

MARCH 2024




Quality Charter Review Recommendation Report 2024

Evaluated By

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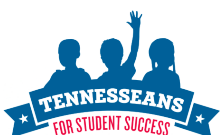
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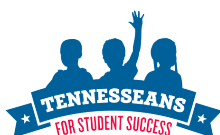
This document was adapted from the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) Charter School Application Recommendation Report. NACSA is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the quality of public education by improving the performance of charter school organizations. NACSA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

Journey Community Schools

Proposed School Name

Journey Northeast Academy

Proposed Location

Sycamore View
Memphis, TN

Board Members

Dr. Nickalous Manning, Karen Hartridge, Charloris Isabel-Hawkins, Kate Lareau, Kevin Leslie, Amanda Montgomery, Cyrus Purnell, Camille Jones Wellington, Dr. Zakiya Donelson Woods

Proposed School Leader

Not yet identified

Mission and Vision

Mission: Engage families and community partners in our students' learning journeys; cultivate a safe, positive, and joyous learning environment; and empower teachers and leaders with support to deliver an inclusive, innovative, and rigorous education.

Vision: To develop a community of lifelong learners who excel in all areas of life.

Educational Model/Instructional Design

General Academic Focus

Enrollment Projections

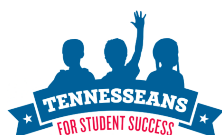
Grade Level	Year 1 2025-26	Year2 2026-27	Year 3 2027-28	Year4 2028-29	Year 5 2029-30	At Capacity
K	88	88	88	88	88	66
1	88	88	88	88	88	66
2		88	88	88	88	66
3			88	88	88	66
4			88	88	88	66
5				88	88	66
6					66	44
7						44
8						44
9						
10						
11						
12						
Totals	176	264	440	528	594	528

Anticipated Student Demographics

Enrollment Demographics: 44% Black, 39% White, 13% Hispanic, 2% Asian

Special Population Projections:

66% FRL 10% SWD, 16% ELL



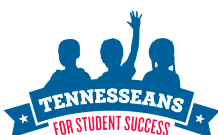
RECOMMENDATION: Approve

Application Strengths Summary

- The application outlines core components of the Academic Plan that align with TN legislation and Memphis Shelby County School's Annual Plan.
- The founding team is in the process of developing relationships with community organizations in the Sycamore View area.
- The Academic Plan emphasizes the creation of an inclusive, innovative, and rigorous education in a safe, positive, and joyous learning environment in alignment with the school's mission and vision.
- The application outlines the research-base to support the school's primary focus on literacy as a tool to close academic achievement gaps in the target student population.
- The application provides literacy outcome data from East Academy, one of the network's schools, indicating success with improving academic performance.
- The performance framework for the proposed school aligns with MSCS and TDOE model frameworks to evaluate academic, operational, and financial performance.
- The application contains a thorough plan for English language acquisition and supports for students with a non-English language background.
- The application contains clear identification, programming, and monitoring procedures for special populations and at-risk students.
- The network has a clear plan for recruiting, hiring, and training school leadership and key staff.
- The school plans to offer a food service system to students at no cost.
- The application contains a robust plan to ensure safety and security at the school.

Application Improvements Summary

- The application does not address the addition of two grade levels in Year 3 (p. 22, 101) when all other years adds only one grade.
- The application includes information on increased academic performance in literacy for the network schools, however, does not disaggregate data to demonstrate the closing of achievement gaps for minority or low-income students. The application also does not address why the Journey Hanley School K-8 that was authorized by the Achievement School District is no longer operated by the network.
- While the application contains letters of support from community organizations and existing partners, no letters from current or prospective families were included.
- While the board satisfies the legal requirement of having a parent serve on the board, given the three different schools and different communities it does not seem that a rotation of parent participation between the schools will provide adequate parent input.
- It is unclear how a lack of daily transportation may impact enrollment and accessibility. The application also does not contain a plan to provide transportation to students with special transportation needs.



ACADEMIC PLAN DESIGN AND CAPACITY

MEETS OR EXCEEDS STANDARD

Summary

Journey Northeast Academy will serve 528 students, at capacity, in grades K-8 in an area of Memphis, TN that is currently without a public elementary or middle school option. The two closest school options to the proposed location are also overenrolled. The school will implement the same general academic focus that is implemented at the network's two other schools. The model will have a strong focus on literacy, following the Science of Reading and data-driven instruction.

Key features of the school include:

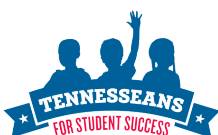
- Rigorous, Standards-Based Tier 1 Curricula
- Individualized Literacy Intervention
- Trauma-informed and culturally responsive practices
- Social-emotional learning (SEL)
- Positive-Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)
- Core Values
- Sense of Belonging
- Frequent data analysis

The daily schedule features an All Hands on Deck (AHOD) block to allow for students to receive literacy intervention specific to their needs in flexible groupings across grade levels. Additionally, a daily math intervention block is built into the math schedule. This schedule supports inclusive practice by ensuring that students with disabilities have access to grade-level content and instruction with their peers to the maximum extent possible.

