



QCR REPORT: ACA RUTHERFORD
MARCH 2023

Quality Charter Review Recommendation Report 2023

AMERICAN CLASSICAL ACADEMY RUTHERFORD

March 2023

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. 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

American Classical Education

Proposed School Name

American Classical Academy
Rutherford

Proposed Location

Murfreesboro or Smyrna,
Tennessee

Board Members

Dolores Gresham, Board Chair
Tricia Stickle, Board Member
Joey Hale, Board Member
Darrell Woodard, Board Member
Dennis Pearson, Board Member
Michelle Garcia, Board Member
Rich Hagland, Board Secretary/CEO

Proposed School Leader

Joel Schellhammer, Executive Director
Phillip Schwenk, Director of School
Development
Principal anticipated Sept. 1, 2023

Mission and Vision

Mission: To train the minds and develop character in students through a content-rich Classical Education in the liberal arts and sciences utilizing instruction in the principles of moral practices and civic virtue.

Vision: To graduate classically educated students equipped with intellectual capacity, personal character, and service and leadership skills, to live as successful and participatory members of American society.

Educational Model/Instructional Design

Classical Education Model

Enrollment Projections

Grade Level	Year 1 2023-24	Year 2 2024-25	Year 3 2025-26	Year 4 2026-27	Year 5 2027-28	At Capacity 2033-34
K	60	60	60	60	60	60
1	60	60	60	60	60	60
2	60	60	60	60	60	60
3	60	60	60	60	60	60
4	50	50	50	50	50	50
5	50	50	50	50	50	50
6		50	50	50	50	50
7			50	50	50	50
8				50	50	50
9					50	50
10						50
11						50
12						50
Totals	340	390	440	490	540	690

Anticipated Student Demographics

Enrollment Demographics:

41% Black/Hispanic/Native
American (pg.36)
59% White

Special Population Projections:

16% Econ. Disadvantaged
9% Students w/ Disabilities
16% English Lang. Learners



RECOMMENDATION

DENY

Application Strengths Summary

- Applicant demonstrates community outreach and robust parent and community interest
- Applicant outlines robust identification and support system for special populations
- 22 BCSI affiliated schools are successfully operated across 11 states, enrolling special populations at rates higher than district averages
- Unique academic focus not currently available to students within the district
- Prospective facilities locations have been identified, with contingency lease if necessary
- Substantial teacher onboarding and professional development plan
- Founding team and board possess expertise necessary for start-up and school management
- Significant start-up and revenue short fall contingency funding available

Application Improvements Summary

- Applicant should explicitly align enrollment projections and school performance/utilization data to proposed facilities locations (Section 1.2)
- Applicant should include explicit crosswalk demonstrating alignment of ACE K-12 Guide curriculum to Tennessee Academic Standards (pg. 40, Section 1.3)
- Evaluators could not locate Personal Finance .5 credit in high school coursework, necessary to meet Tennessee graduation requirements (Section 1.6)
- Applicant should outline robust wrap around services partnerships with area non-profits to support English language learner and economically disadvantaged student enrollment projections (Section 1.8)

ACADEMIC PLAN DESIGN AND CAPACITY

PARTIALLY MEETS STANDARD

Summary

American Classical Academy Rutherford (ACAR) is designed to serve 690 students, at capacity, in grades K-12 in Murfreesboro/Smyrna, Tennessee. The applicant has identified several prospective facilities locations with plans to construct a single building to house all grade levels upon completion. Contingency lease and short-term options are also indicated. The applicant proposes to meet the statutory purpose of charter school in the state of Tennessee by offering "Classical Education curriculum... ensure[ing] a diverse and equitable student body with equal opportunities for achievement and growth" (pg. 13). One key priority of the school is to offer a 'back to basics' school environment... run by highly competent and trusted teachers who will appropriately challenge young people to learn through perseverance, honesty, and service to others" (pg. 12).

