, in response to a question regarding any additional follow up reviews of Rocketship's EL, special education and homeless student services since 2017, a representative of the MNPS Office of Charter Schools stated that the district had not conducted any additional follow up monitoring nor had the MNPS Office of Charter Schools received any complaints in these areas.

In response to the MNPS argument, the Sponsor highlighted their work in the communities where their current schools are located and the need for an additional school in the southeast area of Nashville. First, the Sponsor cited data from MNPS showing the need for additional seats in the Antioch area of Nashville beginning in 2023-24. Second, the Sponsor provided data from the state's report card showing that the school it is proposing to replicate, RUA, outperformed all elementary schools in the southeast area of Nashville in academic achievement, EL proficiency, and student growth. Additionally, the Sponsor stated that the network's two current Nashville schools have been named a "Reward School" in the last two years. Third, the Sponsor highlighted its unique academic program that has proven successful for the projected demographic of the proposed school as well as how the Sponsor successfully serves EL and special education students in its schools. Finally, the Sponsor stated that it focuses on human capital in its

network by providing weekly coaching to teachers, low teacher to school leader ratios, and intentionally encouraging diversity in its teaching staff.

A portion of the public hearing was dedicated to taking public comment. A total of seven (7) people made verbal comments in support of Rocketship at the hearing. In addition, the State Board received three (3) written public comments in support of Rocketship's application.

- **Alignment of MNPS' 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, this part of the district's process appears in alignment with State Board Quality Authorizing Standards.

However, the MNPS Board of Education's decision did not align with the State Board Quality Authorizing Standards because it failed to clearly articulate the "factors that determined the decision [to deny] so that applicants can decide if they wish to revise their plans based in part on that information and resubmit in the future." The letter provided by MNPS to the Sponsor upon the denial of the amended application did not state any objective reasons for denial which does not align with the State Board Quality Authorizing Standards or T.C.A. 49-13-108(b)(3).

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 Rocketship amended application did meet the standards required for approval.

⁷ T.C.A. § 49-13-108.

MNPS cited three key reasons during the public hearing for the denial of the Rocketship application. However, these reasons were not shared with the Sponsor in writing when the amended application was denied by MNPS, which is in conflict with T.C.A. § 49-13-108(b)(3). A Sponsor must be informed of the objective reasons for denial so that it can have a fair opportunity to revise its plans for the future or, in this case, prepare for an appeal before the State Board. The Sponsor was not afforded this opportunity by MNPS because of the lack of transparency in the MNPS Board of Education's decision to deny the application.

In order to understand MNPS' reasons for denial of the Rocketship application, I gathered information about each reason at the public hearing, including asking multiple clarifying questions of the MNPS representatives, analyzed the transcript from the MNPS Board of Education meeting when the Rocketship application was denied, and reviewed the Rocketship amended application. Drawing on the totality of information collected over the course of the appeal process, I will go through each of these reasons in further detail. First, regarding the academic performance of the Sponsor's current Nashville schools, I agree with the Review Committee's assessment that it meets the standard for approval and replication. The Tennessee Department of Education has designed both of the Sponsor's schools as a "Reward School" in the last two years. The school the Sponsor seeks to replicate is located in the southeast area of Nashville, serving a population similar to the demographics of the proposed school, and has consistently outperformed MNPS' academic achievement in English language arts and math on TNReady. Moreover, the Sponsor has demonstrated particular success in serving EL students as shown through its English Language Proficiency data on the state's report card. Based on the totality of this evidence, I agree that the Sponsor's past performance merits replication.

Second, MNPS cited concerns with regard to the services provided by the Sponsor to EL, special education, and homeless students. Through monitoring by the Tennessee Department of Education in 2017, the Sponsor was cited for deficiencies in serving these populations. However, the MNPS Office of Charter Schools stated that, since 2017, there have been no further complaints or deficiencies found. Moreover, the Review Committee found that the proposed academic program met the standard for approval and noted particular strengths in the applicant's plans to serve EL students. At the public hearing, the Sponsor highlighted the wraparound services that it provides all students as well as how it supports special populations through network-level positions focused on EL students and special education. I agree with the Review Committee's assessment that the Sponsor's proposed academic plan, particularly its plan to serve special populations, meets the standard for approval.

Third, MNPS cited financial concerns of the Sponsor, including a primary goal of generating profits for investors, as a reason to deny the Rocketship application. The Review Committee analyzed the financial plans of the amended application, including a review of previous audits, and found a well-supported revenue projection, a realistic and clear budget, and sound financial systems. The Sponsor has received a federal start-up grant for charter school replication to cover its expenses during Year 0, and the budget presented in the application is conservative in its revenue projections from student enrollment. While the Sponsor does intend to work with a private company to finance the purchase and building of the facility, this is very common for charter schools because of the limited availability of

traditional public school buildings for charter schools to use. I agree with the Review Committee's assessment that the Sponsor's financial plan meets the standard for approval.

Therefore, I agree with the State Board and MNPS Review Committees that Rocketship's amended application meets the standard for approval on all areas of the state scoring rubric. After a review of the evidence in the record, the reasons cited by the MNPS Board of Education for denial of the application were largely based on prior issues with the Sponsor's Nashville schools that ignore the substance of the amended application and the Sponsor's current schools' impressive performance and track record over the past two years. The Sponsor has created a robust network through a national governing board and a Tennessee board of directors to support the Nashville schools. The Sponsor has a clear track record of success in Nashville and has demonstrated a clear need in the southeast region of Nashville for additional high quality school options. The amended application is thoughtful, well-researched, detailed, and based on community need. Therefore, I agree that the Rocketship amended application meets the high, but attainable, bar for approval and that the MNPS Board of Education's decision was contrary to the best interests of the students, LEA, or community.

CONCLUSION

For these reasons, and for the reasons stated in the Review Committee Report attached hereto, I do believe that the decision to deny the amended application for Rocketship Nashville #3 was contrary to the best interests of the students, the LEA, or the community. Therefore, I recommend that the State Board overturn the decision of MNPS to deny the amended application for Rocketship Nashville #3 and approve the amended application.



