

May 11, 2018

Orleans Parish School Board
Independent Evaluator Team
3520 General DeGaulle Drive
New Orleans, LA 70114

Re: Generation Success Evaluation Rebuttal

To Whom It May Concern,

First and foremost, thank you for the opportunity to interview and be vetted, and secondarily, to respond to the findings of the committee. While we categorically disagree with some of the information found within our evaluation report, we understand that through discourse, the best possible truth and understanding can be met. At the end of the day, it is in the best of interest of the families and students within New Orleans, that these checks and balances occur.

Introduction

To start, our evaluation states that over 90% of students attend charters which have led to dramatic increases in proficiency and achievement over the last 12 years. While there have been some gains made, New Orleans' achievement and opportunity gap for students persists. In 2005, before the Charter Reform movement, New Orleans' ranked 41st by the Nation's Report Card on standards of Proficiency in Math and Reading. In 2017, we are ranked 47th by the same group, on the same standards. In fact, we are now listed lower than Mississippi and only bested Puerto Rico with our National Report card scoring. This shows that traditional education models, even under the guise of a Charter system in this city, have not worked. Subsequently, many of the top performing charter schools are also the target of a state of California study which explained that in order for the charter movement in Louisiana to be successful, it must account for all of the students in the state. It must especially account for those students which the University of Berkley, NAACP, and Generation Success see as the most vulnerable learners of the school system, students performing three or more grade levels behind, those who have known and unknown educational exceptionalities, and those who need differentiation to reach success. It is for those reasons that Generation Success Academy was created.

School Model

The independent evaluation report asserts that our model only Approaches the standard for quality because it lacks detail on how the portions of the model work together. Though we have stated this, emphatically during the interview and the application cycle, we are still being called a school for Special Education learners. Generation Success wants to be clear, once and for all, that we ARE NOT a Special Education school nor a school for Special Education learners. We are a truly inclusive schools, for ALL learners. Our design is intentional. Where most schools create a plan to educate students but only

consider thinking about Special Education as an addendum, afterthought or additional program within their larger school plan, our design has included the needs of those learners first. We believe that we present a more holistic, and truly equitable model by considering exceptional learners during our creation and development, instead of as an afterthought. This does not mean that our model will not work or is not designed for general education learners as well. Quite the contrary is true. We presented in our application and during the interview, how some of the Top performing schools in the country utilize elements of our Student Driven Learning Model and produce great successes as a result. None of the referenced schools were Special Education schools either.

Flexible Age Classes, Student Learning Plans and Social Emotional Learning

To be fair, we were not asked any questions about how flexible age classes, student learning plans or social- emotional learning work together. In fact, we weren't asked any specific curricular questions. However, as we have expressed in the previous Request for Clarification and the application cycle, these elements are not foreign to education. During the interview, we referenced Blue Ribbon schools utilizing these elements situationally. Well, Generation Success plans to utilize them holistically. Because we know that students will come to us with varying needs, our use of Flexible Age classes is designed to both service the learning needs of students and keep the overhead of educational costs to a minimum. Students are banded together by strengths as reported on Tier 1 assessments that are nationally recognized for their quality. After completing these initial assessments, student learning plans are created with families and educators together. These plans detail areas of strength, areas of growth, and special considerations necessary for reaching educational achievement. Students meet with mentor teachers daily or weekly, depending on need, and review their goals and progress during those times. Student classes are selected by reviewing the needs of the learner. Students are banded in a mentor group which will function as a homeroom cohort, by their strengths, and when possible, paired with a teacher whose strength is a student groups' weakness. The flexible age class makes it possible to do this process. As noted in the schedule, students have intentional study halls during the day. These study hall groups combine students to focus on areas of growth together, making it possible for them to learn together in a flex age class during their core content and elective schedules.

