

MARCH 2024



Quality Charter Review Recommendation Report 2024

Evaluated By

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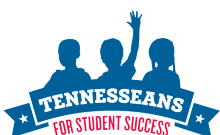
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This document was adapted from the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) Charter School Application Recommendation Report. NACSA is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the quality of public education by improving the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

Novus SMART Academy (K-8)

Proposed School Name

Novus SMART Academy (K-8)

Proposed Location

La Vergne & Smyrna, TN
Rutherford County

Board Members

Dominique Anderson, Brian Bradshaw, Marisa Cannata, Paula Collick, Celest Davis, Charles Frazier, Dwight Gordon, Jantrice Johnson, Travonnie Mackey, Regina Verdin, Jeremy Sager

Proposed School Leader

Jeremy Sager

Mission and Vision

Mission: Novus SMART Academy (K-8) will provide all scholars access to rigorous curricula and high-quality academic instruction that fosters a love for learning, embraces innovation and creativity, and encourages personal growth to thrive in their chosen college and career paths, making a positive impact on society.

Vision: Novus SMART Academy (K-8) inspires all scholars to unlock their full potential through extraordinary learning experiences that lead to successful college journeys and fulfilling careers, empowering them to make a positive impact on society and to achieve extraordinary success in all aspects of life.

Educational Model/Instructional Design

Asset-based Learning, Inquiry-based Learning, Project-based Learning

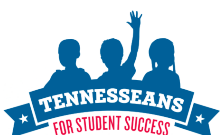
Enrollment Projections

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	110	110
1		88	88	88	88	110
2			88	88	88	110
3				88	88	110
4						110
5						88
6						88
7						88
8						88
9						
10						
11						
12						
Totals	88	176	264	352	462	902

Anticipated Student Demographics

Enrollment Demographics: Demographics from a variety of schools in the proposed area were included in the application but one set for projected demographics was not provided.

Special Population Projections: 21% FRL, 9% SWD, 23% ELL



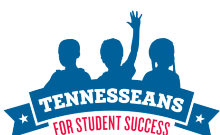
RECOMMENDATION: Deny

Application Strengths Summary

- The school will utilize growth, comparative, and absolute measures to evaluate some aspects of academic program success.
- The assessment plan includes universal screening, interim, benchmark, and progress monitoring tools used at various intervals to support delivery of interventions within the RTI2 process.
- The school will implement an extended day and year to increase learning time for students.
- The application contains a thorough Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) plan to encourage and reward demonstration of school core values.
- The application contains several dozen letters of recommendation for Dr. Jeremy Sagar, the proposed school leader, who has extensive experience and training in the education sector.

Application Improvements Summary

- The school model has been influenced by the success of many charter schools across the nation who implement various aspects of the proposed Academic Plan, however the application fails to clearly describe how all the design elements will be integrated to create a cohesive educational plan.
- The application does not address how the recent approval of three new charter schools to the area may impact community demand and enrollment. The application also acknowledges that there is a potential for saturation of charter schools in the proposed community in the next 3 to 5 years.
- The performance standards contained in the application do not measure key areas of the proposed school model and therefore do not align with the authorizer's performance framework requirement of the inclusion of a mission-specific goal. Additionally, the assessment plan does not identify any assessments to capture the level of attainment in arts, research or technology which are key tenants of the SMART educational model.
- The application details a rigorous student retention policy and indicates that scholars at risk of not meeting standard for promotion will receive remediation opportunities, including mandatory tutoring, however it is unclear when this support would be provided.
- While the application indicates that over 100 people have signed up for the electric newsletter, the application contains only 2 letters from potential founding families with age-eligible students.
- The application contains discrepancies in staffing in several sections with different director or principal roles starting at various phases of the school's build out.
- Initial year budgets have a reliance on unsecured fundraising and concrete and realistic plans to secure funds were not provided.



ACADEMIC PLAN DESIGN AND CAPACITY

PARTIALLY MEETS STANDARD

Summary

Novus SMART Academy proposes to serve 990 K-8 students, at full capacity, in La Vergne and Smyrna. The school seeks to offer a program that focuses on Science, Math, Arts/Electives, Research, and Technology (SMART) in an area of Rutherford County that is experiencing overcrowding in current local school options, as well as lower academic proficiency when compared to state and district averages. The three major design elements of the school are asset-based learning (ABL) in arts/electives and character education, inquiry-based learning (IBL) in science and research, and project-based learning (PBL) in science, math, and technology.

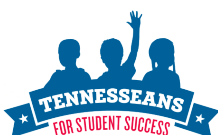
Other aspects of the academic program:

- Standard aligned curricula
- Extended Learning Day and Year
- Blended Learning
- Two-Teacher model in Literacy & Math
- Data-Drive Instruction
- Culturally Responsive
- Habits of Evidence
- Culturally Responsive
- Individualized learning
- Social-emotional learning
- Habits of Evidence

The application identifies many instructional approaches that the school plans to implement however there is little evidence that these will all be incorporated into a cohesive educational model. For example, the Get Better Faster scope & sequence sample included in the application does not contain evidence of the integration of ABL, IBL, or PBL (p.41) and there is very little reference to these approaches in the Academic Plan apart from naming that they will be enrichment opportunities. Additionally, Arts/Elective classes will gradually be added as the school grows towards its full build out, but it is unclear how the school will “ensure scholars participate in their chosen art paths to include media and visual art, vocal and instrumental performance, and theater and dance”, in the 7 years before the school is operating as a K-8 (p. 38). Co-teaching is a key feature of the model however based on the schedule and staffing model, it is unclear if it is feasible for specialized staff to co-plan and co-teach math and literacy for all classes that may contain a student with a disability or with English language acquisition needs.