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: Rocketship Nashville #3

Sponsor: Rocketship Public Schools

Proposed Location of School: Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools

Evaluation Team:

Binh Doan
Ali Gaffey
Grant Monda
Stephanie Rizas
Earl Simms
Robert Wallace

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



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Introduction

Tennessee Code Annotated (T.C.A.) § 49-13-108 allows the 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 four sections of the application: Academic Plan Design and Capacity, Operations Plan and Capacity, Financial Plan and Capacity, and Portfolio Review and Performance Record.
2. **Capacity Interview**: Based on the independent and collective review of the application, the review committee conducted a 90-minute in-person interview with the sponsor, members of the proposed governing board, and identified school leader (if applicable) to address the concerns, weaknesses, and questions identified in the application, and to assess the capacity to execute the application's overall plan.
3. **Consensus Judgment**: At the conclusion of the review of the application and the capacity interview, the committee submitted a final rubric and developed a consensus regarding a rating for each section of the application.

This recommendation report includes the following information:

1. Summary of the application: A brief description of the applicant’s proposed academic, operations, financial plans, and performance record.
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 four 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: enrollment summary; community involvement and parent engagement; existing academic plan; performance management and the capacity to implement the proposed plan.
 - b. Operations Plan and Capacity: network vision and growth plan; network management; network governance; charter management contracts (if applicable); network personnel/human capital; staffing management and evaluation; and the capacity to implement the proposed plan.
 - c. Financial Plan and Capacity: budget narrative; budgets of network and school; cash flow projections; related assumptions; financial policies and procedures; and the capacity to implement the proposed plan.
 - d. Portfolio Review and Performance Record: evidence of successful student outcomes in network; evidence that schools within network are high-performing; detailed narrative of high-performing and low-performing schools; latest audit presented without findings; and organization in good standing with authorizers.

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: Rocketship Nashville #3

Sponsor: Rocketship Public Schools

Proposed Location of School: Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools

Mission:¹ Our mission is to catalyze transformative change in low-income communities through a scalable and sustainable public school model that propels student achievement, develops exceptional educators and partners with parents who enable high-quality public schools to thrive in their community. At Rocketship Public Schools, we are driven by our vision to eliminate the achievement gap in our lifetime.

Number of Schools Currently in Operation by Sponsor:

- Two (2) schools in Nashville, TN—Rocketship Nashville Northeast Elementary and Rocketship United Academy
- Thirteen (13) schools in the Bay Area, CA, two (2) schools in Milwaukee, WI, and two (2) schools in Washington, D.C.

Proposed Enrollment:²

Grade Level	Year 1 (2021)	Year 2 (2022)	Year 3 (2023)	Year 4 – At Capacity (2024)	Year 5 (2025)
K	112	112	112	112	112
1	112	112	112	112	112
2	112	112	112	112	112
3	60	100	100	112	112
4	60	60	100	112	112
Total	456	496	536	560	560

Brief Description of the Application:

The Sponsor, Rocketship Public Schools (RPS), is proposing to open an elementary school in Nashville, Tennessee to serve students in grades K through 4 beginning in 2021. The school, Rocketship Nashville #3 (NSH3), is a replication of an existing school, Rocketship United Academy (RUA), and would be the third school for RPS in Nashville. The school intends “to serve the Antioch and Cane Ridge clusters based upon three primary considerations: (1) Demand from the Current Rocketship Families, (2) Expected Population Growth and Overcrowding, and (3) Opportunity to Elevate Academic Performance for All Students.”³ The school will replicate the success of RUA, also located in South Nashville, to provide a high-

¹ Rocketship Nashville #3 application, pg. 9.

² Ibid., pg. 22.

³ Ibid., pg. 12.



quality public school in partnership with parents, community-based organizations, local civic partners, non-profits, and foundations to the Antioch and Cane Ridge clusters of South Nashville.⁴

The proposed school will operate under RPS, and the Regional Board of Directors and National Board of Directors will work together to govern the school. RPS has budgeted \$199,618 in revenue and projects \$182,118 in expenses for the school in Year 0. RPS projects the school will have \$5,881,865 in revenue and \$5,886,455 in expenses in Year 1 resulting in a net decrease of \$4,590 and a cash ending balance of \$12,910. By Year 5, the school projects to have \$6,197,740 in revenue and \$6,125,676 in expenses, resulting in an increase of net assets of \$72,064.⁵ The school anticipates that 41% of the student population will qualify as economically disadvantaged, 10% of the student population will be students with disabilities, and 39% of the student population will be English Learners.⁶

⁴ Ibid., pg. 9.

⁵ Attachment O: School Planning and Budget Worksheet.

⁶ Rocketship Nashville #3 application, pg. 22.



Summary of the Evaluation

The review committee recommends approval of the application for Rocketship Nashville #3 because of the applicant’s demonstrated strengths and capacity in its academic, operational, and financial plans as well as a record of academic success among its existing schools.

The academic plan consisted of specific details regarding the applicant’s intent to replicate one of its existing schools in South Nashville, Rocketship United Academy. The applicant identified the need for more high-quality school options in the Antioch and Cane Ridge communities and explained how its academic model can meet the unique needs of the students in these communities. Through the applicant’s clearly defined academic model, intentional additions to support a growing English Learner population, and an extended timeline to recruit and enroll students for a 2021 start, the review committee found significant evidence to score the application with a “meets or exceeds standard” in the academic plan.

The operations plan presented by the applicant included a detailed plan to recruit and retain teachers, efforts to build capacity among the regional support staff, and a flexible growth plan that is responsive to the needs of the community and region. Additionally, the review committee found evidence of a strong governance structure that provides sufficient support both regionally and nationally. As a result, the review committee scored the operational plan with a “meets or exceeds standard” as well.

