ORLEANS PARISH SCHOOL BOARD

CHARTER SCHOOL APPLICATION RECOMMENDATION REPORT 2017

National Association of Charter School Authorizers

November 10, 2017

New Charter School Application for

YOUNG AUDIENCES CHARTER SCHOOL - ORLEANS PARISH

Submitted by

YOUNG AUDIENCES CHARTER ASSOCIATION (YACA)

Evaluation Team

TEAM LEAD: **SONIA C. PARK**

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INTRODUCTION

Across New Orleans, more than 90 percent of public school students currently attend charter schools. These schools have led to a dramatic increase in the number of students meeting academic proficiency standards and the performance gap between students in Orleans Parish and Louisiana as a whole has dramatically decreased over the last 12 years.

Despite these gains, additional progress is needed. Every student deserves high quality schools where their interests will come first, where they and their families will have choice, and where educators will have the tools and support they need to be successful.

The Fall 2017 charter school application process seeks proposals from highly qualified applicants to open new Type 1 charter schools and transform existing district-run schools into Type 3 charter schools.

Focus on Quality

The 2017 Request for Proposals and the resulting evaluation process are rigorous and demanding. The process is meant to ensure that approved charter school operators possess the capacity to implement a school model that is likely to dramatically increase student outcomes. Successful applicants will demonstrate high levels of expertise and capacity in the areas of curriculum and instruction, school finance, educational and operational leadership, and non-profit governance, as well as high expectations for excellence in student achievement and professional standards. An application that merits a recommendation for approval will present a clear, realistic picture of how the school expects to operate; be detailed in how this school will raise student achievement; and inspire confidence in the applicant's capacity to successfully implement the proposed academic and operational plans.

Evaluation Process

For the 2017 RFP cycle, OPSB partnered with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) to manage the application process and to provide independent, merit-based recommendations regarding whether to approve or deny each proposal. NACSA assembled an independent evaluation team that included both national and local expertise related to charter school start-up and operation. This report from the evaluation team is a culmination of three stages of review:

PROPOSAL EVALUATION

The evaluation team conducted individual and group assessment of the merits of the proposal based on the complete written submission. In the case of experienced school operators, OPSB and NACSA supplemented this written evaluation with due diligence to verify claims made in the proposal related to past performance.

CAPACITY INTERVIEW

After reviewing the application and discussing the findings of their individual reviews, the evaluation team conducted an in-person interview to assess the team's overall capacity to implement the proposal as written in the application.

CONSENSUS JUDGMENT

Following the capacity interview, the evaluation team came to consensus regarding whether to recommend the proposal for approval or denial. The duty of the evaluation team is to recommend approval or denial of each application based on its merits against OPSB-approved evaluation criteria. The authority and responsibility to decide whether to approve or deny each application rests with the members of OPSB.

Report Contents

This evaluation report includes the following:

PROPOSAL OVERVIEW

Basic information about the proposed school as presented in the application.

RECOMMENDATION

An overall judgment regarding whether the proposal meets the criteria for approval.

EVALUATION

Analysis of the proposal based on four primary areas of plan development and the capacity of the applicant team to execute the plan as presented:

School: academic model and schedule, LEA status, special student populations, goals and metrics, enrollment plans, school culture, and family and community engagement.

People: founder's submission, governing board, staff, mission critical partners, and education service providers.

Operations: start-up plan, facility, and financial readiness.

Finance: budget.

EVALUATION: ADDENDA

For applicants on the existing or experienced operator tracks, applicants that are or will form a corporate partnership, schools whose primary instructional environment is computer-based or virtual, applicants seeking or potentially willing to seek a match to operate an existing Orleans public charter school or school facility, or applicants seeking to start, transform or convert a school serving Grades 9-12, an analysis of:

Experienced Operator Addendum (if applicable): past school performance, growth plan, scale strategy, and risks and associated contingency plans.

