



JANUARY 2025

Quality Charter Review Recommendation Report 2025

Evaluated By

Tennesseans for Student Success

Tennesseans for Student Success

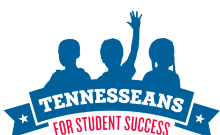
P.O. Box 680231
Franklin, TN 37068

For more information about the content of this document, please contact:

info@tnsuccess.org

Visit our website at: www.tnsuccess.org

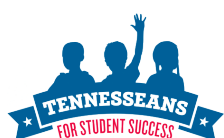
This document was adapted from the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) Charter School Application Recommendation Report. NACSA is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the quality of public education by improving the performance of charter school organizations. NACSA provides training, consulting, and policy guidance to authorizers and education leaders interested in increasing the number of high-quality schools and improving student outcomes.



Contents

This recommendation report includes the following:

Overview	Basic information about the proposed school as presented in the application.
Recommendation	A fact-based assessment determining if the application meets the criteria for authorization by the local school district including an outline of strengths and needed improvements. A recommendation for approval requires a score of Meets or Exceeds Standard in all three primary application sections.
Evaluation	<p>Analysis of the application is informed by the published Tennessee Department of Education Charter Application Scoring Rubric across the three primary application sections:</p> <p>Academic Plan Design and Capacity: School mission and vision, enrollment summary, academic focus and plan, academic performance standards, high school graduation and postsecondary readiness, assessments, school calendar and schedule, special populations, school culture and discipline, recruitment and enrollment, parent and community engagement and support.</p> <p>Operations Plan and Capacity: Governance, start-up plan, facilities, personnel/human capital, professional development, insurance, transportation, food service, additional operations, and waivers.</p> <p>Financial Plan and Capacity: Planning and budget worksheet, and budget narrative.</p>
Rating Characteristics	<p>The following definitions guide evaluator ratings:</p> <p>Meets or Exceeds Standard: Responses address the topic with specific and accurate information that shows thorough preparation; presents a clear, realistic picture of how the school expects to operate; and inspires confidence in the application's capacity to carry out the plan effectively.</p> <p>Partially Meets Standard: Responses meet the criteria in some respects but lack detail and/or require additional information in one or more areas.</p> <p>Does Not Meet Standard: Responses are undeveloped or significantly incomplete; demonstrate lack of preparation; is unsuited to the mission of the authorizer or otherwise raises substantial concerns about the viability of the plan or the applicant's ability to carry it out.</p>



OVERVIEW

Sponsor Name

Daughters of Zion

Proposed School Name

Dream Catchers Charter School

Proposed Location

Memphis, Shelby County

Board Members

iBruce Dailey, Sharon Macklin Butts,
Natalee Peart, Kimberly Adams,
Chekesha Jones, Xavier Wade,
Latonya McGowan

Enrollment Projections

Grade Level	Year 1 2026-27	Year2 2027-28	Year 3 2028-29	Year4 2029-30	Year 5 2030-31	At Capacity
K	10	15	20	25	30	325
1	10	15	20	25	30	325
2	10	15	20	25	30	325
3	10	15	20	25	30	325
4	10	15	20	25	30	325
5	20	25	30	35	40	425
6	20	25	30	35	40	425
7	10	15	20	25	30	325
8	10	15	20	25	30	325
9	10	15	20	25	30	325
10	10	15	20	25	30	325
11	10	15	20	25	30	325
12	10	15	20	25	30	325
Totals	150	215	280	345	410	4,425

Anticipated Student Demographics

Enrollment Demographics: Not provided

Proposed School Leader

Not Yet Identified

Special Population Projections:

100% ED, 30% SWD, 10% ELL

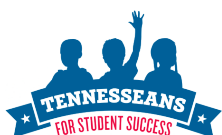
Mission and Vision

Mission: The mission of Dream Catchers Charter School is to provide a stable, nurturing, and innovative educational environment that empowers homeless and youth at risk of homelessness in Memphis and Shelby County to achieve academic excellence, personal growth, and lifelong success.