The financial plan presented by the applicant provided the review committee confidence in RPS’s ability to support the school financially. The proposed budget detailed the school’s revenue through a federal grant, the Charter School Growth Fund, local philanthropy, and, if needed, internal loans from the national network. The applicant provided evidence of a self-sustaining region and the capacity to oversee the financial operations of the proposed school.

Finally, the evidence of past performance presented by the applicant detailed the success of the operator’s two current Tennessee schools in academic proficiency and growth. Both of RPS’s existing Nashville schools have earned the “Reward School” distinction and are outperforming the district and, at times, the state averages in all assessed content areas. In addition, the applicant provided evidence of RUA’s success with its English Learner population by demonstrating consistent academic proficiency and language proficiency scores for this population of students. For these reasons, the review committee found clear and compelling evidence to recommend approval of an additional school within the network.

Summary of Section Ratings

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

Sections	Rating
Academic Plan Design and Capacity	Meets or Exceeds Standard

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



Operations Plan and Capacity	Meets or Exceeds Standard
Financial Plan and Capacity	Meets or Exceeds Standard
Portfolio Review and Performance Record	Meets or Exceeds Standard

Analysis of the Academic Plan Design and Capacity

Rating: Meets or Exceeds Standard

Strengths Identified by the Committee:

The applicant's Academic Plan and Design Capacity meets or exceeds the standard because the applicant presented a compelling rationale for selecting the community it intends to serve, has experienced significant success with its existing academic plan, and demonstrated the knowledge and capacity among the regional support staff to open a new school.

The applicant intends to open NSH3 in South Nashville, specifically serving the Antioch and Cane Ridge clusters. As detailed in the application, RPS identified this community because of its projected population growth, lack of quality school options, and demand among families within its existing school in the area, RUA. During the capacity interview, the RPS Director of Schools explained that several RUA families drive more than 45 minutes to bring their child to school and have expressed an interest in attending a quality school closer to their homes. The review committee inquired about the potential competition a second school could create given its close proximity to RUA. In response, the applicant explained a plan for the regional recruitment and transportation teams to coordinate together to ensure each school is serving a different part of South Nashville and explained that RUA currently has a waitlist of families hoping to enroll their students at the school. Beyond a detailed recruitment plan, the review committee found further evidence of the regional team's capacity to recruit students for grades K-4 in Year 1 through their intentional extended pre-opening timeline. The applicant is planning for a 2021 start to allow the regional team enough time to recruit students, build upon current community partnerships and create new partnerships, and secure a facility. Based on these reasons, the review committee identified a compelling rationale for selecting South Nashville as the location for RPS's new school.

In addition to the regional team's thoughtful community selection and recruitment planning, the applicant provided significant evidence of successes RPS has experienced with its existing academic plan. RPS intends to replicate its existing elementary school, RUA, the network's second elementary school that received a "Reward School" designation from the Tennessee Department of Education and a TVAAS Level 5 for academic growth in 2018. Based on a rotational personalized learning structure, RUA's academic model has proven successful with its student population. Given that NSH3 will also serve the students of South Nashville, the applicant projects a similar student population for the new school and therefore supports the regional team's rationale for replicating RUA's academic plan. The applicant identified RUA as an example of the network's ability to overcome a challenge as RUA serves a large English Learner (EL) population that experienced lagging academic proficiency data in its first year of operation. During the capacity interview, the applicant described all teachers as EL teachers and explained its move to train teachers to use Project GLAD (Guided Language Acquisition Design), an EL curriculum designed to help teachers integrate language instruction with content area instruction. Additionally, the regional team hired an EL Director to support the school with its growing subgroup population. RUA now outpaces the local district in academic proficiency for ELs and is an example of the applicant's strong, comprehensive academic plan that is inclusive of subgroup populations and responsive to data.

Furthermore, the regional team has developed their academic model to be flexible enough to align to the needs of a school's population and explained that, while the demographics between its existing schools differ, the core of its academic model is largely the same. The applicant also explained a strong intervention plan that relied on the intentional use of curriculum specialists on the regional team to support its schools in analyzing data, determining when to move students between intervention tiers,



and modifying instruction. The applicant's consistent response to data and purposeful academic planning has led to positive academic outcomes for all students; RPS knows what success is and how to replicate that success.

Analysis of the Operations Plan and Capacity

Rating: Meets or Exceeds Standard

Strengths Identified by the Committee:

The review committee found evidence of several strengths within the Operations Plan and Capacity including an experienced and knowledgeable regional team, strong indicators of staff recruitment and retention, and a growth plan that is responsive to the needs of the community.

Through evidence presented in the amended application and during a capacity interview with the applicant, the review committee determined that the regional team in Nashville is well suited for their roles and has the capacity to support a third school within the region. The application provided clear details regarding the roles and responsibilities of each member on the regional team as well as their relative experience related to their roles demonstrating evidence of a strong leadership team, as characterized in the Scoring Rubric.⁸ The Scoring Rubric further states that the school's chosen leaders will have the "necessary qualifications, competencies, and capacity for their assigned roles".⁹ The review committee found evidence of these characteristics during the capacity interview through the regional leadership team's aligned responses to questions and shared knowledge of the rules, policies, and laws that govern their work. For example, when asked how the team would ensure all EL teachers were properly endorsed, a regional team member quickly cited the exact Praxis testing code and frequency of the test administration needed for endorsement as well as a plan to request a waiver while the teacher completed the appropriate next steps. This level of detail and awareness is one example of the regional team's knowledge and strengths they bring in support of their schools. Additionally, in anticipation of the possibility of operating under the authorization of the State Board of Education (State Board), the RPS Director of Schools shared during the capacity interview that the region created two new positions dedicated specifically to oversee the additional compliance requirements of the State Board and the data management needs for the new school. This level of awareness and preparation impressed the review committee and further demonstrated the regional team's readiness and capacity to expand.