Corporate Partnership Addendum (if applicable): corporate partnership formation, corporate partner track record, legal relationships, and organizational structure.

Virtual School Addendum (if applicable): location, educational program, instructional staff, state and federally mandated services, evaluation and assessment, school operations, and parent and community involvement.

Transformation Addendum (if applicable): transformation overview, operator track record, educational program, school operations, metrics and goals, and community engagement.

High School Addendum (if applicable): state and district graduation standards, supporting success for all students – truancy prevention, remediation and intervention, ensuring college and career readiness, and strong start – 9th grade transition plan.

RATINGS CHARACTERISTICS

Evaluation teams assess each application against the published evaluation criteria. In general, the following definitions guide evaluator ratings:

Meets the Standard
The response reflects a thorough understanding of key issues. It addresses 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 applicant's capacity to carry out the plan effectively.

Meets the Standard with Reservations
The response meets the criteria in many respects, but lacks detail and/or requires additional information in one or more areas.

Approaches the Standard
The response meets the criteria in some respects but has substantial gaps in a number of areas.

Does Not Meet the Standard
The response is wholly undeveloped or significantly incomplete; demonstrates lack of preparation; or otherwise raises substantial concerns about the viability of the plan or the applicant's ability to carry it out.

PROPOSAL OVERVIEW

Applicant Name:

YOUNG AUDIENCES CHARTER ASSOCIATION (YACA)

Proposed School Name:

YOUNG AUDIENCES CHARTER SCHOOL - ORLEANS PARISH

Mission:

YACA's mission for its schools is to educate the whole child through arts integration and equip our creative learners to flourish as leaders in life and learning.

Proposed Location:

Orleans Parish

Enrollment Projections:

Academic Year	*Planned # Students*	*Maximum # Students*	*Grades Served*
2018-19	675	756	K-8
2019-20	675	756	K-8
2020-21	675	756	K-8
2021-22	675	756	K-8
2022-23	675	756	K-8
At Capacity	675	756	K-8

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recommendation:

YOUNG AUDIENCES CHARTER SCHOOL - ORLEANS PARISH

DENY

Summary Analysis:

The evaluation team recommends denial of Young Audience Charter Association's (YACA) application for Young Audiences Charter School-Orleans Parish (YACS-OP). While several sections of the application approached the standard, other sections lacked critical details and clarity.

YACS-OP is modeled on Young Audiences Charter School-Jefferson (YACS-J), an established school that has not yet achieved high academic performance. Overall, the applicant acknowledged known challenges and areas for growth. However, the academic performance of YACS-J, along with the organizational and operational structures as delineated in the application, remain concerns for the evaluation team.

The applicant highlighted the performance of YACS-J, which, although it has recently earned a "C" letter grade, the school's actual numbered score was lower than last year's "D" letter grade. The academic program has demonstrated little growth. To address the stagnation in absolute growth, the school has implemented high-quality practices such weekly data dives and implementing Eureka Math across all grades. However, performance concerns persist.

The organizational structure and relationship of YACS-OP, YACS-J, YACA, and the Young Audiences of Louisiana (YALA) was not clearly articulated in the application, in subsequent request for clarification, nor during the interview with the evaluation team. In addition, and related to the organizational opaqueness, this lack of clarity extended to the operational structure and budgets.

Overall, there were inconsistencies and missing details across the application. Based on its prior academic performance record and the information provided throughout the application process, it is not evident how YACA would deliver consistent student academic achievement results at an additional school.