Vision: The vision of Dream Catchers Charter School is to break the cycle of poverty and instability by offering a holistic K-12 educational model that combines rigorous academics with comprehensive support services.

Educational Model/Instructional Design

Montessori



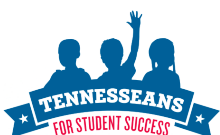
RECOMMENDATION: DENY

Application Strengths Summary

- The proposed school seeks to offer a unique educational option for students experiencing homelessness or who are a risk of homelessness.
- The enrollment policy includes a preference for students in the target demographic.
- The application contains a pre-opening professional development plan that focuses on key aspects of the educational model and target population.

Application Improvements Summary

- The application offers no measurable evidence of the success of the proposed innovations to be offered and does not describe how the school will ensure alignment with Tennessee State Standards.
- The application does not contain an evidence-based plan to help remediate students' academic underperformance.
- The assessment plan fails to identify specific assessments that will be administered.
- There is a lack of alignment between enrollment targets throughout the application and budget.
- Staffing roles listed in various sections of the application and budget workbook do not align.
- School Operations sections are incomplete or vague.
- The application does not describe the role or relationship of the Sponsor Entity in the proposed school.
- The Financial Workbook appears to be incomplete with no description of Year 0 revenue (\$200,000) or accompanying expenses.



ACADEMIC PLAN DESIGN AND CAPACITY

DOES NOT MEET STANDARDS

Summary

Dream Catcher Charter School aims to serve K-12 students in Memphis and Shelby County who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness. There is a discrepancy in enrollment numbers throughout the application with the cover sheet indicating that the school will serve 1,000 students at capacity while Table 1: Enrollment Summary included up to 4,425. The school will implement Montessori principles and key features of the proposed school include individualized learning plans, mixed-age classrooms, experiential learning, career and life skills, and social-emotional learning however, the application does not describe how the school will offer a research-based curriculum, close achievement gaps, or meet Tennessee State Standards.

While the application indicates that assessments, continuous data analysis, and targeted professional development will ensure all students make meaningful academic progress, the plan lacks sufficient detail to determine its viability, including a lack of specific assessments, staff responsible, and whether there is time allocated in the schedule to complete these activities.

The school plans to provide 6.5 hours of instructional time each day that includes core subjects and extracurricular activities however it is unclear how the proposed schedule aligns with Montessori principles of experiential learning or multi-age groupings. Saturday School, Summer School, and After-School Tutoring will be offered to provide remediation and targeted interventions for students.

The application notes that Shelby County is home to over 3,000 homeless students, as well as those at risk of homelessness, and cites this statistic as a demonstration of community need and demand. Five letters of support and seven statements of support were included in the application. While the K-12 model would provide students with stability and continuity, the “comprehensive support services necessary to address the unique challenges faced by homeless and at-risk students” the school proports to provide are not identified within the application and sufficient evidence of community need and demand is not provided (p.31). The application indicates that information from surveys, town halls, and community meetings helped shape the school’s plan however data from these sources was not included in the application.

A Parent-Teacher Advisory Board will be created to allow for continuous input and collaboration. Additionally, monthly workshops will be offered for parents, and the school will establish partnerships with community organizations. The application includes several communication channels between the school and parents however it is unclear which staff are responsible for overseeing these initiatives.

The school culture will be reinforced with daily gatherings, monthly speakers, and weekly advisory session. It is unclear where advisory session will occur within the provided schedules. The application describes that the school will establish a culture that embraces diversity by creating individualized support plans, implementing cultural competency training for teachers and staff, and hosting inclusive celebrations. Discipline policy features positive behavior incentives and restorative practices. The discipline policy does not demonstrate a full understanding of protections for students under IDEA.

The application demonstrates a general understanding of identification procedures for special populations and outlines the components of a continuum of services however does not describe how these services will be implemented within the proposed model. Additionally, the application includes a vague description of how the school will identify and support at-risk students but does not provide specific information as to how this will be executed, or which staff will oversee these processes.