A second strength of the application is the clear indicators of strong teacher and leader recruitment and retention. As described within the application and emphasized during the capacity interview, the applicant established a recruitment pipeline called the Rising Leaders Program to develop and incubate aspiring leaders within their schools. The program currently has fourteen (14) future leaders enrolled, and RPS anticipates selecting their founding school leader and two assistant principals from this candidate pool. In addition, RPS has existing relationships with a national recruiter based in Tennessee as well as local universities and training programs, including Relay Graduate School of Education, to recruit educators for their schools. The recruitment team inquired about the applicant's high percentage of teacher retention across its schools and found sufficient evidence of effective retention strategies through the multitude of ongoing training and support provided to teachers. The applicant team cited a variety of supports and strategies including weekly professional development, monthly flex days, full days dedicated to analyzing data without the pressure of having students present, differentiated skill goals for new and

⁸ Tennessee Charter School Application Rubric – Evaluation Ratings and Sample Scoring Criteria, Section 2.12 Network Management (For Existing Operators) and Section 2.16 Personnel/Human Capital – Staffing Plans, Hiring, Management, and Evaluation (for Existing Operators).

⁹ Tennessee Charter School Application Rubric – Evaluation Ratings and Sample Scoring Criteria, Section 2.16 Personnel/Human Capital – Staffing Plans, Hiring, Management, and Evaluation (for Existing Operators).



experienced teachers, regular coaching, and encouraging teachers to use their ten (10) personal days each year.

During the capacity interview, the applicant further explained the network's aggressive growth plan outlined in the application, which projected the operation of six (6) schools in Tennessee by 2025. The RPS Director of Schools, Board Chair for Rocketship Tennessee, and RPS Chief Financial Officer (CFO) confirmed that the expansion plan was conservative, and the region would not "grow for the sake of growing". The CFO added that the region's existing schools are projected for the budget to be close to breaking even this year and will remain close to breaking even with the addition of a new school as well. The applicant emphasized that they would ensure each school is open and serving all students well before deciding to open an additional school. Additionally, the RPS Director of Schools highlighted the consistently high academic performance of their existing schools and the newly established regional support roles as evidence of the region's readiness to expand. The RPS Director of Schools also explained how RPS established a local governing board in response to the needs of their Nashville schools. This local governing board is unique to the region and serves as a more centralized support team for their Nashville schools. While the national governing board holds each school's charter agreement, the local governing board has the power to determine when it is the right time to grow. In preparation for a third school, the local governing board is focused on its internal expansion with the addition of a parent member and recruitment of additional board members to achieve a size of between eight (8) and ten (10) members by the end of 2019.

The review committee cited each of these actions as evidence of RPS's response to the needs of the region through its efforts to strengthen its support team, develop and grow a local governing board, and recruit and retain quality educators for its students.

Analysis of the Financial Plan and Capacity

Rating: Meets or Exceeds Standard

Strengths Identified by the Committee:

The review committee found evidence of several strengths within the Financial Plan and Capacity including a well-supported revenue, a realistic startup plan and budget, and sound financial systems and processes.

As detailed within the application and through information shared at the capacity interview, the applicant provided sufficient and supported evidence of RPS's capacity to support the opening of a third school in Nashville through internal loans and the pursuit of educational grants and philanthropic dollars. The network's CFO shared that the existing schools are expected to be financially stable this year and that the region had raised \$1.2 million in philanthropic dollars to support the opening of NSH3. Moreover, RPS is in conversation with the Tennessee Department of Education regarding the Charter Schools Program Grant for Replication and Expansion of High-Quality Charter Schools (CSP grant) and is the recipient of a \$700,000 federal grant for charter school replication to cover expenses during Year 0. While the review committee agreed that this was a sound plan to support the region's growth, the committee expressed initial concern with the applicant's plan to use the financial support of its network as contingency plan. However, the committee also acknowledges that this is a common practice among large charter school networks, and the applicant provided evidence of the network's healthy financial standing.

In addition to its well-supported lines of revenue, the applicant presented a realistic startup plan and budget. As explained in the capacity interview, NSH3 is on track for full enrollment and therefore would have more revenue available than what was budgeted in the application. Although RPS's existing schools experience high levels of student attendance, the applicant designed a conservative budget reflecting projected revenue estimates averaging only 93% of ADA/ADM, which is likely low. This allows for the likelihood of additional funding available for the school. Another challenge that applicants often face within the startup plan is the location of and purchase of a facility. While the applicant had not yet identified a site for the school in the application, during the capacity interview the review committee learned of RPS's current negotiations for a facility in Antioch. With regard to the cost of purchasing a facility, the application detailed a plan to refinance the facility after three (3) years of operation, leaving NSH3 to carry a large debt during its early years. When the review committee flagged this concern during the capacity interview, the applicant explained their loan structure and ability to refinance with a zero dollar loan as they have with their existing schools. The review committee probed further to determine the reliability of this plan and a sound contingency plan, as expected in the Scoring Rubric. In response, the applicant confirmed the regional fundraising team's capacity to continue raising funds and the national team's ability to support its schools with grant dollars and/or intercompany loans, as needed.

A third strength within the applicant's financial plan is RPS's sound financial systems and processes. As part of the capacity interview, the review committee learned more about the Governing Board's "two-layer approach" to the financial management and oversight of the school. The applicant explained that the local and national boards were each responsible for reviewing a school's financial audit and approving a school's operating budget. The Board Chair of Rocketship Tennessee added that the local board reviews each school's financial statements monthly and quarterly to analyze its results, discuss misalignments, if found, and create budget forecasts. The review committee found this explanation to be sufficient evidence of the applicant's capacity and plan to open and operate a financially responsible school.

Analysis of the Portfolio Review and Performance Record

Rating: Meets or Exceeds Standard

Strengths Identified by the Committee:

The applicant's Portfolio Review and Performance Record meets the standard because of evidence of successful student outcomes for its two existing Tennessee schools, Rocketship Nashville Northeast Elementary (RNNE) and RUA. The committee cited RPS's schools earning the designation of a "Reward School", consistently achieving high levels of academic growth as measured by the Tennessee Value Added Accountability System (TVAAS), and proficiency scores outperforming the local district and the state as evidence of a strong performance record.