Project-Based Learning and Social Emotional Learning

Most educators understand that some materials must be front loaded before students can successfully complete projects around their learning. Thus, as the application's Narrative Part 2 section details, students are expected to learn standards' base, core content, and using their learning plans, choose projects that include deep learning opportunities over some core aspect of a standard. The initial core content is taught using Tier 1 content approaches, and the project-based learning modules further their understanding of the materials because they choose what to review more of for themselves. Consequently, the project-based modules are guided modules. The Student Driven Learning or SDLM component is utilized through topic selection and delivery methods only. Specific content must still be included, coverage of standards'-based materials must still be included, and foundational, core elements of Social Emotional learning must be addressed. During the interview, we referenced those elements as including: Collaboration, Self- Reflection, Self-Management, Self- Awareness, Responsible Decision Making, and Social Awareness. It should be mentioned that these elements are also covered in the design of the school through Morning Meetings, Mentor check-ins, and inside of the classroom.

So as noted above, how these elements work together is through intentionality. Student learning is driven by learning plans, student growth is facilitated through flex age classes where student's data and passion drives the learning, and social emotional supports are embedded throughout.

Overall Alignment

Once again, Generation Success Academy is committed to providing what other schools do not, equity and actual inclusion. While we do not have goals around targeting Special Education learners, we still provide for them and all students. There seems to be fundamental disconnection in assuming that what works for a Special Education or exceptional learner will not work for a general education student. That is categorically false. All students benefit from differentiation, growth driven by passion and desire, building capacity by focusing on strengths instead of weaknesses, and varied modalities in learning and assessment. These are, after all, evidence-based pedagogical approaches. There is no misalignment. Service learning teaches social awareness, collaboration, self-management and self-reflection. I should mention again that these are the very social emotional principles that Generation Success Academy curriculum includes. Secondly, portfolio assessments are necessary when completing project-based learning. With so many variations to what a student can and should product to demonstrate their learning, it would be illogical and damaging not to include portfolio assessments. Please note above, and as pointed out in the application, students are graded based on core content standards. That means, a rubric will be given to determine if required components of the project-based learning modules are addressed. This is their portfolio assessment.

Student Goals

To state, again, after the Request for Clarification asked the same question, that our goals are unclear as to whom they refer, is simply untrue and misleading. We have stated, emphatically, that our school goals are for all students. We do not create special goals for exceptional learners because that implies that they cannot reach the outcomes of a general education learner. At Generation Success Academy, we do not believe that mantra. We know that with the best supports, evidence-based educational practices, and true inclusion, all learners will rise to high expectations.

ESL Learners

The evaluation report suggests that we have not created a plan for English Language Learners and Gifted and Talented learners. Once again, this is categorically false. They do reference that our board and CEO/Co-Leader have the expertise to ensure that federal guidelines can be met, but then quickly assert that no plan exists. To reference the expertise first, our Board is created with a University of Virginia Turnaround trained specialist at the helm of oversight. We have included a Nationally recognized Restorative Practices consultant and expert who has spent time as a school and district leader doing this work. Secondly, our CEO/CoLeader is a certified Gifted and Talented, and ESL educator, Trained and certified Trainer in SIOP, one of the leading pedagogies for English Language Learners, and has spent time as a Gifted and Talented District Facilitator in coaching and program creation for one of the largest ESL, and most well-performing school districts in the country, in Texas. To assume that no plan was created, using this group, is not only incorrect, but mildly insulting. As far as plans are concerned, we have referenced in the application, that ESL students will be taught English in a Sheltered English environment where the SIOP model is used in every classroom, and provided pullout ESL courses when necessary. If ESL pullout is necessary, students will still utilize the SIOP model to address language

barriers. The TerraNOVA and Gates MacGinitie assessments have shown great merit when used with ESL student populations because of their diagnostic ability and nonverbal sections. Thus, we have also included ESL considerations in our design.

Gifted and Talented Learners

Gifted and Talented services will be provided to students in our school. I would like to point out that Gifted and Talented students are also exceptional learners. The inclusion of Social Emotional skills directly relates to the needs of Gifted and Talented learners as their psycho-social development is always included in their IEP creation. Thus, we address their needs, by addressing the needs of all our learners. Gifted and Talented students will also participate in Learning Plans, which as noted in the RFC and applications, works in tandem with their IEP goals to ensure that they are receiving appropriate services and their learning is differentiated accordingly. Generation Success Academy would also like to note, we will be among the few schools to provide Gifted and Talented services to students. This is not a norm across current New Orleans schools.

