

ORLEANS PARISH SCHOOL BOARD

CHARTER SCHOOL APPLICATION RECOMMENDATION REPORT 2018

National Association of Charter School Authorizers

May 11, 2018

New Charter School Application for

Young Audiences Charter School - Orleans Parish

Submitted by

Young Audiences Charter Association

Evaluation Team

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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 Spring 2018 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 2018 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 2018 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, budget, and financial readiness.

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.

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

Proposed School Name:

Young Audiences Charter School - Orleans Parish

Mission:

The mission of Young Audiences Charter Association (YACA) is “to educate the whole child through arts integration and equip our creative learners to flourish as leaders in life and learning.”

Proposed Location:

YACA has not identified a site

Enrollment Projections:

Academic Year	Planned # Students	Maximum # Students	Grades Served
2019-20	424	472	PK - 3
2020-21	524	572	PK - 4
2021-22	624	672	PK - 5
2022-23	724	772	PK - 6
At Capacity	924	972	PK - 8

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Young Audiences Charter School - Orleans Parish

Recommendation:

APPROVE

Summary Analysis:

The evaluation team recommends approval of the proposal for Young Audiences Charter School – Orleans Parish (YACS – OP).

The School section meets the standard. The proposal is detailed as to how this school will raise student achievement and the applicant inspires confidence in Young Audiences Charter Association's (YACA) capacity to successfully implement the proposed academic and operational plans. The primary strengths include an academic model that is shown not only by research to be effective in advancing student achievement but also by the student performance results at YACA's existing school where the academic model has already been implemented. At Young Audiences Charter School – Jefferson Parish (YACS – JP), the Spring 2017 LEAP Criterion-Referenced Test showed the third-grade students at YACS – JP exceeded both Jefferson Parish School System and the State of Louisiana in Mastery (and above) levels for ELA and Math. Third-grade students at YACS – JP exceeded Jefferson Parish in Mastery (and above) in Science and Social Studies.

The People section meets the standard. YACA has identified pipelines from which it can hire staff and has partnerships with teacher education programs at local universities. YACA has identified a school leader for the proposed school in Orleans Parish, and his leadership experience and familiarity with the arts-integrated model will enable him to be an effective leader at YACS – OP. YACA has identified a group of mission-critical partners who can deliver meaningful resources that support and enhance the school's academic model. YACA's contingency plan for terminating contracts with mission-critical partners can be further developed. However, YACA demonstrated capacity to further develop and, if needed, execute the contingency plan.

The Operations section meets the standard. It includes a detailed start-up plan with specific tasks, timelines, and responsible individuals, and is aligned with YACA's start-up budget. Financial projections in the budget template are based on accurate, conservative, and legally compliant assumptions.

The Experienced Operator Addendum meets the standard. YACA was genuinely reflective about its scale strategy; identified significant and realistic threats to its success; and identified steps to minimize threats. The evaluation team is confident in YACA's capacity to expand while not destabilizing performance and derailing progress at YACS – JP. YACA has already identified the qualified individuals who will fill leadership vacancies at YACS – JP that stem from transitions to YACS – OP.

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

EXPERIENCED OPERATOR ADDENDUM (IF APPLICABLE)

Meets the Standard

PEOPLE

Meets the Standard

TRANSFORMATION ADDENDUM (IF APPLICABLE)

N/A

OPERATIONS

Meets the Standard

SCHOOL

Young Audiences Charter School - Orleans Parish

RATING:

Meets the Standard

Plan Summary:

YACA proposes to open YACS – OP, an open-enrollment, fully arts-integrated school. YACA is a returning applicant after submitting an unsuccessful Type 3 application during the Fall 2017 RFA process. In its current application, instead of proposing to transform a failing school, YACA proposes to start a new Type 1 charter school. The proposed school will open with grades Pre-K-3 and serve 424 students in 2019-20 with plans to add a grade each year through Grade 8. YACS – OP will offer five major arts disciplines, providing opportunities for student artistic and cultural growth, as well as pathways to master academic core competencies.

To assess baseline data, YACS – OP will use NWEA Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessments for Reading and Math, and Fountas & Pinnell beginning in August 2019. YACS – OP will conduct MAP testing three times per year and LEAP360 testing four times annually.

The professional development scaffold includes both traditional “top-down” delivery and “hands-on” co-teaching elements, including (1) professional development institutes and traditional professional development in-service days; (2) dedicated, full-time arts integration specialists and teaching artists on staff; (3) co-taught professional teaching artist residencies; and (4) arts integration leadership training.

Analysis:

The School section meets the standard.

The proposed arts-integrated model is comprehensive, research-based, and is likely to lead to intended student performance goals. YACA cites six research studies that demonstrate that the academic model's structures, policies, and practices are effective. This same academic model, currently implemented at YACS – JP, has produced the following results: Spring 2017 LEAP Criterion-Referenced Test showed the third-grade students at YACS – JP exceeded both Jefferson Parish and the State of Louisiana in Mastery (and above) levels for ELA and Math. Additionally, third-grade students at YACS – JP exceeded Jefferson Parish in Mastery (and above) in Science and Social Studies. In addition to performance on LEAP, evidence of the academic model's capacity to drive results is evident in year-over-year increases in MAP scores, as well as an increase in the school grade from “D” to “C.” While a “C” grade is not YACA’s goal, the evaluation team is confident that the applicant is demonstrating an upward trajectory in student performance. YACA’s academic model presents an excellent plan for professional development, which will support teachers in their roles as instructional leaders responsible for student outcomes and progress.