According to the Scoring Rubric, a high-quality applicant will "provide clear, compelling evidence of successful student outcomes for each school in the network".¹⁰ The applicant demonstrated evidence of meeting these criteria by highlighting both of its operating schools' state designation as a "Reward School", with RUA earning the distinction in 2018 and RNNE in 2019. RPS plans to replicate RUA, one of the region's two elementary schools, which continues to demonstrate high academic success on the state's TNReady assessment. Additionally, RUA has demonstrated success among its EL population as demonstrated by its high performance outcomes on the WIDA ACCESS assessment. In 2017-18, RUA saw 20% of its EL population earn scores above a 4.0, thus allowing them to exit EL services, as well as 66% of its EL students met their expected growth target. In comparison, the local district saw 15% of EL students exit services, and 47% of EL students met expected growth targets in that same year.

Beyond the region's high academic performance on the TNReady and WIDA ACCESS state assessments, in 2017-18 RPS schools also earned a TVAAS Level 5 composite score for academic growth, the highest possible score. While the 2018-19 results of a TVAAS Level 3 composite score did not reveal the same progress in academic growth for RUA, the review committee was confident in the regional team's thorough reflections and quick adjustments to their academic model because of this dip in growth scores. For example, in response to the 2018-19 data, the applicant adjusted its staffing model to ensure the best people were in the right role and increased instructional coaching support for teachers within the school. This reflection and quick response demonstrates evidence of the applicant providing a narrative outlining a school's unsatisfactory performance and specific strategies to correct the deficiencies, as aligned with the Scoring Rubric.¹¹ Although the demographics across RPS's two existing schools varies, both schools execute the same academic model, which continues to demonstrate successful outcomes for all students within both schools.

When compared with the traditional district-run elementary schools and the local district overall in TNReady assessment scores, RUA students consistently exceed the average academic performance results, as demonstrated by **Table 1** and **Table 2** below. The applicant continues to provide evidence of successful student outcomes for each school within the network and demonstrates the capacity and plan to replicate another high quality school option for the students and families in South Nashville.

¹⁰ Tennessee Charter School Application Rubric – Evaluation Ratings and Sample Scoring Criteria, Section 4.1 Past Performance (For Existing Operators).

¹¹ Ibid.

Table 1.¹²

2017-18 Glenciff Cluster: All Students, Grades 3-5							
School Name	Math			ELA			Overall TVASS
	% On-Track/Mastered	Rank	TVASS	% On-Track/Mastered	Rank	TVASS	
Rocketship United	40%	1	5	32%	1	5	5
Fall-Hamilton Elementary	24%	4	3	24%	2	1	1
Glenciff Elementary	29%	2	2	20%	3	5	4
Glengarry Elementary	25%	3	3	19%	5	3	3
Glenview Elementary	15%	6	1	9%	7	3	1
John B. Whitsitt Elementary	19%	5	3	20%	3	5	4
Paragon Mills Elementary	12%	7	5	18%	6	5	5

Table 2.¹³

TNReady: % On-track/Mastered All students, Grades 3-5				
Entity	Math		ELA	
	2016-17	2017-18	2016-17	2017-18
RUA	36%	40%	13%	32%
MNPS	29%	28%	25%	27%
TN State	40%	40%	34%	36%

¹² Rocketship Nashville #3 application, pg. 74.

¹³ Rocketship Nashville #3 application, pg. 71.



Evaluation Team

Binh Doan is the Director of Operations at Aurora Collegiate Academy, a K-5 charter elementary school in Memphis, Tennessee. Binh has experience teaching at both the elementary and middle school level. Additionally, she has served on the board of The Collective Memphis, Teach For America's association for alumni of color and the regional strategy team for 90-ONE, a Memphis-based organizing network for educational equity. Binh is an alum of Teach For America - Memphis, New Memphis' Embark program, and the Breakthrough Collaborative's teaching fellowship. Binh holds a Bachelor of Arts in Archaeological Studies from Yale University and a Master of Education from Christian Brothers University.

Ali Gaffey serves as the Deputy Director of Charter Schools for the Tennessee State Board of Education. In this role, she oversees the charter school appeals process and authorizer responsibilities of the State Board. Prior to joining the State Board, Ali was the 7th and 8th grade Academic Dean at STEM Prep Academy, a charter school serving a largely immigrant population in Southeast Nashville. Ali is a former middle and high school English teacher and Teach For America alum with a decade of experience in Education. Ali has taught and led in charter schools in Nashville and New Orleans and loves the innovation and quality education opportunities charter schools provide. Ali earned her B.A. at the University of Florida.

Grant Monda is in his fifth year with Aurora Collegiate Academy, currently serving as its Executive Director. Aurora is a tuition- free public charter elementary school serving students from all over Shelby County. Grant joined Aurora after completing the prestigious Ryan Fellowship in 2015. In addition to his work at Aurora, Grant has previously taught in Memphis City Schools and served as a district level coach and evaluator with Shelby County Schools. Grant has reviewed charter applications for the state and Shelby County Schools. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from Rhodes College and a Master's in Education from Christian Brothers University.

Stephanie Rizas has served as an educator in the state of Maryland for 13 years. She has been both a classroom teacher and an instructional coach working with middle and high school students as well as administrators. She serves on the board for the National Consortium for Teaching About Asia as well as the journal, *Education About Asia*, and coordinates online workshops for teachers across the United States to develop curriculum about Asia for use in a wide range of disciplinary fields. She continues to mentor teachers and serve as a lead teacher with National Board certification. Stephanie is a summa cum laude graduate of the University of Maryland, College Park with a BA and MA in curriculum and instruction, with a focus in social studies. Stephanie is committed to education and abides by the philosophy that every child deserves quality, accessible, and meaningful educational experiences.