Restorative Practices

Our plans for Restorative Practices are outlined in the Application. We do not believe in the No-Nonsense approach to school that so many other charters have taken. We have a three-tiered system of infractions that include restorative conversations, and escalated penalties if base-line infractions continue. We also firmly believe that discipline infractions are often a result of limited educational opportunities for struggling learners, a lack of engagement and differentiation among all students, and a lack of relationships and community buy-in within the school. We have intentionally designed Generation Success Academy to address many of these issues proactively. By making students members of our Building Leadership team, they have an actual voice in what happens in their school. This fosters buy-in. Through Morning Meetings, held every day, students can celebrate victories and each other, further building community, voice concerns and offer solutions, further fostering buy-in, voice, and equity within the community, and hold each other accountable in the process. We should re-reference, these are the very principles that our Social Emotional foci include. So, through curriculum, leadership, and community, we are intentional about holistic learning and trauma-informed practices. And just to be clearer and on the safe side of transparency, our inclusion of morning meetings, mentor check-ins, and building leadership team supports from students are all trauma-informed practices because they foster safety, inclusivity, support, voice, and equity.

Educator Professional Development

To account for training and development, we should note that the pieces of our model are not separate components that somehow work together. They are integrated features of one whole body. To that end, while the Buck Institute's services involve creating a better understanding of Project-Based learning, student learning plans cannot be created without this understanding. We see the learning plans' professional development as a part of our process on Tuesdays when we discuss Best Practices in the school. The SDLM model is a teaching pedagogy which cannot be learned over a summer. It will need to be taught throughout the year in the same process that many of the more well-known coaching schools prepare educators, a 'See it, Name it, Do it' approach that resembles Relay Grad school's coaching methodology. Instead of Relay's processes though, we will utilize Marzano's rubric for evaluation which focuses on monitoring student behaviors to better coach educators. This coaching, as we stated during

the interview and the application, and as your independent evaluation noted, happens every week on our early release days of Tuesdays and Thursdays. Thursday is reserved for data dives. During these meetings educators are coached on how to review data, how to allow data to inform practice, and how to acknowledge shortcomings through action planning. Because the curriculum models were written by the CEO/Co-Leader, she is the best person to also create training opportunities around them. As we discussed in our application and interview, we are committed to maintaining a fund balance for such occurrences as mission critical component needs. We explained this thinking during the interview's performance task when we carved out the fund balance from our fund balance before cutting the budget and made note that we would not remove funding from mission critical needs. Thus, if additional trainings and supports are necessary, we will have the funding to provide those. We are also committed to ensuring that such training occurs.

Schedule Concerns:

To address the School Schedule, we have not heard any requests for clarification, nor have any questions arisen during the interview. Thus, we are not totally sure what the concerns are as they are not clear and were never mentioned. The schedule has consistently been provided through the application in Narrative 1 and re-referenced in Narrative 2. There have been no changes made to the schedule through either cycle of the RFP or during interviews. For the sake of consistency, we utilize a college-based schedule that begins after 8:30 because research shows that this is best for the development of high aged students. Our courses also prepare students should they choose either a career post high school, or a college or university option.

Pupil Progression Plan (PPP)

Generation Success Academy is unsure why our PPP was not attached. We no doubt included it, but also, accidentally, provided our addendum to the PPP through uploads to the OPSB Fluid system. Thus, not only should evaluators have had access to our PPP, but they should have had access to our RTI document which is directly tied to the PPP. For the sake of time, our PPP lists the standard language of high schools, with the inclusion of our Restorative practices in discipline and the SDLM's use for Transitional 9th graders, as well as all students.

People

The independent evaluation team notes that our People section approaches standard, but incorrectly labels us as having 6 Board members. We in fact have 7 Board members that span education and Turn-around training, restorative practices, mental health, finance, community building and partnership creation, Early childhood literacy and Special Education.