The focus of the school includes explicit phonetic instruction, fundamental math instruction, utilization of primary sources, the Socratic method, and an inquiry-based approach to science instruction. The applicant outlines robust community engagement that has amassed 200 responses to a community interest survey. Letters of support from numerous (>30) community members, parents, non-profits and businesses are included. Key features of the proposed school include:

- ACE K-12 Guide for K-8 ELA, science, and high school curriculum (Core Knowledge Sequence)
- Literacy Essentials for literacy skills curriculum
- Singapore Math for Math curriculum
- Discriminant use of technology
- "Civic virtue" character education
- Formal Latin coursework starting at 6th grade and required for high school graduation

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. Additional clarity is warranted for student daily scheduled intervention time, and the process and frequency for student "ability grouping."

Overall, the application lacks explicit evidence that the ACE K-12 Guide is aligned with Tennessee Academic Standards. This may limit academic evidence necessary for application recommendation. The use of iReady, NWEA MAP, and Aimsweb assessments demonstrates intention to align curriculum with state academic standards.



OPERATIONS PLAN AND CAPACITY

MEETS OR EXCEEDS STANDARD

Summary

School leadership is defined as an Executive Director, Director of School Development, and a principal to be hired in Year 0. The school will utilize iReady, NWEA MAP, and AimsWeb for internal assessment and student progress monitoring. The applicant indicates plans to create community partnerships for wrap around services and plans to offer tutoring before school and after school for all grades as well as concurrently with recess for upper grade students.

Members of the board of directors will serve on the following committees: Executive/Governance Committee, Finance/Audit Committee, Education Committee, and a Local Advisory Committee (pg.128). The board will utilize Tennessee Charter School Center and BoardOnTrack for required training and resources for board duties.

Applicant has identified potential community partners including:

- Rutherford County Chamber of Commerce
- Optimist Club of Murfreesboro
- The Center for the Arts
- Local houses of worship

Staff professional development will utilize Barney Charter School Initiative (BCSI) programming including data interpretation, trauma-informed teaching and learning, and culturally responsive pedagogy. The applicant would benefit from offering explicit Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion training.

Evaluation of teaching staff will follow the TEAM model. The Executive Director and principal will also be evaluated using the TEAM model.

The applicant proposes the purchase of land with intentions to build a facility large enough to house all grades at capacity. Alternative short-term sites will also be considered, if necessary. The applicant does not plan to offer transportation, unless enrolled families communicate need. A contracted transportation service provider will be utilized, if necessary. ACAR will solicit bids for a food service provider or partner with the district, to provide breakfast, lunch, and snack to all students.

Overall, the applicant founding team and board demonstrate 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 ACE board and Prestige School Solutions as the back-office service provider (Attachment O pg. 4).

Prestige School Solutions has extensive experience working with charter schools across the country, and will be contracted in the first quarter of the planning year to provide payroll and fiscal controls policies. 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 utilize board member connections and national applicant pools for principal recruitment upon approval of the charter application with plans to hire teaching staff and a social worker starting August 2023.

Additional staffing details:

- Teacher and staff salaries are competitive including generous teacher bonuses
- TCRS state retirement system will be utilized
- 1:21 core academic teacher to student ratio in Year 1
- 1:10 SPED teacher to student ratio in Year 1
- 1:54 EL teacher to student ratio in Year 1
- 1:340 school social worker to student ratio in Year 1; 1:540 by Year 5
- 6 educational assistants in Year 1; 10 by Year 5

The applicant anticipates primary funding by public revenues (Attachment O, pg. 1) with the budget reflecting conservative assumptions. ACE will provide the school with access to a \$750,000 no-interest start-up loan and an additional \$1,000,000 line of credit through the American Classical Education Foundation. CSP Grant is calculated into Year 0 and carried over into Year 1 and Year 2 assumptions.

Overall, the board has extensive expertise in finance, fundraising, and grant writing to ensure a successful startup (pg. 9). The board also has extensive construction and real estate experience, giving credibility to the proposed renovation timeline. Special education and educational assistant staffing projections are generous, with low student to core academic teacher ratios. The applicant should consider additional EL staffing. The applicant should consider hiring an additional social worker as the school reaches capacity. The applicant financial plan and proposed budget are sound.