OPERATIONS PLAN AND CAPACITY

DOES NOT MEET STANDARD

Summary

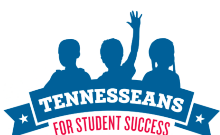
The applicant did not fill out section 2.1 Governance and only included a list of 7 board members, in addition to general bylaws and code of conduct documents. As such, the board structure, ability to meaningfully oversee the school performance, operations, and finance, in addition to the range of knowledge and skills required of the board, cannot be evaluated.

The facility plan generally outlines the space needed to operate the school. It indicates that classroom spaces will be dedicated for each grade level however this does not align with the multi-age level educational model. The leadership team brings experience in real estate, construction, managing community facilities, and large-scale renovation projects. A general timeline is provided and while the application indicates that potential options have been identified, no viable facility options are presented indicating that the timeline associated with acquisition and renovation may not be realistic. Additionally, no contingency plans were provided.

The application includes a high-level Start-Up plan with some key activities however references several roles, including a Facilities Manager, Human Resources Manager, Academic Director, and Community Engagement Coordinator, who are not included in the Year 0 budget demonstrating that the plan is not realistic or viable.

The personnel plan indicates that all teachers will meet TN licensure and endorsement requirements, with a focus on culturally responsive teaching and experience with diverse learners, however, it does not address any licensure or experience with the Montessori principles on which the school model centers which indicate staff may not be prepared to implement the proposed educational model. The Organizational Chart included in the application does not align to the positions listed in the narrative sections or the budget staffing line items. The application lists various professional development opportunities that teachers can participate in but does not indicate which staff will be responsible for overseeing this nor does it address who will evaluate educators on an annual basis. Similarly, while the application describes that leaders will participate in Leadership Institutes, Professional Networks, and Coaching and Mentoring, there is no information provided as to who will oversee or support these initiatives. Additionally, the budget indicates there will be 2 classroom teachers and 1-2 specialist teachers for Year 1 with a projected student enrollment of 150 which exceeds the allowable student to teacher ratio.

The application indicates that it will provide daily transportation to students who qualify through the McKinney-Vento Act or a student's IEP, however no transportation costs are included in the budget. Proof of Insurance included in the application is not comprehensive or adequate coverage for charter schools. The application vaguely describes a plan for ways in which the school could offer food services but does not demonstrate an understanding of state and federal regulations or nutritional guidelines. Overall, the application does not demonstrate a clear understanding of school operations and requirements.



FINANCIAL PLAN AND CAPACITY

DOES NOT MEET STANDARD

Summary

The financial workbook does not align with many components of the Organizational Plan including facilities, staffing, transportation, and nursing/health services. While the budget narrative includes generally reasonable assumptions, there are still significant gaps in the budget, especially in areas of staffing and facilities. Additionally, there is no description of what "Contracts with Private Agencies", that range from \$85,000 to \$375,000 from Years 1-5, will fund or which agencies are included.

The Year 0 budget does not describe where the \$200,000 cash in hand originates from or how it will be used. Expenses for Year 0 are blank in the budget workbook.

The application indicates that key financial functions, including payroll, benefits administration, and audits, will be outsourced to experienced vendors through an RFP section process however it is unclear where this expense is included in the budget workbook. Additionally, broad statements about roles and responsibilities for financial planning and oversight do not demonstrate a full understanding of required financial policies and procedures.

The budget workbooks do include a contingency reserve to address unexpected financial needs however it is not clear that the budget expenses are all included to determine if this fund is viable in the event of lower-than-expected revenues or higher-than-anticipated expenditures. Other contingency plans listed in the application include seeking grants, expanding community partnerships to secure in-kind donations and financial contributions, and bridge financing through short-term loans or lines of credit.

Overall, the application fails to demonstrate the financial expertise required to start and operate a charter school.