The application contains a robust assessment plan including universal screeners, benchmark assessments, curriculum embedded assessments, and prerequisite skill analysis. Assessment data is used to inform the school's Tiered instruction framework and interventions. Network leadership meets with school Principals on a weekly basis to examine data using prescribed data protocols. Additionally, quarterly step-back data meetings are used to make high-level adjustments to instructional plans. Teachers also meet with leadership on a weekly basis to analyze and apply assessment data.

The school will partner with iOpening Enterprises which will provide professional development to all staff on embedding trauma-informed, responsive practices into their instruction. They will also coordinate implementation teams who will meet regularly to examine cultural data, identify root causes, and prescribe solutions. The school will also implement Lions Quest, a CASEL-aligned SEL curriculum to foster a sense of belonging and academic excellence. The school will focus on creating a positive learning environment with a sense of belonging. Structures including Orientation, Culture Weeks, Family Meetings, and Acts of Recognition will be used to support the student culture.

Overall, the application outlines an academic plan that is based on a successful model with an emphasis on literacy and strong school culture.



OPERATIONS PLAN AND CAPACITY

MEETS OR EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS

Summary

The Journey Community Board of Directors currently has eight members with experience overseeing the academic, operational, and financial performance of the network's current two schools. The board receives relevant performance data on a regular basis and uses a committee structure to analyze the information. Additionally, the board annually evaluates the network Executive Director and completes a self-assessment of through BoardOnTrack.

The startup plan contains key preopening activities in the areas of governance, operations, human resources, community engagement, enrollment, academics, and facilities that will be completed by members of the board, the network team and the principal of the new school. The plan was informed by the current operations of the two network schools. The application identified four key challenges: human capital, recruitment and enrollment of students, securing a facility, and navigating operations and funding. A key mitigation strategy is the expertise and experience of the Executive Director and Vice President of Finance and Operations who were part of the founding team of East Academy, the network's first charter school in 2016.

The personnel section outlines a variety of systems and structures to support and develop talent. Teachers will participate in a School Retreat, Morning Huddles, Wellness Buddy program, Mentorship program, and receive regular acts of appreciation or recognition. Additionally, teachers who are interested in growing professionally will be offered an array of leadership opportunities including content leadership and mentoring. Administrators will also participate in a retreat with other network leaders, Leader Week, Culture Walkthroughs, and onboarding supports. While a school leader has not yet been identified, the network has begun recruitment activities and has a target start date of July 1st, 2024. During the pre-opening year, the leader will be responsible for key activities such as hiring and will also receive coaching and support to fully orient them to the mission, vision, academic plan, core values, and systems and structures of the network.

The facility acquisition process will be led by the Executive Director with the plan to lease a temporary facility for 1-2 years and purchase/renovate a longer-term facility for Years 3 and beyond. Initial conversations have begun with a potential lease space and a letter of support was provided. Partnerships with a real estate broker, architectural firm, consulting firms, and a general contractor will be secured as needed.

Overall, the network has clear structures for oversight, management, and support of Journey Community schools and is well equipped to replicate the instructional model. One operational concern identified is the lack of transportation service, in particular for students with special transportation needs.



FINANCIAL PLAN AND CAPACITY

MEETS OR EXCEEDS STANDARD

Summary

Journey Northeast Academy's preopening budget assumes receipt of the full CSP award amount and \$500,000 in fundraising for revenue sources. This will enable the hiring of the school leader and a part time business manager, in addition to paying for professional development, legal fees, materials, and recruitment activities.

Year 1 staff will include:

- Principal
- Assistant Principal
- Office Manager
- Facilities Technician
- General Education Teachers (9)
- Special Education Teacher
- Intervention Specialist

While starting salaries are competitive, the budget does not reflect the inclusion of dental or vision insurance coverage for employees. There is a modest allocation for bonuses (1.3% of salaries) but these factors may impact the retention of high-quality staff over time. In addition to consultants, contractors, professional development, and material resources, each school pays a proportionate share (15% of its per pupil revenues) to the network to support staffing and operations.

The proposed school's budget assumes philanthropic donation amounts of \$500,000 in Year 1 and \$350,000 in Year 2. The ED and Managing Director of Development & Special Projects will be responsible for fundraising efforts, with support of the board. The network has successfully raised substantial amounts of private funding since its inception and maintains strong relationships with philanthropic partners, however no commitment letters were included in this application to verify projected amounts.

While the school budget contains unsecured funding sources, the network has an experienced finance team, including contracted financial services. The board will monitor financial statements on a monthly basis and commits to achieving positive operating income each year, developing and implementing a financial model that is sustainable on public revenues, and maintaining 68-119 days of cash on hand to address any contingency expenses or delays in reimbursements.

The Journey Community Schools in operation have strong fund balances as of the last fiscal audit and the organization has a fund balance of \$11million. The network has also demonstrated success in budget and fiscal management, as well as fundraising, and has access to cash reserves and a line of credit to make up for revenue short falls that the school may experience due to lower than anticipated enrollment or reductions in TISA funding. Additionally, the school will pursue making strategic cost reductions of non-core teaching positions, school administration, and network positions or seek additional philanthropic resources.