The school will implement RTI2 Academics and Behavior. Students will use blended IXL programs to work on their individual ability levels during content blocks, allowing for additional practice that is adapted and differentiated. Teachers may also use this time to pull small groups of students. The application does not demonstrate a clear understanding of appropriate services and support for special populations. The application indicates that English language learners will be supported through Tiered interventions however intervention strategies identified are not specific to English language acquisition. Additionally, it is concerning that the application names that only certain classes will be “inclusion classrooms” (p. 119-120).

Overall, the Academic Plan does not demonstrate a clear plan for implementing the proposed mission and vision of the school.



OPERATIONS PLAN AND CAPACITY

PARTIALLY MEETS STANDARD

Summary

The Board of Directors will be comprised of 7-15 members, in addition to the CEO/Lead Founder, Dr. Sager, who will serve in an ex-officio capacity. The Founding Board was selected by the CEO/Lead Founder and his BES Senior Director of Leadership Development and Governance Coach based on their diverse backgrounds and skill sets. BES has provided professional learning and development regarding governance best practices and founding board action items during the application planning year.

The Board will hold the school leader accountable for the daily operations of the school as they relate to academics, school culture, and school operations. An Evaluation Committee will use the KIPP Leadership Framework and Competency Model as the primary indicator of the school leader's performance.

The CEO/Lead Founder will also receive leadership coaching BES coach during Years 0, 1, and 2. Dr. Sager has over 15 years of experience in education and participated in a rigorous fellowship through BES as well as the preparation programs through the Emerging Leaders Program, National Principals Academy, and Relay Graduate School of Education. Dr. Sager will serve as the Lower School Principal for Years 1-4.

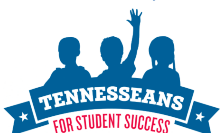
Other Key Staffing Details:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">Academics Coordinator (Year 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Director of Asset-Based Education (Year 3)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Operations Manager (Year 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Lower School Principal (Year 4)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Office Secretary (Year 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Assistant Principal (Year 5)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">DEI Coordinator (Year 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Scholar Access Coordinator (Year 5)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Office Manager (Year 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">4 Certified Teachers + 2 Teachers-in-Residence (Year 1)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Special Education Teacher (Year 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">1 Elective Teacher (Year 1)

The CEO will leverage connections with organizations such as Teach for America, Nashville Teacher Residency, Relay Graduate School of Education, and BES to recruit high-quality teachers, school leaders, and staff. Staff will receive ongoing coaching and development and professional development, in addition to an annual evaluation, however the tool has not yet been identified. While the budgeted salaries are competitive based on a traditional school year, compensation does not reflect the extended school day and year that teachers will be working in the proposed model.

The CEO will lead the facility search with support of the Finance Committee, Development Committee, Facilities Task Force, local real estate professionals, and previous charter school founders with facility acquisition experience. The ideal facility location is a co-location with a community organization however the team is in contact with several local churches for start-up and potential long term facility options should a co-location not materialize.

Overall, the application outlines a clear start-up plan however staff support and retention plans lack detail.



FINANCIAL PLAN AND CAPACITY

PARTIALLY MEETS EXPECTATION

Summary

The Pre-Opening Year budget assumes \$775,00 in revenue from the CSP Startup Grant (\$250,000), grants and fundraising (\$505,000). A \$30K grant has been secured from BES however all other funds are unsecured. These funds will support the staffing of the CEO/Lead Founder, and partial year staffing of an Office Secretary and Office Manager, as well as costs associated with professional development, financial services, supplies, and marketing materials to execute the start-up plan.

Revenue sources include an annual \$10K contribution from the Board of Directors in addition to other philanthropic sources. The application indicates that once approved, the proposed school will establish partnerships with philanthropic funders who have historically aided other charter schools. Should fundraising not materialize, the school will reevaluate staffing plans, renegotiate contracted services, or delay equipment and furniture purchases. The school will pursue up to a \$1 million line of credit, in addition to pursuing cash flow financing.

The application indicates that stipends will be available for teachers who take on additional responsibilities including grade and content-level chairs, coaches, club sponsors, and tutoring however they are not contained in the budget workbook. Additionally, the budget contains discrepancies in staffing from descriptions and charts contained in other areas of the application making it challenging to evaluate appropriateness of compensation.

Financial management will be led by the proposed Board Treasurer and Finance Committee Chair who has economics and finance experience, with support from a hired auditor, back-office provider, and accountant. While there is currently only one Board Member with finance expertise, the board plans to add additional members with finance experience to support financial oversight of the school.

Overall, the budget is based on reasonable expense assumptions however fundraising revenue in Years 0-2 represent unsecured funds with a lack of detailed plans to secure those resources. There is minimal financial expertise on the founding team and clear policies and plans for fiscal oversight were absent.

