



JANUARY 2025

Quality Charter Review Recommendation Report 2025

Evaluated By

Tennesseans for Student Success

Tennesseans for Student Success

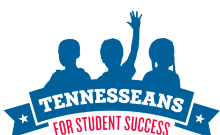
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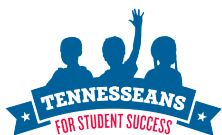
This document was adapted from the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) Charter School Application Recommendation Report. NACSA is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the quality of public education by improving the performance of charter school organizations. NACSA 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

Dr. Jeremy Sager

Proposed School Name

Novus SMART Academy (K-8)

Proposed Location

LaVergne and Smyrna,
Rutherford County

Board Members

Charles Frazier
Marisa Cannata
Daniel Kadeba
Celest Davis
Brian Bradshaw
Andrea Coleman
Christian Hill
Latarsha White
Jeremy Sager, Ex Officio

Enrollment Projections

Grade Level	Year 1 2025-26	Year2 2026-27	Year 3 2027-28	Year4 2028-29	Year 5 2029-30	At Capacity
K	96	96	96	96	96	96
1	96	96	96	96	96	96
2		96	96	96	96	96
3			96	96	96	96
4				96	96	96
5					96	96
6						96
7						96
8						96
9						
10						
11						
12						
Totals	192	288	384	480	576	864

Anticipated Student Demographics

Enrollment Demographics: Not provided

Proposed School Leader

Dr. Jeremy Sager

Special Population Projections:

25% ED, 15% SWS, 35% ELL

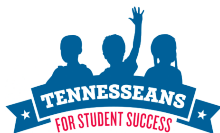
Educational Model/Instructional Design

SMART (Science, Math, Art, Research, and Technology)

Mission and Vision

Mission: Novus SMART Academy provides scholars with an extraordinary learning experience, where college and career begin in Kindergarten.

Vision: Novus SMART Academy produces global achievers through high-quality academic instruction, character development, and relentless ambition for success in life. The vision aligns with Rutherford County Schools' 2023-2028 Strategic Plan, emphasizing early intervention and equitable education to ensure every scholar thrives academically and personally. Our Approach incorporates the OECD's principle that equity and quality are essential for educational excellence. Through our unique design, Novus SMART Academy (K-8) will achieve the following measurable outcomes: 1-4. Scholars will demonstrate Met Expectations or Exceeded Expectations performance in English/Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies.
5. The school will maintain good standing under the Tennessee ESSA accountability guidelines and system.
6. Novus SMART Academy will demonstrate fiduciary and fiscal responsibility.
7. Novus SMART Academy will be fully enrolled with high levels of attendance and reenrollment.
8. Parents/guardians will demonstrate satisfaction with our academic program and school-to-home communication.
9. The Board of Directors will provide effective and sound oversight of the school.



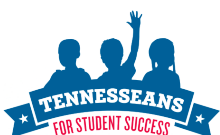
RECOMMENDATION: APPROVE PENDING FINAL SUBMISSION

Application Strengths Summary

- The application contains ambitious annual and long-term academic achievement goals that are absolute, comparative, and longitudinal measures of success that also align with Rutherford County School's strategic plans, state Academic Standards, and tenants of the Every Scholar Succeeds Act (ESSA).
- The application clearly defines and quantifies the racial gaps in opportunity, discipline, segregation, and achievement in Rutherford County Schools, making a strong justification for a high-quality option serving diverse learners.
- The school will implement evidence and research-based strategies to support Character Education and social-emotional wellness.
- The school will implement curricula that is fully aligned to the Tennessee State Academic Standards.
- The philosophy of the school is rooted in excellence, inclusion, and innovation.
- The assessment plan includes universal screening, interim, benchmark, and progress monitoring tools used at various intervals to support delivery of interventions within the RTI2 process.
- Clear data meeting protocols are used to equip staff with resources to analyze data and action plan to meet student needs.
- The application describes how input from the community influenced several aspects of the school design including small class sizes, diverse and inclusive curriculum, and cultural representation and support.
- The school's behavioral expectations are clearly built out and reflect the cultural values of the school's mission and vision.
- The staffing plan includes several administrative positions dedicated to supporting and overseeing services to special populations and RTI2/MTSS.
- The school plans to operate a comprehensive Summer School program during the month of June to address academic learning loss and meet TDOE requirements for the Promotion and Retention of Third Grade Students policy.
- The application contains a clear decision-making process for selecting adequate transportation and food service vendors.