Summary of Section Ratings:

Opening and maintaining a successful, high-performing charter school depends on having a complete, coherent plan and identifying highly capable individuals to execute that plan. It is not an endeavor for which strengths in some areas can compensate for material weaknesses in others. *Therefore, in order to receive a recommendation for approval, the application must Meet the Standard in all areas.*

SCHOOL

Meets the Standard with Reservations

PEOPLE

Meets the Standard with Reservations

OPERATIONS

Approaches the Standard

FINANCE

Approaches the Standard

EXPERIENCED OPERATOR ADDENDUM

Approaches the Standard

TRANSFORMATION ADDENDUM

Meets the Standard with Reservations

SCHOOL

YOUNG AUDIENCES CHARTER SCHOOL - ORLEANS PARISH

RATING:

Meets the Standard with Reservations

Plan Summary:

Young Audiences Charter Association (YACA or the applicant) proposes a Type 1 transformation school. The Young Audiences Charter School–Orleans Parish (YACS–OP) will open as a K-8 school, serving up to 675 students (75 per grade) in 2018-19. If approved, YACS–OP will be the second school in YACA's network, following the opening of Young Audiences Charter School-Jefferson (YACS–J) in 2013.

YACS-OP would deliver an arts-integrated model. Full-time arts integration specialists would work with teaching staff to integrate the curriculum and instruction. For the 2018 school year, YACA is piloting an arts-integrated crosswalk to support teachers in curriculum implementation. The crosswalks connect National Core Arts Standards with Louisiana Student Standards.

The educational model uses Louisiana State Standards aligned commercial subject area curricular models such as Arts for Learning, Eureka Math, and Pearson World Civilizations. YACS-OP would implement teacher-created assessments, portfolios, interim assessments, and quarterly formative assessments.

Analysis:

The School section meets the standard with reservations. Though the applicant was generally responsive to the required elements of the application, it was less evident to the evaluation team how YACA will be able to establish high academic performance in a transformation setting based on YACS-J existing academic record which, to date, has generated "C" and "D" school letter grades.

The academic program has demonstrated little academic growth. YACS-OP is modeled on Young Audiences Charter School-Jefferson (YACS-J). Though YACS-J school letter grade was raised to a "C" in 2017, its SPS of 63.5 is a decline from the "D" score of 66.4 earned in 2015-16. To address stagnation in absolute growth, the school has implemented high-quality practices such more frequent data dives and implementing Eureka Math across all grades. During the interview, the applicant team identified several reasons for the baseline and subsequent performance grades, including starting YACS-J with 408 K-3 students, changing school leadership, and the resetting of academic expectations.

Full-time arts integration specialists would write curriculum, co-plan, and co-teach along with classroom teachers. YACS-OP would implement teacher-created assessments, portfolio assessments, and interim assessments. Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) testing will be conducted three times a year to inform the data dives that instructional specialists, teachers, and teaching artists use to review student performance and develop plans to re-teach.

Despite the academic performance of YACS-J, the applicant is implementing practices to try to address the limited academic growth. The experiences gained through operating YACS-J would provide the YACS-OP principal, who is proposed to migrate over to the new school if approved, with a more refined and tested arts-infused model.

PEOPLE

YOUNG AUDIENCES CHARTER SCHOOL - ORLEANS PARISH

RATING:

Meets the Standard with Reservations

Plan Summary:

Mr. Brandon House, current principal of YACS-Jefferson, would transition to lead YACS-Orleans. Other key leaders include Sandy Levy, YACA board president, and Rickie Nutik, current executive director of YALA, who would become chief executive officer of YACA. The majority of the proposed school leadership team is currently in place at either YACS-J or YACA.

The proposed governing board includes ten members with combined experiences that include law, education, arts and nonprofit management. The application includes descriptions of staff recruitment plans, qualifications, salaries and teacher expectations, development, support, and evaluations.

The applicant's mission critical partners include: Young Audiences of Louisiana (YALA), Goat in the Road Productions, Playworks, Project Peaceful Warriors, Arts Council of New Orleans, and Loyola University's Institute for Quality, and Equity in Education.

Analysis:

The People section meets the standard with reservations. The application met some of the criteria; however, some sections lacked critical details and clarity on the organizational structure and relationship of YACS-OP, YACS-J, YACA, and the Young Audiences of Louisiana (YALA).