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



Robert Wallace serves as the Director of Operations at KIPP Antioch College Prep Elementary. Robert was first introduced to education through Teach For America (TFA). After completing TFA’s two-year teaching requirement, Robert continued to serve students in the Nashville community as an educator. Robert taught middle school Reading, Math, Science and Social Studies in Metro Nashville Public Schools for 4 years. Robert is a Cum Lade graduate of Belmont University with a BBA in Business Management. Robert earned his M. Ed in Instructional Practice at Lipscomb University. Robert is continuing his education at Vanderbilt’s Peabody College as a candidate for a Doctorate of Education in Leadership and Learning in Organizations. Robert is committed to ensuring that all students receive an excellent education, such that they are able to increase their college access and live choice-filled lives.

Exhibit B



Charter School Application Recommendation Report

Submitted By: Rocketship Public Schools

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

Shereka Roby Grant, Title I Facilitator, Federal Programs, MNPS

Gay Burden, Consultant

Diane Denney, SPED Coach, Exceptional Education, MNPS

Diane Chumley, EL Coach, Office of English Learners, MNPS

Ryan Mathis, District Lead Math Coach, Office of Instructional Support, MNPS

Courtney Wilkes, District Lead Literacy Coach, Office of Instructional Support, MNPS

Adrienne Useted, Director of Operations, LEAD Public Schools

Tisa Beard, Sr. Accountant, Financial Reporting and Budgeting, MNPS

Gerry Alteri, Principal, Harris Hillman, MNPS

Charter School Amended Application Recommendation Report

Submitted By: Rocketship Public Schools

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

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Shereka Roby Grant, Title I Facilitator, Federal Programs, MNPS

Gay Burden, Consultant

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Alyssa Udovitsch, EL Coach, Office of English Learners, MNPS

Ryan Mathis, District Lead Math Coach, Office of Instructional Support, MNPS

Courtney Wilkes, District Lead Literacy Coach, Office of Instructional Support, MNPS

Adrienne Useted, Director of Operations, LEAD Public Schools

Tisa Beard, Sr. Accountant, Financial Reporting and Budgeting, MNPS

Gerry Alteri, Principal, Harris Hillman, 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 the 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.
 - › **Past Performance** – Summary of replicating school’s performance record and network financial capacity.

Replicating 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 – Rocketship Public Schools

School Name – Rocketship Nashville #3 Elementary School (NSH3)

Mission and Vision:

Mission: Rocketship Nashville #3 Elementary School’s (NSH3) mission is to catalyze transformative change in the low-income communities through a scalable and sustainable public-school model that propels student achievement, develops exceptional educators, and partners with parents who enable high-quality public schools to thrive in their community.

Vision: Rocketship Nashville #3 Elementary School (NSH3) vision is to eliminate the achievement gap in our lifetime.

Proposed Location – Rocketship Nashville #3 Elementary School’s (NSH3) is proposing to provide services to the Antioch and Cane Ridges clusters located in the South Nashville area.

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

Grade Level	Number of Students				
	Year 1 2021	Year 2 2022	Year 3 2023	Year 4 2024 At Capacity	Year 5
K	112	112	112	112	112
1	112	112	112	112	112
2	112	112	112	112	112
3	60	100	100	112	112
4	60	60	100	112	112
Totals	456	496	536	560	560

Executive Summary

Original Recommendation from the Review Team:

Authorize

Do Not Authorize

Original Summary Analysis – The Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools 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 a replication 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.
- Past Performance
 - Compelling evidence of successful student outcomes for each school in the network.
 - Consistently high-performing schools and provides a detailed narrative outlining primary causation of high-quality, high-performing status, along with description of challenges met and overcome.
 - Evidence that the operator’s schools are high performing and successful by meeting state standards and national standards
 - Consistently is in good standing wherever they have located schools, and there have been no revocations, litigation that has resulted in negative outcomes, non-renewals, or financial, organizational, or academic deficiencies.
 - No findings and is prepared in accordance with generally accepted accounting and auditing principles as is outlined in Tennessee law.

After a thorough review of Rocketship Nashville #3 Elementary School’s (NSH3) written replication application and their participation in the capacity interview conducted by the review team and the Office of Charter Schools, a recommendation of denial for this application is present to the board. The reason for this denial is the result of past academic performance within the Rocketship network in located in Nashville, Tennessee.

Currently, Rocketship Public Schools operate two (2) schools located in Nashville Tennessee;

- Rocketship Nashville Northeast Elementary (RNNE) opened in 2014 and is located at 2526 Dickerson Pike, Nashville, TN.
- Rocketship United Academy (RUA) opened in 2015 and is located at 320 Plus Park Blvd, Nashville, TN.

While the review team had to consider both schools’ academic, operational, and financial performances, the review team found the replication application relies heavily on the performance at RUA.

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Meets Standard <input type="checkbox"/> Partially Meets Standard <input type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet Standard
Operations Plan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Meets Standard <input type="checkbox"/> Partially Meets Standard <input type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet Standard
Financial Plan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Meets Standard <input type="checkbox"/> Partially Meets Standard <input type="checkbox"/> Does Not Meet Standard
Past Performance	<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 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 a replication 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.
- Past Performance
 - Compelling evidence of successful student outcomes for each school in the network.
 - Consistently high-performing schools and provides a detailed narrative outlining primary causation of high-quality, high-performing status, along with description of challenges met and overcome.
 - Evidence that the operator's schools are high performing and successful by meeting state standards and national standards
 - Consistently is in good standing wherever they have located schools, and there have been no revocations, litigation that has resulted in negative outcomes, non-renewals, or financial, organizational, or academic deficiencies.
 - No findings and is prepared in accordance with generally accepted accounting and auditing principles as is outlined in Tennessee law.

After a thorough review of Rocketship Nashville #3 Elementary School's (NSH3) written amended replication application the review team and the Office of Charter Schools, would like to submit a recommendation of approval for this application presented to the MNPS Board of Education. The reason for this approval is the result of academic plan, operations plan, financial plan, and past academic performance within the Rocketship network located in Nashville, Tennessee meeting or exceeding expectations based on the state rubric.

