



QCR REPORT: TENNESSEE CAREER ACADEMY
MARCH 2023

Quality Charter Review Recommendation Report 2023

TENNESSEE CAREER ACADEMY

March 2023

Evaluated By

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. For more information, visit <http://qualitycharters.org>.

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 lacks 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

Tennessee Career Academy, Inc.

Proposed School Name

Tennessee Career Academy

Proposed Location

Central City West
Memphis, Tennessee

Board Members

Tom Marino, President
Octavius Nickson, Vice President
Andy Davis, Secretary/Treasurer
Dr. Mark Conley, Member
Charles Gerber, Member
Elliot Perry, Member
Tate Wilson, Member
Dr. John Barker, Executive Director

Proposed School Leader

Dr. John Barker, Executive Director
Principal anticipated December 2023

Enrollment Projections

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
6th Grade	100	100	100	100	125
7th Grade		100	100	100	100
8th Grade			100	100	100
9th Grade	100	100	100	100	125
10th Grade		100	100	100	100
11th Grade			100	100	100
12th Grade			50	100	100
Total	200	400	650	700	750

Anticipated Student Demographics

Enrollment Demographics:

MSCS Averages Estimated
(pg. 19)

Special Population Projections:

50% Econ. Disadvantaged
13% Students w/ Disabilities
15% English Lang. Learners

Mission and Vision

Mission: To be the top-rated provider of world-ready graduates in the South by combining high-performance core curriculum with career-focused training and experiences.

Vision: Reimagine education so that every young person has the skills to succeed in the modern global workforce.

Educational Model/Instructional Design

Career and Technical Education



RECOMMENDATION

DENY

Application Strengths Summary

- Applicant demonstrates keen understanding of district priorities and community needs
- Applicant outlines robust identification and support system for special populations
- Applicant cites extensive partnerships with areas stakeholders and dynamic plans for family, community, and district engagement
- Unique academic focus not currently available to students within the district
- Emphasis on career awareness and work-based learning opportunities with community businesses
- Robust teacher recruitment, onboarding, and professional development plan
- Founding team and board possess expertise necessary for start-up and school management

Application Improvements Summary

- Additional opportunity exists to demonstrate effectiveness of CTE focused model on student achievement, post-secondary enrollment, and career placement (Section 1.1)
- Lack of finalized core subject curriculum limits evidence for research-based curriculum and teaching methodology (Section 1.3)
- Parent letters of support or petition signatures will be necessary to improve evidence of parent and community interest (Section 1.12)
- Fundraising timeline limits evidence of financial resources, though board members elicit confidence with finance, fundraising, and grant writing expertise (Section 2.2)

ACADEMIC PLAN DESIGN AND CAPACITY

PARTIALLY MEETS STANDARD

Summary

Tennessee Career Academy (TCA) is designed to serve 750 students, at capacity, in grades 6-12 in Central City West, Memphis, Tennessee. The applicant is hopeful to locate the school in an underutilized building, formerly occupied by Memphis Tech High School. Contingency properties in the area are also being considered. The applicant proposes to meet the statutory purpose of charter school in the state of Tennessee by their, "... commitment to high-quality instruction in both the general education and career and technical education areas" (pg. 11). One key priority of the school is to produce "world-ready students who have substantial preparation to ensure their success after graduation, whatever they choose" (pg. 9).

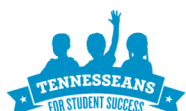
The career technical education focus of the school is comprised of four "TCA Pathways" in Business and Communication, Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing, Health and Human Services, and Skilled Trades. The applicant outlines a plan for community engagement to begin in March 2023, including community focus group sessions. Letters of support from numerous community non-profits and businesses are included. The applicant can benefit from including letters of support from families interested in enrolling in the school to better demonstrate parent engagement.

Key features of the proposed school include:

- Focus on career exploration, starting in grade 6
- Intention for every graduate to complete at least one industry certification
- Individualized graduation plans, including ACT prep course for all students
- No core curriculum yet identified
- Emphasis on Social Emotional Learning (CASEL assessments)

The applicant thoroughly explains how they plan to utilize a multi-tiered system of support to address the needs of English language learners and students with disabilities, including students enrolling with moderate to severe disabilities.