The relationship of the various entities, the positions of individuals, and how the board, staff, and organizations interacted was unclear and confusing. The relationships were not clearly articulated in the application nor in the subsequent request for clarification. Only after the third description and iteration of the organizational chart did the evaluation team get a clearer sense of the structure. There is one proposed governing board for YACA, which will become Charter Management Organization (CMO) upon the chartering of YACS-OP. YACA's governing board will govern both schools. The governing board's membership includes individuals with legal, academic, arts, and nonprofit business credentials. The application defined a scope of standard governance roles, duties and responsibilities for the four board committees: executive, academics, finance and legal/advocacy. YALA, which has a separate governing board, will be a critical partner to YACA and will provide after-school and summer-school services, train art teachers, and provide a start-up loan of up to $259,000 to YACS-OP.

In order to effectively establish the model at YACS-OP, staff from YACS-J would move to the new school, including the principal, operations manager, and one teacher per grade. However, given that YACS-J will continue to grow out to a K-12 configuration, it is possible that, in order to create stability in the new school, the original school could be destabilized.

Based on their experiences with YACS-J and YALA, key leadership appear to have the individual and collective capacity, academic backgrounds, and professional experiences necessary to lead and operate YACS-OP. However, the applicant would need to further demonstrate that it could maintain a separate and arms-length relationship with the other organizations.

OPERATIONS

YOUNG AUDIENCES CHARTER SCHOOL - ORLEANS PARISH

RATING:

Approaches the Standard

Plan Summary:

YACA seeks to open a Type I-Transformation Charter as a full-school takeover. YACA will plan to remain in the existing facility that the transformed school currently occupies. YACA will be able to accommodate as many as 675 students in 2018-19 and will work with OPSB staff to determine the appropriate timeline and transition of the facility to YACA.

A start-up plan was presented that included transportation, safety and security, and insurance coverage. YACA, the CMO that will be formed after the chartering of YACS-OP, would provide back office operation services that will include financial management, reporting, and human resources services.

Analysis:

The Operations section approaches the standard. While the application met some of the criteria, some sections lacked critical details. Specifically, there is limited documented relationships between YACS-OP, YACA, and YALA, especially in regards to the start-up loan of up to $259,000 by YALA to the school. The loan would engage a combination of YACA and YACS-OP staff, including the YACA CEO and COO, and the school's director of school operations and principal for six months prior to opening.

Specific terms of the loan are not provided and its repayment to YALA is not reflected in the original nor revised budget. It is also unclear why the loan would pay for YALA staff at another organization, though the applicant assured the evaluation team that legal counsel was sought to approve the complex relationship.

Starting in Year 1, YACS-OP and YACS-J will cover the salaries of the CMO staff, which include the chief executive officer (CEO), chief academic officer (CAO), chief financial officer (CFO), chief operating officer (COO), IT manager, and data manager. In addition, an annual $42,500 management fee is paid to the CMO. It is unclear how this additional layer of supervisory staff interact and work with school-based staff. For example, the school will have a principal, assistant principal, dean, and a director of curriculum and instruction; however, their relationship with the CAO and CEO is not fully explained.

The close relationships between the various organizations and individuals could potentially lead to conflicts of interest and the inability of the CMO to evaluate the critical partner. Sandy Levy, current YACA board president was on the YALA board. Rickie Nutik, current ED of YALA, would step down to become CEO of YACA when it becomes a CMO. Several other key staff members from YALA, such as Richard Bates, associate director, and Jon Cosper, director of extended learning, would migrate to the CMO. Though there would be a formalized contractual, fee-based relationship between the entities, it remains unclear if YACA could or would terminate that contract if it had to.

Despite the complicated arrangements, the CMO team and school-based operations team have the capacity and demonstrated the talent, skill, and experience to operate another charter school. However, the applicant should remain conscience of potential conflicts of interest.