Currently, Rocketship Public Schools operate two (2) schools located in Nashville Tennessee;

- Rocketship Nashville Northeast Elementary (RNNE) opened in 2014 and is located at 2526 Dickerson Pike, Nashville, TN.
- Rocketship United Academy (RUA) opened in 2015 and is located at 320 Plus Park Blvd, Nashville, TN.

Amended Evaluation

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

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

Academic Plan Detail

Rating: Meet Standard

Summary as Presented in Proposal: Rocketship Public Schools submitted a replication application for grades K-4 to open a school in the southeast section of Nashville. At capacity, the school would have 560 students. NSH3's mission is to catalyze transformative change in the low-income communities through a scalable and sustainable public-school model that propels student achievement, develops exceptional educators, and partners with parents who enable high-quality public schools to thrive in their community.

Review Team Analysis: The replication application meets standard for the academic plan. While the review team had several questions develop while reading the application, these questions were answered during the capacity interview either through the participation in the scenario exercise or direct response to questions asked by the review team.

The proposed charter's mission statement is that every student has the right to dream, to discover, and to develop their unique potential. The school also indicates that their goal is to catalyze transformative change in low-income communities through a scalable and sustainable public-school model that propels student achievement, develops exceptional educators, and partners with parents who enable high-quality public schools to thrive in their community. The Rocketship Regional Team was able to provide a coherent description of what the school would look like as it is meeting the goals and mission of the school. Lastly, the mission and vision had goals that were aligned and identified as the focus in meeting the school's success.

A description of the community where the school intends to draw students included the Antioch and Cane Ridge Clusters. Also, it detailed the demographics of the students within the zone including the percentages of economically disadvantaged, English Learners, and students with disabilities. While participating the capacity interview, the Rocketship Regional Team provided more in-depth detail and rationale for selecting the proposed community.

The academic focus is aligned with the school's mission and vision. They plan to target students who are or may be at risk of achieving below grade level. Substantial data was provided regarding the subgroup achievement of Economically Disadvantaged, Black, Hispanic and Native American, and English Learners of current students of Rocketship United, which has similar demographics of the proposed charter. The Rocketship Regional Team provided evidence of a framework for a rigorous research based academic plan that reflects the needs of the targeted student population and is aligned with the school's stated mission and vision. Additionally, a robust and quality curriculum overview, supported by research, with a plan for implementation that included all grades was included. The team provided evidence that the curriculum design is aligned with the Tennessee State Standards. Additionally, the proposed academic plan appeared to be appropriate and effective for growing all students while at the same time closing achievement gaps. Lastly, there was a description of effective methods for providing differentiated instruction to meet the needs of all students.

Rocketship's Growth and Community Team consists of part-time staff to respond to enrollment inquiries from families, support interested families through ongoing school tours, and conduct in-home enrollment sessions for parents who are unable to visit the campus. Months prior to opening, the founding principal and the founding leadership team engage in a series of community meetings with families to discuss the vision of the new school. Rocketship has partnered with various Head Start locations in South Nashville for Kindergarten enrollment. This was reinforced during the capacity interview.

The education program is based on a rotational model that focuses on Humanities, STEM, and Learning Lab. Additionally, the school will partner with area universities to develop resident teachers from Nashville. They will send existing RPS staff to the new school. Implementation of the GLAD program for EL is a strong component. The Rocketship Regional Team provided a clear description of the existing academic plan. There was no evidence that the key features of the existing academic plan will significantly differ from the operator's existing schools.

The goal for NSH3 is for each student to meet or exceed the average achievement for schools in the same geographic area on the state mandated achievement assessments and TVAAS and demonstrate at least 1.5 years of growth towards grade level proficiency in Reading and Math on the NWEA assessment. During the capacity interview the Rocketship Regional Team expanded details regarding how the organization will measure its academic progress – individual students, student cohorts, all grade levels within a school and across the network of schools. Multiple assessments such as NWEA, exit tickets, Step, Fountas and Pinnell, etc. were indicated to measure the success of students.

Operations Plan Detail

Rating: Meets Standard

Summary as Presented in Proposal: Since its initial inception in 2014, Rocketship Public Schools has created a Tennessee Regional Leadership Team which consists of a Director of Schools, Manager of Achievement, and Director of Operations. This shift will allow Rocketship Public Schools to build capacity through regional support while maintaining a focus on high-quality school growth.

Review Team Analysis: Rocketship Public Schools indicated their five-year network growth plan would include two (2) schools in 2020-2021, (3) schools in 2021-2022, and by 2024-2025 having four (4) schools. In addition, a local regional team was established consisting of a full time Director of Schools, Manager of Achievement, and a Regional Director of Operations. They have plans to include an Associate Director of Integrated Special Education, and Associate Director of Family and Community Engagement, as well as a talent recruiter to launch a new school. They provided a clear and detailed description during the discussion at the capacity interview of the results of past replication effort, challenges, and lessons learned, and how the organization has addressed any challenges.

Rocketship outlined the proposed leadership team for RNES3. The school director identified in the application has previous experience as a teacher, principal, director of schools, and chief achievement officer with Rocketship Public Schools. The purposed Chief Financial Officer has four (4) years of experience as a board member and secretary treasurer for Envision schools in California, which currently manages four (4) schools in the network. The Chief Programs Officer was previously responsible for the educational model design for the Rocketship network in 2013-2014. The proposed Chief Growth and Community Engagement Officer identified has previous experience with a foundation that focuses on innovative educational options for underserved students.

Currently the Rocketship schools in Tennessee have a single network level governing board that governs both RNNE and RUA. The governing board will be responsible for overseeing the operations and fiscal affairs of the proposed school. The Board of Directors would be comprised of members with expertise in various operational areas that include governance, academics, and financial management. The Rocketship Regional Team provided detail surrounding current size and composition of the governing board, with a rationale of how the current/proposed governance structure and composition will ensure the desired outcomes of a network of highly effective schools if the proposed school is approved. This discussion also included a clear, detailed description of the governance structure at the network level and how it relates to the individual school.

