



JANUARY 2025

# Quality Charter Review Recommendation Report 2025

Evaluated By

**Tennesseans for Student Success**

## Tennesseans for Student Success

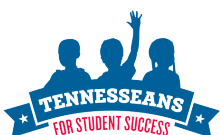
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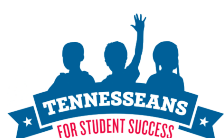
This document was adapted from the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) Charter School Application Recommendation Report. NACSA is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the quality of public education by improving the performance of charter school organizations. NACSA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

<b>Overview</b>	Basic information about the proposed school as presented in the application.
<b>Recommendation</b>	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. <b>A recommendation for approval requires a score of Meets or Exceeds Standard in all three primary application sections.</b>
<b>Evaluation</b>	<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>
<b>Rating Characteristics</b>	<p>The following definitions guide evaluator ratings:</p> <p><b>Meets or Exceeds Standard:</b> 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><b>Partially Meets Standard:</b> Responses meet the criteria in some respects but lack detail and/or require additional information in one or more areas.</p> <p><b>Does Not Meet Standard:</b> 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

Rocketship Education Tennessee

## Proposed School Name

Rocketship TN 4

## Proposed Location

LaVergne and Smyrna, Rutherford County

## Board Members

April Taylor, Abby Spaulding, Anderson Green, Dr. Diarese George, Henderson Majors, Dr. James Hildreth, Jeff Brown, John Eason, June Nwabara, Kanika Covert, Lindsey Margraf Rudd, Malick Gaye, Phil Elbert, Rob Elliot

## 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	96	96	96	96	96	96
1	48	96	96	96	96	96
2	48	48	96	96	96	96
3	24	48	48	96	96	96
4	24	24	48	48	96	96
5		24	24	48	48	96
6						
7						
8						
9						
10						
11						
12						
Totals	240	336	408	480	528	576

## Anticipated Student Demographics

**Enrollment Demographics:** Not provided

**Special Population Projections:** 25% ED, 10% SWD, 40%ELL

## Proposed School Leader

Not yet identified

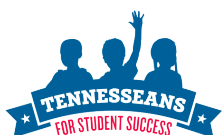
## Mission and Vision

*Mission:* The Mission of Rocketship Public Schools 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.

*Vision:* Not provided

## Educational Model/Instructional Design

Personalized Learning/Rotational K-5



## RECOMMENDATION: APPROVE

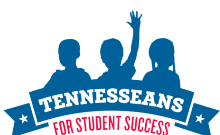
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### Application Strengths Summary

- The application is aligned with the school mission and goals across the academic plan.
- Rocketship's curriculum and assessments are fully aligned with Tennessee's academic state standards.
- The application details the successes of its existing 3 Tennessee schools, all of whom scored a Level 4 or 5 on TVAAS Composite scores in 2022-2023.
- There is a strong alignment between the school's academic goals and the Rutherford County Schools' Charter School Performance Framework.
- The instructional approaches are supported by research to improve student outcomes.
- The proposed school has a comprehensive plan to meet TCA § 9-6-3115 requirements of ensuring all eligible 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> graders receive tutoring, remediation, and support, including summer school.
- The proposed school will benefit from the experience and expertise of the regional network team.
- The application demonstrates a clear understanding of legal requirements for identification, services, and monitoring for special populations.
- The facility plan, and facility contingencies, reflect the experience of the network in successful facility acquisition and construction.
- The network demonstrates its commitment to ensuring that leaders and staff reflect the diversity of the student body and surrounding community with recruiting and hiring practices that are intentionally designed to attract candidates from the local community.
- The application details a comprehensive transportation plan that addresses daily transportation needs, summer school, and field trips, in addition to transportation for students whose IEP include required accommodations.
- The organization had demonstrated success in opening and operating high-quality charter schools across Nashville and will benefit from lessons learned from the national network's expansion efforts.

### Application Improvements Summary

- The application does not clearly describe how their analysis of demographics, population growth, and community input led them to their target enrollment numbers and do not identify how many families showing support have age-eligible children who would likely enroll.
- While 1 member of the board is a parent of a current Nashville Rocketship student, it is unclear if an additional parent will be added to represent the Rutherford County community.
- The application does not contain financial procedures, policies, systems, and processes for other fiscal tasks. The application states that RSED-National's Business team will ensure that "funds are managed diligently and with integrity" (p. 173).
- The sample CMO Agreements do not articulate deliverables, goals, or performance-evaluation benchmarks or other methods to enforce contract renewal or termination.



# ACADEMIC PLAN DESIGN AND CAPACITY

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## MEETS OR EXCEEDS STANDARD

### Summary

Rocketship TN 4 proposes to serve 576 students, K-5 at full capacity in La Vergne and Smyrna, two communities with rapid population growth and diverse demographic profiles. The school will implement evidence-based strategies for closing achievement gaps including, personalized learning and a rotational model with the use of real-time data to drive improvements.

Key Aspects of the Instructional Model:

- Personalized Learning & Rotational Model
- Social Emotional Learning
- Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports
- Meaningful inclusion
- Enrichment
- Community School Framework
- Parent Power
- Talent Development

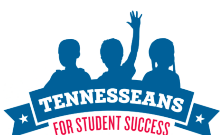
The current Rocketship TN schools located in Nashville are operating at near-full capacity and projects that TN 4 will have a Year 1 enrollment of 240 students based on parent feedback and analysis of population trends in the target areas. Input gathered from the community during information sessions and interviews informed several aspects of the school's design including family engagement programming, support for special populations, and transportation and accessibility. While letters of support are provided, it is unclear if there is sufficient demand from families with age eligible students. The Network support team will be primarily responsible for implementing the multi-phase student recruitment plan.