Experience and Expertise

The independent evaluation asserts that our Board lacks experience and expertise in Community Building, Management and Operations, and Legal. Again, not only were the number of Board members misrepresented, but the expertise among the Board was also misrepresented. Our Treasurer, President, and general Board Members, all have Management and Operations experience through multiple avenues. Kelvin Oliver and Cherryllyn Branche were both District and School level leaders. They not only managed school operations but did so for districts as well. Shannon Bush, runs the management and oversight for Oddessey House of New Orleans. She too possesses the management and operations

expertise of running a nonprofit's day to day operations. Charita McClellan, our Treasurer, is a Fortune 500 CPA and Auditor. She has managed the oversight of companies like Citigroup, Seven Eleven, Chase, and Exxon. We have also contracted with a government CPA to ensure that meet standards. We discussed during the interview that we lacked an attorney for our Board, but that we were in talks with two individuals to join committees and potentially take Board seats. Thus, we did not lack a plan to fill gaps on our team. Most importantly, the independent evaluation asserts that we have no one who has Community Building experience on our Board. This is again, untrue. Members of our Board have been Board members in other places; we also have an MBA recipient whose educational and professional expertise is in community building and relationship management in Imari Ruffin, our Secretary. Ashley Robinson, our Vice President, builds and manages relationships for Agenda for Children. She too comes to us with experience in this capacity.

Staffing

To claim that our staffing is administratively heavy is an oversimplification. We have provided staffing rationales for our model during the application and briefly during the interview. We were only requested to provide one job description during the RFC process, and did so. Thus, we cannot be certain what the questions about our staffing are, or why these questions are not clear, if the analysis is also not clear.

To begin, we have several leadership positions coming on board in Years 3 and beyond, because anticipated student enrollment predicates this. If student enrollment does not support the need for additional staffing, it will not be included. We have discussed during the interview and application that it is our goal to open with two school leaders, one of which is our CEO. The maintenance of the CEO role is because we are already underway with operations in Indianapolis. Thus, we need someone to maintain the brand in both locations. We have not opened a school there, and thus, are not experienced operators, but we have met before the School Board of Indianapolis and the Mayor's Office to be certified and authorized as new school operators for the future. For the sake of clarity also, we would not open a school in two cities at once. We will make priority decisions to determine which location is first and then, move the planning years for the other city to the back end, giving us time to get one city's school up and running before opening another.

Secondly, we have stated from day one that we will open the school with the following positions 2 school leaders, operations manager, and a dean of culture. This leadership structure allows for a skeletal crew during years 1 through 3, and ensures that all leaders are pitching in to support the school. If our Special populations grow, which we anticipate our programmatic offerings making it possible for this to happen, we will include a Director of Special Populations role to provide oversight to all Special Education, ESL, and IAP students. This role will be assumed be one of the coleaders if enrollment determines otherwise. Further, we will only include additional administrative staff as we scale our model and include middle and elementary schools- a factor that has been left out of the evaluation process. We apologize for a lack of clarity here, but this has been our plan from day one. We do not need an administratively heavy building for students. We need coaches to monitor achievement and instruction, and coaches to monitor restorative practices and behavior. We will proceed with maintaining 1 Operations' Manager if enrollment is low and if we do not scale. This person will manage the financial and operations side of our school. The COO will only be utilized if we scale across two cities. Again, administrative staff is contingent on enrollment and scale.

CEO Concerns

The independent evaluation asserts that clear and consistent leadership is not provided. The report further states, Brandy Williams has not been a Principal and did not showcase evidence of leading a team of effective teachers, and that she explained her weaknesses as Board relations and Facility management and Operations. With all due respect, it is not possible to ascertain nor provide adequate information about leadership track records in the 5 minutes that this question was brought up. First, while it is true that Brandy Williams, as CEO, has never been a Principal of Record, she has been an Assistant Principal and a District level leader, a role higher than a Principal. Second, as a leader she has run Nonprofits, including Generation Success, and school teams towards effective achievement and management. She does, in fact, have experience working with Board for oversight, as a committee member, and as a direct report CEO. To start, educationally, Brandy Williams has 15 years of solid, education experience. As an Alternative Certified educator, she managed to achieve 90% passing and 35% Mastery as a first-year math teacher in Texas. She was quickly promoted in Year 3 to a Team Leader in one of Texas' largest school districts, and continued to produce as an educator in that year. She was moved out of the classroom and into a coaching role for the district in year 4. That does not happen because of a lack of effective leadership. From that point, she began coaching educators on team teaching in inclusion classrooms, and Gifted and Talented facilitation. She effectively coached teams of educators to create Gifted and Talented programs that exactly mirrored the population of their schools, which is a gold standard in Gifted and Talented education. Students in these programs excelled, despite being categorically different in achievement and abilities, boasting over 90% pass rating and over 80% Mastery ratings on average. In New Orleans she has participated in coaching educators to turn-around student achievement. Here in New Orleans, her efforts led to 95% compliance in ESL regulations for one charter system and over 90% compliance for IAP/504 compliance in another. As a Math Dean, she coached a team of first year, uncertified educators, to reach end of year goals by January, bringing Proficiency levels of students in grades 3 through 8 from 0% to 73%.