Rocketship Public Schools indicated that members of the school team would receive ongoing professional development centered on key levers, that include data driven instruction, coaching and observation school culture, staff culture and school leader team management. Additionally, recruitment for teachers includes local college career fairs, Teach for America, referral programs for current teachers, use of social media and webinars. Assistant Principals have multiple

training opportunities that include professional development as well as shadowing of executive principals to help prepare them for the transition.

Original

Financial/Business Plan Detail

Rating: Meet Standards

Summary as Presented in Proposal: Rocketship Public Schools indicated that Rocketship's national network will provide financial support to schools in the startup year as enrollment increases and the school starts to achieve financial stability.

Original Review Team Analysis: Rocketship Public Schools provided sufficient documentation regarding budget assumptions and reasonable numbers that reflect evidence of financial procedures and policies in place for accounting, payroll, etc. There was evidence of a complete, realistic, and viable start-up operating budget for the network and the anticipated school. The panel indicated and provided documentation that reasonable, well-supported revenue and cost assumptions, including grant/fundraising assumptions were secured vs. anticipated. There was a sound contingency plan to meet financial needs if anticipated revenues are lower than estimated. Lastly, all cost revenues and all major expenditures were accounted for and were realistic. It is important to note that since their inception, both current sites have had no audit findings each year of operation.

Original

Past Performance Detail

Rating: Partially Meet Standards

Summary as Presented in Proposal: While the application provides a compelling story for RUA, for the most part, it leaves out the key information concerning RNNE. The review team had to look at all available information provided for the entire network and make a decision accordingly.

Original Review Team Analysis: While the past performance for Rocketship Public Schools in the categories of operations and financial did meet the standard, the past performance in the academic section did not.

While RNNE demonstrated average growth in RLA on TNReady assessments for the 2018 school year, the percent of students scoring On Track/Mastered for the past two years has been below district averages. RNNE demonstrated strong student growth in mathematics for the 2018 school year; however, the percent of students scoring On-Track/Mastered was just over half that of the district average (RNNE – 11.9%, MNPS – 21.9%). This caused concern, especially as the district holds a current status of “In Need of Improvement”.

The review team is optimistic regarding RNNE’s ability to assist students in growing to meet grade level goals. At this time, however, there is not sufficient evidence to indicate sustained student achievement using the measures required by this application.

Amended

Past Performance Detail

Rating: Meet Standards

Summary as Presented in Proposal: The amended application included updated information for RNNE and RUA. RNNE was identified as a reward school for School Year 19 and RUA was identified as a reward school for School Year 18.

Original Review Team Analysis:

Though the original application listed this section as “Partially Meets Standard” the review team modified their rating for the following reasons:

- RNNE achieved Level 5 TVAAS in numeracy for both 2018 and 2019.
- RNNE achieved Level 3 TVAAS in literacy in both 2018 and 2019.
- RUA achieved Level 5 TVAAS in numeracy in 2018, with a Level 3 in 2019.
- RUA achieved Level 5 TVAAS in literacy in 2018, with a Level 3 in 2019.
- RNNE showed high levels of student growth in mathematics as compared to area elementary schools. Additionally, RNNE outperformed both district and most area school achievement averages in Math in 2019.
- RNNE scored just below district average achievement in ELA in 2019.
- RUA outperformed district and area school achievement averages in both ELA and Math in 2019.

The data for 2019 provided evidence of sustained student growth and achievement for both schools, especially for RNNE.

School	Grade 3-8 Math TVAAS Level
Rocketship Nashville Northeast Elementary	5
Shwab Elementary	5
Hattie Cotton Elementary	3
Ida B. Wells Elementary	3
Chadwell Elementary	2

School	Grade 3-8 ELA TVAAS Level
Hattie Cotton Elementary	4
Shwab Elementary	4
Chadwell Elementary	4
Rocketship Nashville Northeast Elementary	3
Ida B. Wells Elementary	1

School	Grade 3-8 Math TVAAS Level
John B. Whitsitt Elementary	5
Paragon Mills Elementary	5
Glencliff Elementary	4
Glangarry Elementary	3
Rocketship United	3
Glenview Elementary	2
Fall-Hamilton Elementary	1

School	Grade 3-8 ELA TVAAS Level
Glencliff Elementary	5
Glenview Elementary	5
Glangarry Elementary	5
Paragon Mills Elementary	5
John B. Whitsitt Elementary	3
Rocketship United	3
Fall-Hamilton Elementary	3

School	Subject	Pct_On_Mastered
Rocketship United	ELA	28.4
MNPS	ELA	25.9
Fall-Hamilton Elementary	ELA	20.5
John B. Whitsitt Elementary	ELA	19.2
Glangarry Elementary	ELA	18.8
Glencliff Elementary	ELA	15.6
Paragon Mills Elementary	ELA	12.4
Glenview Elementary	ELA	7.2

School	Subject	Pct_on_Mastered
Rocketship United	Math	48
Glangarry Elementary	Math	31.6
MNPS	Math	29.9
John B. Whitsitt Elementary	Math	27.8
Glencliff Elementary	Math	27.4
Fall-Hamilton Elementary	Math	21.7
Paragon Mills Elementary	Math	17.5

School	Subject	Pct_On_Mastered
Chadwell Elementary	ELA	28.4
MNPS	ELA	25.9
Rocketship Nashville Northeast	ELA	25.2
Shwab Elementary	ELA	23.2
Hattie Cotton Elementary	ELA	17.6
Ida B. Wells Elementary	ELA	**

School	Subject	Pct_on_Mastered
Shwab Elementary	Math	37.5
Rocketship Nashville Northeast	Math	33.8
MNPS	Math	29.9
Glenview Elementary	Math	27.6
Hattie Cotton Elementary	Math	21.5
Chadwell Elementary	Math	20.4
Ida B. Wells Elementary	Math	9.5