FINANCE

YOUNG AUDIENCES CHARTER SCHOOL - ORLEANS PARISH

RATING:

Approaches the Standard

Plan Summary:

The application details the five-year financial projections as follows:

Year 1: $6,786,646 in revenues and $6,525,676 in expenses, with an ending fund balance of $260,970.

Year 5: $6,786,646 in revenues and $6,780,822 in expenses, with an ending cumulative fund balance of $855,690.

The base budget assumes 675 students in grades K-8 in year 1 and remains constant throughout the 5-year budget. The budgets included projections for local, state, federal and other revenue sources. Budget assumptions were provided in the narrative and with individual line-items. The budget narrative provided assumptions for enrollment, funding, staffing and operating expenses based on the current year operation as a district school.

Several budgets were provided, including a start-up budget, first year cash flow, and a five-year forecast.

Analysis:

The Finance section approaches the standard. While the application met some of the criteria, some sections lacked critical details. Specific terms of the loan are not provided and its repayment to YALA is not reflected in the original nor revised budgets.

It is unclear why the loan would pay for YALA staff at another organization. In addition, the budget includes $750,000 of contracted programmatic services between YALA and the school. YACS-OP would also pay YACA an annual CMO fee of $42,500 and pay for 50 percent of the CMO staff salaries. Though the applicant assured the evaluation team that legal counsel was sought to approve of complex relationships, it is not immediately clear if the relationships are mutually beneficial.

The information and evidence concerning its approaches to budgeting and fiscal planning were consistent with generally accepted standards for fiscal, accounting and auditing practices, with much of the information informed by the applicant's fiscal operating experience with YACS-J. However, the budget narrative was not aligned to the budget and additional documentation on the loan agreement was missing.

EXPERIENCED OPERATOR ADDENDUM

YOUNG AUDIENCES CHARTER SCHOOL - ORLEANS PARISH

RATING:

Approaches the Standard

Plan Summary:

Young Audiences Charter Association currently operates one open-admissions charter school in Jefferson Parish, serving over 750 students in Kindergarten through seventh grades.

According to the latest Louisiana school report card data, YACS-J is rated as a "C" school with an SPS of 63.5. Data was presented on past academic performance of YACS-J. Attachment EO-2 provided a set of spreadsheets that included an Operator Portfolio Overview, Operator Academic Data, and Operator Track Record. The sheets provided contact information on Rickie Nutik, the current ED of YALA, student socio-demographic information, and some assessment data.

YACS-J has not had any performance deficiencies or compliance violations that have led to district interventions. Neither YACA nor YACS-J's leaders have been involved in any material audit findings.

Analysis:

The Experienced Operator Addendum approaches the standard. While the application met some of the criteria, some sections lacked critical details and demonstration of capacity. Specifically, the evaluation team remains concerned that the applicant may not realistically be able to immediately deliver quantitative student learning results in a demanding school transformation setting.

Although YACS-J recently earned a "C" rating on the Louisiana School Performance Score (SPS) - improving from the "D" it received in past years - the academic program and the performance of YACS-J has demonstrated little growth. Its 2017 SPS of 63.5 dropped from the "D" score of 66.4 earned in 2015-16. To address stagnation in absolute growth, the school has implemented high-quality practices such more frequent data dives and implementing Eureka Math across all grades. During the interview, the applicant team identified several reasons for the baseline and subsequent performance grades, including starting YACS-J with 400 K-3 students, changing school leadership, and the resetting of academic expectations.

An additional concern is the capacity of YACA to manage two schools sites next year with student populations of YACS-J at 850 and 675 at YACS-OP. Over the course of the next five years, the total number of students would continue to grow; starting in 2018-19 the population would increase annually to 1528 students in year one and growing to 1928 students by year 5. Given the start up challenges YACS-J confronted with its current population of 408 K-3 students, the applicant has not clearly demonstrated that it could manage both school sites effectively.

