



MARCH 2025

Quality Charter Review Recommendation Report 2025

Evaluated By

Tennesseans for Student Success

Tennesseans for Student Success

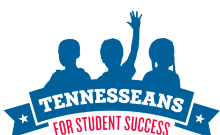
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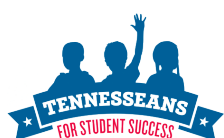
This document was adapted from the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) Charter School Application Recommendation Report. NACSA is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the quality of public education by improving the performance of charter school organizations. NACSA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

The Rock Academy of Nashville

Proposed School Name

The Rock Academy

Proposed Location

Nashville, TN

Board Members

Nathan Garrett, Tera Hambrick, Jon Rybka, Jennifer Wade, Guadalupe Davalos Meyers

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						
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						
9	88	88	88	88	88	88
10		85	85	85	85	85
11			82	82	82	82
12				78	78	78
Totals	88	173	255	333	333	333

Anticipated Student Demographics

Enrollment Demographics: none provided

Proposed School Leader

Dr. Ahmed White

Special Population Projections:

>75% ED, 25% SWD, 29% ELLs

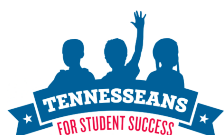
Mission and Vision

Mission: The mission of Rock Academy is to re-engage disconnected youth to ensure that they succeed in the postsecondary pathway of their choice. We envision a world where all young people have **the power** to share their own futures.

Vision: None provided

Educational Model/Instructional Design

Mastery-Based Education Opportunity School



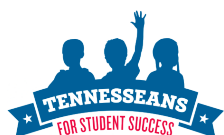
RECOMMENDATION: APPROVE

Application Strengths Summary

- The application outlines goals that are aligned to the Opportunity Schools Accountability Framework, as well as to state, federal, and authorizer frameworks to ensure that relevant and rigorous program monitoring occurs. Additionally, a comparable data set based on national trends was used for comparative measures.
- The application connects the school design elements with Whole Child Design Model principles, and the aligned school practices, as well as provides the research based to support the effectiveness of each.
- While the academic program will be flexible to meet student needs, all course material will be aligned to the Tennessee State Standards
- A detailed assessment plan provides information, and opportunities, for teachers to make immediate, short-term, and longer-term instructional and student support decisions.
- The application contains detailed research into the target student population, including an analysis of MNPS high schools with high chronic absenteeism, low graduate rates, and high dropout rates, in addition to a heat map of families receiving financial food assistance, to demonstrate the need for the proposed school.
- The application contains a robust number of letters of support from community members, including service providers who work with the target student population who will serve as student recruitment partners by referring families.
- The lead applicants have collected 225 completed interest surveys and conducted 65 home visits with families who qualify as Opportunity Youth as part of a strong early community engagement process.
- The facility team includes local and national experts with track records of successful acquisition, construction, and management.
- The application clearly outlines the qualifications, experience, and training of the proposed Executive Director as well as how these skills will be integral to the success of the proposed school.
- The application provides a detailed professional development plan focusing on instruction, culture and discipline, and operations intentionally spread throughout each quarter of the school year.
- The application details a Sustainability Plan and a Fundraising Plan to justify philanthropic targets as well as the rationale for supplementing student-based funding sources to implement the model.

Application Improvements Summary

- The application lists curricula that are under consideration but specific criteria or timeline for adoption is not provided.
- While the application lists strategies that will be used to engage families once the school is operational, there is a lack of detail provided in the plan to evaluate if the strategies are likely to initiate and maintain meaningful relationships.
- While the application describes a plan to develop financial policies and procedures, they are not yet developed.



ACADEMIC PLAN DESIGN AND CAPACITY

MEETS OR EXCEEDS STANDARD

Summary

The Rock Academy will serve 333 students, at capacity, in grades 9-12th as an Opportunity Public Charter School targeting students who are at increased risk of dropping out of high school as measured by chronic absenteeism, foster involvement, and/or experiencing additional risk factors.

The school will implement a Mastery-based education model and instruction will be individualized. Upon enrollment, the school will identify individual risk factors for students in order to align resources. The academic program will function as a continuous cycle of RTI2 to support student needs with leveled assignments and support, in addition to having extended literacy blocks and a flex block to allow for intervention opportunities during the school day.

Based on the extensive research completed by the founding team, a third of Nashville High School students meet the criteria for being chronically absent. The applicants identified the drivers of chronic absenteeism in Nashville, which include findings that kids are disengaged, and schools are not designed to serve all kids equally. The school's objectives are to reconnect students to school, improve their academic and social emotional skills, engage with diverse post-secondary pathways, and graduate students who are prepared to persist in their pathway of choice.

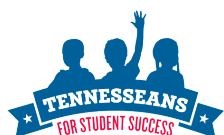
The school will implement a Whole Child Design model, a research-backed structure for addressing the needs of at-risk youth. Key features of the proposed school include:

- Positive Developmental Relationships
- Environments Filled with Safety and Belonging
- Rich Learning Experience and Knowledge Development
- Development of Skills, Habits, and Mindsets
- Integrated Support Systems
- Career and Technical Education
- Mastery-Based Learning

The applicant conducted focus groups, advisory groups to support with analysis of trends, meetings with community members and experts in the field, and site visits and learning experiences from peer schools across the country to identify root causes for student challenges, as well as what strategies worked to engage at-risk students. The design of the school is responsive to the data collected during community engagement including use of a House structure, full-time mentors that matriculate with the cohort, on-demand counseling, and flexible, culturally responsive curriculum that is mastery-based.

