

# Ben Franklin Elementary Mathematics and Science School

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November 14, 2017

Dr. Henderson Lewis  
Superintendent, Orleans Parish School Board  
3520 General DeGaulle Drive  
New Orleans, LA 70114

Dear Dr. Lewis:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Fall 2017 Charter School Application Recommendation Report provided to the Legacy of Excellence for Benjamin Franklin Elementary Mathematics and Science School by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers. We would like to address and respond to some aspects of the evaluation report, specifically within the "People" section on page 8 of the report.

First, the report states that the "governing board's understanding of its full scope of responsibilities was not wholly evident." Legacy of Excellence respectfully disagrees with this statement, as the governing board is made up of individuals with deep professional and board knowledge, and this was communicated in the application and during the interview. Legacy of Excellence's board president, Tommie Vassel, previously served on OPSB's board – and continues to serve on multiple other education and non-profit boards, demonstrating that he, as the leader of the board, has extensive knowledge of board governance and the associated responsibilities of such, and will be ensuring that this is consistent of all board members. In addition, the Legacy of Excellence board will also be engaging in professional development (provided by the Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools) and participating in annual retreats to ensure board cohesion and effectiveness.

Second, the report states that the board "overall demonstrated a lack of capacity," as it "did not contain specific qualifications for the proposed subcommittees described in the application." As stated in the written application, the members of the board (four at the time of submission), included the following individuals and their associated experience:

- "Tommie Vassel (Board President) is a distinguished business and servant leader in the community of New Orleans. Mr. Vassel is a **CPA with over 36 years of experience**, having **owned and operated his own consulting firm** for the past two decades. Mr. Vassel has an extensive record of supporting schools and youth as well in multiple capacities, and also has experience serving on a variety of boards. **Mr. Vassel served on the Orleans Parish School Board, beginning in 1997**, as well as boards for Dillard University, Southern University of New Orleans, the University of New Orleans, and the

United Negro College Fund. Mr. Vassel brings **financial and operational expertise to the board, as well as a wealth of community connections**. He is also a **BFE parent**.

- Yvette Alexis (Secretary) is an **administrator with vast experience in higher education**, having worked at Delgado Community College and Southern University of New Orleans for almost three decades. A graduate of McDonogh 35 High School and Southern University at New Orleans, and Ms. Alexis brings expertise of **education, staff development, and community involvement** to the board.
- Angela Wilklow (Vice President) is a **licensed clinical social worker** who has worked in the social work field in New Orleans for the past 18 years. Ms. Wilklow has worked with many child-serving agencies within the Greater New Orleans area and has a deep understanding of **child development** and issues that students and families may face.
- Nia Woods Haydel (Treasurer) has a **wealth of experience in higher education**. She is currently employed as the **Director of the Academic Center for Excellence at Dillard University**. Dr. Haydel has two decades of experience in higher education, including working directly with students, **fundraising, strategic planning, and teaching.**”

In addition to these previously identified board members, who collectively have experience in academics, finance and operations, and fundraising and development, Legacy of Excellence stated during the capacity interview that they had already identified three additional board members, all of whom will provide additional expertise and skills in the specified committees. The report does not indicate for which areas or subcommittees the board was lacking capacity or experience in, but the Legacy of Excellence respectfully disagrees with this general assertion.

The evaluation report states that is it “unclear how the governing board will provide effective academic, financial, and administrative oversight of the school, especially in regards to the supporting and evaluating school leadership.” On pages 44 and 45 of the revised proposal narrative, the evaluation of school leadership is clearly stated, including component areas, what data will be collected, and how it will be collected:

**“One of the central responsibilities of the board is an annual evaluation of the school leader.** In order to conduct a significant evaluation of the leader’s performance, the board will **utilize a rubric that is aligned to the job responsibilities of the school’s leader, and which is composed of several key assessment points.** These key areas, which have been sourced from **state-approved evaluation rubrics**, include the following base performance modules:

<b>Module</b>	<b>Data</b>	<b>Collection Method</b>
<b>Academic</b>	School Performance Score (SPS), LEAP scores, and any additional assessment data unanimously approved by the board	Annual school report card (state reported), LEAP data (state reported), end of year DIBELS or MAP assessments (from testing coordinator)

<b>Financial</b>	Annual budget, annual audit, and school fund balance (reported quarterly)	Reported by the board's finance committee chair, in conjunction with 4 <sup>th</sup> Sector Solutions
<b>Cultural</b>	Disciplinary rates (suspensions, expulsions), student attendance and retention (targets versus actual)	This data is provided by the school leader, as reported and verified through the school information system
<b>Staffing</b>	Satisfaction surveys, performance reviews, retention rates, and professional development	These elements are reported by the school leader on a monthly basis, and verified by 4 <sup>th</sup> Sector Solutions

The board, along with input from the school leader, who will provide baseline and previous year(s) data, will **set specific performance standards and targets that the school leader will be expected to meet on an annual basis**. Examples of these performance standards and goals for 2018-19 may include:

- **School Performance Score:** 99+ (B)
- **LEAP:** increase Mastery+ % by at least 2% from previous year
- **Student retention rate:** 90%+
- **Suspension rate:** >5%

While the annual evaluation comprises the above areas of performance, **the evaluation is also supported by monthly reports**, which demonstrate progress toward outlined goals set by the school leader at the start of each school year. These goals include data routinely measured and recorded by the school information system, such as suspension and attendance rates. Alongside these monthly reports, the leader will address any board concerns about progress toward goals, and approaches the leader has taken to remedy any areas of weakness evident in student data.”

Though the four examples given above were not specific to finance or operations, the inclusion of that category is clearly indicated above, along with data collection measures. Additionally, the application states on page 59 that “the 4th Sector finance manager also meets not less than monthly with the principal and the board treasurer or finance committee to review the financial reports and update the school’s financial forecast,” thus providing financial information to the board on an ongoing basis as well.

The evaluation report states that it is “difficult to assess whether the governing board will gather sufficient data to evaluate whether the school leader has met the performance standards.” As shown above, the board will be collecting data in the following forms: School Performance Score (SPS), LEAP scores, and any additional assessment data unanimously approved by the board; annual budget, annual audit, and school fund balance (reported quarterly); disciplinary rates (suspensions, expulsions), student attendance and retention (targets versus actual); and satisfaction surveys, performance reviews, retention rates, and professional development. This is a minimum of 14 different indicators for which the board will be gathering data, spanning all areas of leader effectiveness.

The Legacy of Excellence Board Chairman, Tommie Vassel, has extensive experience evaluating executives as a result of his many leadership roles on private and public boards. This experience includes evaluating a College President, Executive Director of the New Orleans Sewerage & Water Board, CEO of Catholic Charities of New Orleans as well as designing and implementing the evaluation process for the Executive Director of the Louisiana Society of CPAs. We believe this experience will serve our board well in evaluating the leadership of Legacy of Excellence.

Finally, the evaluation reports states that it was “unclear what actions the governing board would take if the school leader’s evaluation indicated that goals were not being met.” Although we do not recall the question of goals not being met by the leader, we would like to take this opportunity to clarify that the school leader would be supported in improving outcomes in order to achieve goals, but if goals were not consistently met after improvement objectives were put in place, the board would ultimately make the decision to remove the leader.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to respond to the evaluation report. We hope that we have clarified and appropriately responded to the concerns of the external evaluators, and have clearly communicated the ability of the Legacy of Excellence board to effectively govern and provide oversight for Benjamin Franklin Elementary.

Sincerely,

Charlotte L. Matthew