Overall, the application lacks explicit evidence that the school will offer research-based curriculum and teaching methods in core content areas, as the applicant does not plan to finalize curriculum until March 2024 (pg. 64). This may limit academic evidence necessary for application recommendation. The use of CASE/MasteryConnect does demonstrate intention to align curriculum with state academic standards and district strategic goals.



OPERATIONS PLAN AND CAPACITY

MEETS OR EXCEEDS STANDARD

Summary

School leadership is defined as an Executive Director, Principal, Office Manager, and Director of Operations to be hired in Year 0, followed by the addition of a Director of Academic Supports (SPED, ELL, Assessment) to be hired in Year 1. The school will utilize CASE/Mastery Connect for assessment and student progress monitoring. Substantial wrap around services and parent/community learning opportunities are outlined, including summer tutoring.

Members of the board of directors will serve on the following committees: Executive Committee, Finance Committee, Academy/Program Committee, and Development Committee (pg.139). The board will utilize the Tennessee Charter School Center and BoardOnTrack for required training and resources for board duties.

Clarification is needed in the following areas:

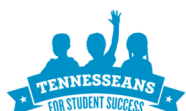
- Advisory committee structure to ensure diverse representation and consistent input from parents and stakeholders
- Anticipated applicant pools for principal and teacher recruitment
- Principal evaluation process
- Food service contingency if MSCS is unable to assume contract

Staff recruitment and professional development will be facilitated by TNTP including effectiveness coach consultation during the onboarding process.

Evaluation of teaching staff will follow the TEAM model. The Executive Director performance will be evaluated "in a manner to be determined by the Board" (pg. 61). The board will be evaluated annually by the Tennessee School Board Association.

The applicant proposes the purchase and renovation, or lease of MSCS property at 1266 Poplar Avenue. Transportation planning will be contingent upon parent feedback with a small number of chartered pick-up spots, MATA coordination, ride share, and gas cards facilitated by the Director of Operations.

Overall, the applicant brings extensive community awareness and robust partnerships with district and community stakeholders. The applicant founding team demonstrates substantial board, start-up, and operations experience.



FINANCIAL PLAN AND CAPACITY

MEETS OR EXCEEDS STANDARD

Summary

Financial policies and procedures will be finalized by the Executive Director, the Finance Committee, Director of Operations, and GT3 Group as the back-office service provider (pg. 208).

GT3 Group has extensive experience working with charter schools in Memphis, and will be contracted in the second quarter of the planning year to provide accounting, purchasing, payroll, facilities financing, and project management services. The applicant will conduct an RFP process during the planning year to select an auditing firm. The board will monitor school finances monthly.

The applicant will consult with TNTP for principal recruitment upon approval of the charter application with plans to hire teaching staff and counselors starting December 2023.

Additional staffing details:

- Teacher and staff salaries are competitive including generous teacher bonuses
- TCRS state retirement system will be utilized
- 1:25 core academic teacher to student ratio in Year 1
- 1:26 SPED teacher to student ratio in Year 1
- 1:30 EL teacher to student ratio in Year 1
- 2 CTE teachers in Year 1 may be conservative for numerous CTE pathways
- 1:200 school counselor to student ratio in Year 1
- No educational assistants projected in five-year staffing projections

The applicant anticipates fundraising to be initiated in August 2023 (pg. 63) with the goal of \$750,000 from local foundations with a contingency loan, if necessary. CSP Startup Grant is not included in Year 0 assumptions.

Overall, the board has extensive expertise in finance, fundraising, and grant writing to ensure a successful startup (p. 61). The board also has extensive construction and project management experience, giving credibility to the proposed renovation timeline. Staffing projections may be conservative given the anticipated number of special populations and the breadth of CTE programs to be offered. Delaying fundraising until August 2023 may limit the financial evidence necessary for application recommendation.