YACA has thoughtfully identified the following four main threats in transforming an existing school, along with the associated measures it will take to minimize them. The challenges include: 1) adoption of new behavior management plan; 2) community engagement and competition for students enrollment; 3) talent; 4) board oversight in two parishes. By recognizing its vulnerabilities, YACA has been able to anticipate and mitigate the risks by identifying supports before issues arise.

TRANSFORMATION ADDENDUM

YOUNG AUDIENCES CHARTER SCHOOL - ORLEANS PARISH

RATING:

Meets the Standard with Reservations

Plan Summary:

If approved, YACA will transform one school in the 2018-2019 school year--an elementary and middle transformation school that will serve up to 675 students in kindergarten through Grade 8 and add one grade (eighth) to YACS-J, bringing that school population to 850 students. YACS-J was permitted to revise its charter by Jefferson Parish Pubic to expand to a PK to 12th grade configuration. YACS-J will continue to add one grade each year until it reaches Grade 12 in 2022-2023.

Analysis:

The Transformation Addendum section meets the standard with reservations. While the application met some of the criteria, some sections lacked critical details. While the data-based evidence for YACS-J had shown an encouraging, incremental progression in student academic achievement, its most recent academic performance pauses that progress.

Because YACS-OP will be a transformation charter school, YACA is not able to identify total student enrollment numbers and student demographic information such as racial distributions, student socio-economic status and numbers and types of Special Education services. Given the general profile of the Orleans Parish School system, it is reasonable to anticipate that YAC-OP will be assigned a school that has a different student population that that of YACS-J. The performance score and unknown school demographics make it more difficult to forecast with confidence that the model will transfer smoothly and effectively to any site in Orleans.

EVALUATOR BIOGRAPHIES

Evaluator's Name

SONIA C. PARK

Ms. Park has over 18 years of experience in school start-up, support, accountability, and development. She has a background in organization and school development, support, and accountability in relation to school-based, district, state, and federal policies and practices. Prior to leading the Diverse Charter Schools Coalition, she served under Secretary John King at the US Department of Education as a Senior Policy Advisor in the Office of Innovation and Improvement where she worked on policies concerning charter schools. Previously, Ms. Park was the Executive Director of Manhattan Charter Schools, a two-school charter network located in lower Manhattan. She also worked under the New York City Department of Education's Chancellor Denis Walcott as the Executive Director of Charter Schools and Accountability and Support. Her background includes the NY Charter Schools Resource Center, NY Charter Schools Association, and Edison Schools.

Evaluator's Name

DR. IRIS PALAZESI

Dr. Palazesi is an independent education consultant specializing in the areas of charter school applications, grant applications, and educational research. She has worked successfully with clients to secure over $21M in grant awards and over eighty approved charter school applications. Dr. Palazesi served on the board of directors of a high-performing charter school in Tallahassee, Florida for nine year, including four years as board chair. Dr. Palazesi has also worked for the Florida Department of Education fas a Program Specialist for Gifted Students, Supervisor of Exceptional Student Education Services, and Interim Administrator for Title I. Prior to moving to Florida, Dr. Palazesi was a university professor at Ball State University in Muncie, IN and Thomas College in Thomasville, GA. Dr. Palazesi earned her B.A. in Elementary Education from the University of Illinois; her Master's degree in Gifted Education from Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago; and her Doctoral degree from the University of Illinois.

Evaluator's Name

DR. WILLIAM MILLER

Dr. Miller is a former high school teacher and retired staff member of the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE). While on the LDOE staff he was engaged in a broad scope of regulatory, administrative, and policy-formation actives including the implementation of the Louisiana Charter School Program. Since retirement from the LDOE, he has continued as a program evaluator for the the Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE), a teacher practitioner mentor, and a charter school application reviewer for the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA). He received his Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral degrees in Education from the University of New Orleans.