As a leader, she created the curriculum for the Tulane Earn and Learn program, quadrupled their enrollment in year 2, and landed large grants in the amount \$750K, in under a year. The program met its 80% benchmark of successful completion and placement among students. She has led Generation Success and single-handedly managed community partnerships and development for the organization. For these efforts, Generation Success received 501c3 status within 4 months of operation, grew their budget from \$5k to over \$100K in one year, and landed partnerships with NSNO, The Mind Trust, 4.0 Schools, InventSchools, and upon successful authorization, The Walton Family Foundation, as well as a host of local supporters and partnerships. Again, these leaps and bounds do not happen without effective management and leadership skills. And yes, while it is true that Brandy Williams lacks Facility management experience, not Operations and Board as well, it is untrue to state that she does not presently hold the skills necessary to coach and develop leaders in a successful team in education. Yes, there is a plan to fill gaps in experience. This too is another example of Brandy Williams' experience in displaying one of the 7 Habits of Highly effective leaders, a benchmark that has been used to ascertain effective school leaders from those who are ineffective. Lastly, as it was not mentioned, Brandy Williams not only has the experience on paper, but she also has the pedigree in education on paper. Mrs. Williams has participated in Nancy Euske's Leading For Excellence Institute where it was determined that she possess the two necessary leadership capacities for running effective, change-making teams, Visionary and Coaching Leadership styles. These styles were not self-reported, but rather, a summation

of Gallop surveys completed by subordinates, supervisors, and peers. Secondly, Brandy Williams holds two Master's degrees in Education Leadership and Instructional Management, and Clinical Mental Health Psychology. Again, these are two highly regarded, accredited educational accomplishments which also showcase ability. While it is not necessary to note this, it is certainly helpful to note that both Master's degrees were completed with 4.0 GPA and the inclusion of highly selective Honor societies like Golden Key, which only includes the top 2% of the field in their membership.

Operations

The independent evaluation claims that some tasks are misaligned and not all tasks are accounted for. Evaluators claim that the Board should manage tasks associated with contracting with back office support. The evaluators also note, though, that the Board oversight is necessary to move forward with contractual agreement and management. Thus, it seems that there is contradiction in their findings. While the CEO will garner relationships with support service providers and make initial evaluations of them, these findings will be given to the Board who will then provide additional oversight and give final authorization. This is not a misaligned task. The CEO cannot spend money that is not Board approved. The CEO also cannot make partnership agreements that are not Board approved. Further, this process has been discussed with the current CEO through mentorships from current CMO and charter school leaders in the city. Thus, it is the widely accepted practice of activities. Lastly, if steps in the start-up year planning are missing, the CEO and Generation Success Academy are already in the hands of the NSNO Fellowship to better inform those practices. Still, without clear indication of what steps are missing, there is no way for Generation Success Academy to meet the standards required.