A variety of assessments, including diagnostic and universal screening data, will be used to establish baseline data, strengths, and areas of need. Ongoing data collection allows teachers to provide individualized, just-in-time instructional support to students. Teachers have built in common collaboration time during their daily schedule and will meet bi-weekly as grade levels and content-specific groups to make instructional adjustments as evidenced by data. Special education and ESL teachers will also participate in these sessions to provide input into adjustments and support. Staff will engage in weekly shared planning time, coaching and development, annual step-back days, strong student support staffing and an intentionally flexible instructional model that allows for constant monitoring of progress and opportunities to adjust strategies in the moment.

The leadership has extensive experience supporting special populations and the application demonstrates a thorough understanding of identification, service delivery, and monitoring requirements for students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and gifted learners. Overall, the academic plan details a strong academic program with evidence of community support.



OPERATIONS PLAN AND CAPACITY

MEETS OR EXCEEDS STANDARD

Summary

The Governing Board will provide oversight of the school's academic, operational, and financial performance in alignment with the mission and model. It currently includes five members with a broad range of backgrounds and areas of expertise, including organizational management, law, community involvement, education, personnel/human capital, and experience specific to the target student population. The board will also seek to appoint a caregiver of a student who is enrolled in the school within six months of opening.

The board will evaluate the success of the school using performance against established goals that align with the Opportunity School Performance Framework, the academic model, and the student population. The Executive Director will regularly present data in aggregate and disaggregated views to support the identification of, and response to, trends. The Executive Director will be evaluated on an annual basis using a tool that reflects the mission, academic model, and performance goals.

The proposed Executive Director, Dr. Ahmed White, has an extensive background in education leadership and working with the target student population. The application contained several personal recommendation letters from former employees, colleagues, and families of students whom his work has impacted. He will receive development support through the Nashville Incubator Fellowship, Modern Classrooms Leadership Coaching cohort, and the New Schools Venture Fund, who are all invested in the successful launch of the first Opportunity School in Tennessee.

The facility plan includes operating in an incubation site for the first five years, before moving to a permanent facility. The facility acquisition, management, and renovation/construction management team is composed of local and national experts, with the backing of the Nashville Incubator which will provide both technical and financial support for securing a facility. Several possible sites have been identified and a timeline developed around authorization is identified. Given that all stakeholders have named transportation as one of the primary impediments to sustained attendance, transportation is a key aspect of the operations plan. Daily transportation, as well as transportation to CTE sites, field trips, and afterschool activities, will be provided by a contracted private provider.

To support staff in implementing the innovative and unique educational model, teachers will participate in 21 days of summer in-service, have explicit data analysis professional development, individual coaching and support, observations, regular feedback, as well as targeted developmental support. The TEAM model will be used to evaluate all educators annually.

The application identified potential start-up challenges, including being the first school of its kind in Tennessee, recruiting qualified and mission-aligned staff, student recruitment, securing a facility, implementing the innovative academic model, and ensuring financial viability. Mitigation strategies and contingency plans are provided for each area of operation. The school plans to partner with a multitude of community service providers and support agencies who have signed letters of support and commitments to ongoing partnerships.

Overall, the application demonstrates a strong operations plan including a thorough start-up plan, strong community partnerships, and a supportive staff development process.



FINANCIAL PLAN AND CAPACITY

MEETS OR EXCEEDS STANDARD

Summary

The application acknowledges that the proposed model is expensive and will require the school to meet enrollment targets, as well as utilize philanthropy to supplement student-based funding. The budget is intentionally based on conservative enrollment targets and invests in the key elements of the innovative model including its intentional staffing structure to support the target population, wrap-around services, and a line item of \$20,000 to support enrollment efforts.

The application details the unique features of the school and associated higher cost per student, as well as a justification for not diluting the model in order to operate off student-based funding alone and to utilize fundraising to fill the gap. The Sustainability Plan describes the research and landscape analysis that were conducted to determine that The Rock Academy will need to raise \$80K- \$1M per year in additional funding. The applicant demonstrates their previous fundraising successes in which they received \$750,000 from two funders to support the development of the school.

Year 0 revenue is projected at \$1.9 million dollars in philanthropy and grants, of which \$500K is secured. The associated Fundraising Plan outlines the status and timeline of each grant the team has pursued to justify the reasonableness of the revenue target. Additionally, the Fundraising strategy for Year 1 is multifaceted and accounts for staff and board time required to accomplish the goals. In the event that fundraising from known foundations does not materialize, other funding opportunities including pursuing individual donations, corporations, and fundraising from events, will be utilized. The team is also prepared to consolidate programming options, including staged roll out of CTE programs and fewer cohorts in order to reduce staffing without compromising the model.

The school will contract with GT3, an experienced charter finance vendor, to manage accounting, purchasing, and payroll. Financial oversight and financial policy development and implementation will be the responsibility of the Executive Director, Principal, Director of Operations, Finance Committee, and GT3. The application describes the roles and responsibilities of each Finance team member as well as their level of financial expertise.

Overall, budget expense and revenue assumptions provided are reasonable and based on research from the field, and while it is reliant on supplementary revenue sources, the application justifies the rationale, and demonstrates the team's success in fundraising.