Application Improvements Summary

- The goals and assessment plans do not identify how the school will measure the level of attainment in art or technology, which are key tenants of the SMART educational model.
- The application includes a detailed recruitment and community engagement plan to be implemented upon charter approval however it is unclear how successful previous, or current engagement efforts are and if there is sufficient interest in families of age-eligible children to meet the school's enrollment goals.
- The application contains letters of support from only 3 of the 30+ community organizations of which it proposes to establish partnerships.
- The application does not reflect a full understanding of IDEA disciplinary protections for student with disabilities.



ACADEMIC PLAN DESIGN AND CAPACITY

PARTIALLY MEETS STANDARD

Summary

Novus SMART Academy proposes to serve 864 K-8 students, at full capacity, in La Vergne and Smyrna. The school seeks to offer an educational model rooted in Science, Math, Arts, Research, and Technology (SMART) in an area of Rutherford County that is experiencing overcrowding in current local school options, as well as lower academic proficiency when compared to state and district averages. The model is based on several high-performing charter schools across the nation.

Key features of the academic program:

- Inquiry-based learning (IBL)
- Project-based learning (PBL)
- Asset-based learning (ABL)
- Universal Design for Learning (UDL)
- Structured English Immersion
- Extended Learning Time for Core Subjects
- College and Career Exploration
- Character Education, Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and Well-Being

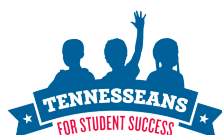
A Co-teaching model will be used to support personalized learning by incorporating direct instruction, small group instruction, independent work and blended learning. Students will receive targeted instruction and support in academics through the RTI2/MTSS process which will utilize prescribed learning paths to address intervention and/or enrichment needs. Additionally, the ABL Framework aims to foster an inclusive, interactive, culturally informed, linguistically responsive, and reflective/adaptive environment that supports all students, regardless of ability.

The RTI2/MTSS Process utilizes universal screening, progress monitoring for academics and social-emotional behaviors, regular evaluation of data for areas of inequity and disproportionality, as well as dyslexia screening processes in alignment with statutory requirements. Additionally, the application outlines a continuum of services for supporting the needs of students with disabilities, however it is unclear how the framing of “deficit-based intervention services” described in the application aligns with the school’s culture of inclusion and ABL philosophy. A variety of instructional programs, practices and strategies are identified for use in meeting the needs of English language learners and two qualified staff members will be responsible for implementing the chosen service delivery model(s). While identification and programming options are detailed, the application lacks specificity on how programming will be selected for students and how staff will have the capacity to implement the variety of models proposed.

The school will partner with community organizations like the Boys and Girls Club and YMCA and encourage students to participate in their extracurricular activities until the school is able to develop their own extracurricular offerings. The integration of Art in the curriculum is vague and an established art program is not planned until Year 3.

The school will engage families and provide opportunities for input through a Family Advisory Council and Engagement (FACE). The FACE will regularly present findings to the Board of Directors. Additionally, families are asked to annually sign Scholar-Family School Commitments, including committing to participate in family learning nights, Scholar-Led Conferences, support scholars with homework, and actively communicate with the school regarding academic or behavioral concerns.

Overall, the Academic Plan contains detailed information on the rationale for selected the variety of academic programming options across general education and special populations, however, lacks specificity in how these will be implemented into a seamless educational experience for students.



OPERATIONS PLAN AND CAPACITY

MEETS OR EXCEEDS STANDARD

Summary

The Founding Board is comprised of 9 members, representing a variety of expertise and industry experience including education, finance, legal matters, and community engagement. The Board will utilize 3 officer positions and 3 committees to provide oversight of academics, finances, and compliance. Within 6 months of opening, the Board will appoint a parent representative to ensure that family perspectives and needs are represented and there is an open line of communication to the community.