Budgets and Facilities

The independent evaluation states that budgets are misaligned, and that contingency plans are not provided for if these funds are not granted. However, this is also inaccurate. We did not complete an Operating Year 1 budget, as it was not requested. Thus any inclusion of this amount does not represent our actual finances. We did complete a Year 1 budget with expenditures however, and those are consistent. The CEO Salary is conditionally listed as \$99,9996 if targets are met after year 1. Therefore, the salary of \$80K which is included, is accurate for Start-up and Year 1 expenditures. As discussed in the interview, we have survived as an organization on grant and philanthropic donations. A part of the CEO's year 1 goals includes, though is not limited too, locating additional revenue to equal \$200K. If that revenue is found and the goal met, the CEO salary will be increased to the \$99,996 amount. Further, that amount will still be one of, if not the lowest salary, for active CEOs in this city.

We presently do not need a contingency plan for Walton or NSNO. As noted in the interview, Walton is basing their decision of fund acquisition on Charter approval. If we are authorized, we will receive their grant dollars. We have already been awarded NSNO's funding which will have an initial disbursement of \$15K August 1. We are actively in talks with InventSchools to provide additional funding, on top of what we have received to date, and again, as a nonprofit, we have raised over \$100K in a little under 1 year. We are not certain why we would present a contingency plan for funds that we have already been awarded- in this case NSNO-, or conditionally been awarded- as is this case with The Walton Family Fund. But, our process and plan is to continue doing what we have always done in going after competitive grants, and building relationships with private funds and donors. This was mentioned during the interview. As a last resort, which was also discussed in the application, RFC, and interview, we will

cut noninstructional materials, travel, and if still necessary, benefit retirement funding amounts will be lowered to the minimum of 2%, and as a final resort, cutting nonessential staff.

Resume and Financial Planning

As discussed in the interview and our application materials, we have already made a conditional offer of employment for our Operations' Manager position. She is a current Operations Manager for one of the high performing charter school systems in New Orleans. Her resume was included. Secondly, we offered the Board Member's resume to provide clarity on who will be chief in driving the financial oversight for Generation Success Academy. That person is Charita McClellan, Board Treasurer. Third, the Operations' Manager position was included, which listed the following qualifications necessary:

Credential or degree

BA or BS with required coursework in Business Administration or Organizational Management

Three years of Broad, varied and increasingly responsible budget management experiences, computer information systems and organizational systems. Charter school experience preferred.

Key competencies include, but were not limited too: Understanding of budgeting, facility management, organizational management, budgeting and accounting, data processing, purchasing and inventory control.

Again, this description was pulled and copied directly from the job descriptions that was already uploaded and provided to the independent evaluation committee. Thus, it is inaccurate to assert that we have not addressed what the qualities and competencies for this position entailed. Again, we were very clear that the Operations' Manager would grow into the Director of Operations once we reached scale and full enrollment in our school.

Financial Management and Auditing

With respect again, we were never asked any questions about our plans for selecting an auditing firm, or why our system included the matrix of decision makers it included. Thus, it is not only unfounded to assume that we do not understand the supports' necessary for these ventures, but it is a wholesale assumption based on no information. We have discussed, numerous times, that our Board makes final decisions on all contracts. The CEO makes recommendations based on meetings and referrals from other CMO leaders. Still, the CEO will have no say in choosing the auditor. That is Board decision alone. The CEO may only request information guidelines from the Board, to best direct her people. We have submitted that Charita McClellan is a Fortune 500 Auditor. She is not only qualified to lead the Board through these processes, but also, she is qualified to direct the efforts of the CEO in reviewing potential needs of the auditing process and the management of our day to day books. The Operations' Manager reports to the CEO, who will be able to direct his/her efforts in this area.

Summary

We have answered each area of concern raised by the independent evaluation. We are troubled by the factual inaccuracies laden through our evaluation, and by the sheer assumptions that have been based on unfounded claims. There are several areas within this evaluation which mention aspects that we were never questioned about, nor were concerns made to us. Additionally, there were several areas in

this evaluation that included unclear metrics that were not offered, and not specifically given factual basis or descriptors for. We cannot meet a standard that we, and the evaluators, are not clear about. Moreover, we look forward to answering any further claims that may arise from our rebuttal as none of the information provided here is new or previously undiscussed. We have acknowledged our needs and gaps in experience within our team and Board. We have also made plans to answer and provide for those needs and gaps in experience. We are excited, passionate, poised, experienced, and ready to take on the challenges of educating this community.

Sincerely,

Generation Success Board