The application contains a robust assessment plan including baseline, formative, interim, and summative assessments with quarterly data review cycles to evaluate progress against network-wide benchmarks and accountability metrics. Teachers and leaders analyze classroom-level data in weekly data meetings to identify trends and adjust instructional strategies. Universal screening for both academic and behavioral needs will inform a Multi-Tiered System of Supports process which will provide students with tailored support and intervention.

Special Educators co-teach alongside general education teachers to support students with disabilities in the inclusive classroom setting and provide pull-out services, when needed, to ensure students have access to the least restrictive environment and a full continuum of services. Students qualifying as English Learners will receive targeted language development through co-teaching/push-in and pull-out services. Small group time is built into the daily schedule to minimize disruption to core instruction.

The school will implement multiple strategies to support its commitment to serving all students with excellence, including meaningful inclusion, equitable discipline, backfilling admissions, and successful service to diverse and at-risk populations. TN 4 seeks to provide a holistic educational experience and supplements core academics with after-school programs, sports clubs, and student leadership programs.

Overall, the application provides evidence that the school will offer research-based curriculum and instruction within a unique educational option for Rutherford County. The academic plan thoroughly describes how Rocketship TN 4 will implement an educational program with personalized learning, enrichment programming, and a strong culture of inclusion, as well as how the school will adjust for the differences in student demographics and needs in the target community compared to those of the existing Rocketship TN schools.



# OPERATIONS PLAN AND CAPACITY

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## MEETS OR EXCEEDS STANDARD

### Summary

The proposed school will be the 4<sup>th</sup> Rocketship School in Tennessee and will also be governed by the RSED-TN (Rocketship Education Tennessee) Board of Trustees. Currently there are 14 members with varied professional skill sets including, education, finance, law, and nonprofit governance, in addition to family and community representatives. It is unclear which Board members, if any, represent the Rutherford County Community. The Board will assess the school's success through quantitative and qualitative measures for academics, operations, as well as stakeholder feedback. Similarly, the school leader will be evaluated by the board on their ability to achieve measurable annual goals and effective leadership across academics, operations, and community engagement. To support effective school oversight, the Board will engage in annual self-evaluations, ongoing training, and professional growth opportunities in addition to regularly conducting skill audits to identify expertise gaps and recruitment plans to fill any that arise.

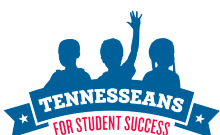
Launchpad Development, RSED-National's real estate affiliate, has experience in facility acquisition, management, and renovation. Rocketship National and Launchpad have begun investigating 3 potential locations and are in collaboration with experienced real estate brokers and local architects who were also involved in the RSED-TN's other 3 facility acquisition processes.

The Start-Up plan draws on RSED-National's over 17 years of experience and identifies key activities across facilities, organizing, family recruitment, talent, programming, schools, operations, marketing, and finance. During Year 0, the regional network team will allocate 8 staff members to lead the start-up efforts, including the recruitment of the school leader. While a leader has not yet been identified, qualifications and requirements are outlined in the job description. Once hired, the school leader will participate in professional development provided by the network and region including a personalized development plan as well as Rocketship's New Principal Training Cohort and ongoing support from the RSED-TN's Executive Director and Director of Schools.

The school will offer competitive salary and benefits, as well as incentive structures and robust professional development to support teacher recruitment and retention. Staggered planning time and weekly development sessions provide opportunities for teacher planning and collaboration, as well as instructional coaching and data analysis.

RSED-National's CMO division has served as the CMO for the RSED-TN schools since their authorization and will expand to service to TN 4, once approved. As such, the CMO Agreement between RSED-National and RSED-TN is currently being drafted. Sample agreements were included in the application that list CMO services including administration, expenditures, hiring personnel, and creating and implementing instructional methods with specific tasks documented in the contract appendix. While provided services and corresponding fees are clear, the conditions for renewal or termination, deliverables, goals, and benchmarks are vague.

Overall, the application demonstrates a clear delineation of roles between the relevant parties, as well as evidence that RSED-TN, with support from RSED-National, has the capacity and expertise to successfully replicate the Rocketship educational model for the students and families in Rutherford County.



# FINANCIAL PLAN AND CAPACITY

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## MEETS OR EXCEEDS STANDARD

### Summary

The financial model for Rocketship schools was developed based on more than 17 years of charter operation experience to allow schools to operate sustainably as they grow. TN 4's budget revenue and expense estimates are based on RSED-TN's last several years of operation. The budget does include unsecured revenue from the CSP grant however no private philanthropy is budgeted and should the grant not be awarded, the CMO Development team and RSED-TN will collaborate to pursue philanthropy through local and national donor pipelines to close the revenue gap. Additionally, contingencies and flexibility are built into the budget to ensure financial viability if enrollment does not match projections. In the event of cash flow challenges, the proposed school will be able to rely on RSED-National to provide internal financial support through internal grants, internal loans, or the deferral of network service costs.

As the application indicates, financial management responsibilities, including accounting, grants management, payroll, and retaining an independent auditor will all be conducted by RSED-National's Business team and therefor detailed descriptions of systems and processes are not included. Daily financial operations will be managed by the RSED-TN Executive Director.

To date, all existing RSED-TN schools have not received a corrective action or finding on their audited financial statements, are current on all their financial commitments, and have cash reserves, demonstrating positive fiscal health.

Overall, the RSED-National Business team brings extensive finance experience and capacity to implement financial responsibilities however the key financial duties, policies, and practices of the school and regional team are vague. The proposed budget is reasonable and based on the actual operations of local Rocketship schools and should unexpected financial shortfalls arise, TN 4 will have the financial stability and support of the national network.