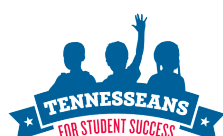
The school will utilize BES Follow-on Support (Years 0-2) and BoardOnTrack (Year 0 and beyond) for governance support and capacity building. Onboarding modules, annual training, and annual self-evaluations will be used to support the implementation of best practices in governance. Additionally, the school leader will be evaluated by an ad hoc Evaluation Committee on an annual basis. The review will utilize aspects of the BoardOnTrack's evaluation tool in conjunction with the TEAM Administrator Evaluation rubric to assess instructional leadership, culture, professional learning and growth, resource management, as well as academic performance goals, a self-evaluation, and school culture survey results.

Dr. Jeremy Sager, a BES Fellow with over 15 years of experience in public school and higher education, is the Proposed Executive Director of Novus SMART Academy. Dr. Sager will serve as the instructional leader and operational manager of the school. As such, he will be responsible for recruiting and hiring staff and will leverage connections with organizations such as Teach for America, Nashville Teacher Residency, Relay Graduate School of Education, and BES to recruit high-quality teachers, school leaders, and staff. Staff will receive ongoing coaching and development and professional development, in addition to an annual evaluation. Professional development plans include assessment protocols, implementing Get Better Faster, practice clinics with feedback protocols, weekly data meetings, and reteach structures. Budgeted salaries and benefits are competitive compared to local district averages.

The Facilities Task Force and Finance Committee will collaborate with a community advisor to evaluate potential properties. The team brings expertise in development, acquisition, and renovation in addition to market dynamics, real estate, financial planning, and budget management. Two possible facility options have been identified however the team is also pursuing options for co-location with a community-based organization.

The application identifies several anticipated challenges in the start-up phase including facilities, talent acquisition and retention, and funding, as well as how the founding team will mitigate these risks. The team plans to utilize the internal team expertise, as well as local and national supports to meet its goals.

Overall, the application outlines a clear start-up plan, strong governance structures, and detailed facility acquisition process.



FINANCIAL PLAN AND CAPACITY

PARTIALLY MEETS STANDARD

Summary

The founding team has secured start-up funding from a variety of grantors including BES, Charter School Growth Fund, Charter School Program (CSP), and Z Combinator to support the implementation of its Start Up plan. In addition, there are several other grant applications, philanthropy, and private donation requests that the team is pursuing to support Years 0-2.

The school's operating budget (Years 1-5) assumes a conservative enrollment number that is less than the targeted amount to support financial sustainability should the school experience enrollment variances of less than 10%. The application details several challenges that could result in negative impacts on the school's budget and provides plans to mitigate each of these including prioritizing essential expenditures such as staffing and instructional materials as well as scaling non-essential spending, however non-essential spending is not defined and it is unclear what impacts budget cuts may have, if any, to the implementation of the educational program.

Financial oversight will be led by the proposed Board Treasurer/Finance Committee Chair who has economics and finance experience. The school will utilize EdTec for back-office services including payroll management, accounting and financial management, and state and federal reporting. An independent auditor will be hired to conduct an annual financial audit and review of internal controls, financial statements, and compliance with TDOE requirements. Additionally, EdTec will train the Executive Director and Assistant Principal of Operations and Finance in financial management to ensure compliance and school-based operational readiness. There are clear distinctions in the role of the board and school administration regarding financial oversight, accountability, and management.

The budget workbook includes budget assumption notes and while revenue sources are fully detailed with accompanying methodology, the narrative does not clearly explain how many cost assumptions were determined. Agreements or MOUs for contracted services are not provided to determine if budgeted costs align with the scope of work described in the application. Criteria for vendor/contractor selection was also not provided.

Overall, the budget is based on generally reasonable expense assumptions, including staffing and benefits, and there are viable contingency plans in the event of slight enrollment variations. Additionally, the team has demonstrated success in attaining sufficient grant funding to support Start Up activities.