The applicant’s professional development plans are well-developed, which are critical to implement the unique aspects of the arts-integrated model. Ten days of professional development are led by Young Audiences of Louisiana (YALA) before the start of every school year. Teachers will participate in six professional development in-service days during the academic year. Teachers will receive intensive training on implementing YACA’s curricula, as well as how to use assessments and data to improve their pedagogy and student outcomes. Portions of professional development are specifically dedicated to training teachers on arts integration as a pedagogical practice. YACA has a well-developed strategy for utilizing full-time teaching artist staff members to write curricula, co-plan, and co-teach arts-integrated units alongside classroom teachers.

YACA submitted a comprehensive special education plan that described how all special education students will be identified and evaluated, and also described plans for developing IEPs. The applicant provided meaningful strategies for ensuring that English learner students succeed both academically and socially at YACS – OP. The staffing plan adequately supports the strategies and special education plan proposed for YACS – OP.

PEOPLE

Young Audiences Charter School - Orleans Parish

RATING:

Meets the Standard

Plan Summary:

YACA is a non-profit organization founded in 2012 by YALA, which is the Louisiana affiliate of a national arts organization called Young Audiences Arts for Learning. YACA currently operates one charter school in Jefferson Parish, YACS – JP. The 10 members of the YACA governing board provide oversight of all financial, academic, and legal matters of the schools. Board members' areas of expertise include academics, finance, legal, management, operations, and community relations.

YALA is a mission-critical partner who will provide the backbone of the model's signature arts-integration plan and implementation. Services will include a professional development model, as well as the following staff members: director of arts integration; teaching artists; after-school coordinator; after-school teaching artists; after-school teachers; and a grant writer. The director of arts integration will be co-evaluated by YACS – OP's school leader and senior leadership at YALA. YACA asserts that the YALA board has no role in the governance of YACA and states that YALA is governed by a separate board of directors with no overlap with the YACA board. Beginning in the 2019-20 academic year, YALA will provide services to YACA on a fee-based contract (total payments of \$520,000 to YALA in 2019-20).

YACA has identified pipelines from which it can hire staff, such as teacher education programs at Tulane University, Xavier University, and Loyola University. Instructional leaders will use the Whetstone classroom observation platform to conduct formative, weekly classroom observations and provide teacher feedback. The Whetstone rubric is based on COMPASS and YACS – OP has embedded additional metrics to ensure teachers are improving instruction for students specific to YACA's arts-integrated model.

Brandon House has been identified as the school leader for YACS – OP.

Analysis:

The People section meets the standard.

YACA has identified five mission-critical partners who will deliver meaningful resources that will support and enhance the school's academic model. YALA is identified as the key mission-critical partner. YALA's overall effectiveness in conducting arts-integrated professional development has undergone an independent evaluation (conducted by Loyola's Institute for Quality and Equity in Education [IQEE]) for the last four years as part of its U.S. Department of Education-funded Arts-Integrated Professional Development program and will continue to be evaluated through 2021.

YACA has presented a sensible staffing plan that aligns with the school's arts-integrated model and is enhanced by the partnership with YALA. YALA will provide the following staff members to the proposed school: director of arts integration; all teaching artists; after-school coordinator; after-school teaching artists; after-school teachers; and a grant writer. The director of arts integration will be co-evaluated by YACS – OP's school leader and senior leadership at YALA.

YACA has identified a qualified school leader who has managed a school, a team of teachers, and an academic program. Brandon House is currently the school leader at YACS – JP and provides instructional leadership to team leaders and teachers. Under his leadership, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding iLEAP/LEAP Reading and Mathematics Standards has increased each year since 2014. During the capacity interview, he exhibited a strong command of the leadership practices that develop high-performing teams of teachers.

The applicant's contingency plan for mission-critical partners lacked detail as to how the school would continue to operate an arts-integrated model in the absence of its mission-critical partners. However, during the capacity interview, YACA demonstrated capacity to further develop and, if needed, execute the contingency plan.

OPERATIONS

Young Audiences Charter School - Orleans Parish

RATING:

Meets the Standard

Plan Summary:

YACA's COO, with support from the CEO, will be responsible for identifying and securing a school facility in the 11 months prior to opening. YACA's priority will be leasing an OPSB building. However, YACA is prepared to pursue other options in the event that an OPSB building is unavailable, including leasing an unoccupied building from the Archdiocese of Louisiana or other entities. The YACS – OP budget includes \$240,000 for annual facilities rent. YACA states that all facility-operating expenses have been budgeted based on comparable facilities, including water/sewer, disposal services, contracted custodial services, repairs & maintenance, property insurance, and utilities.

YACA proposes to engage Michael Dunn of Dunn Financial Solutions, LLC, who will be employed as the CFO and provide back-office services to ensure a strong foundation for effective school operations. Dunn has provided financial services for several charters school in Louisiana, including YACS – JP and he is the former CFO of KIPP New Orleans.

The applicants approach to budgeting is that original annual operating budgets and budget updates are prepared by the CFO in conjunction with the school leader, CEO, operations manager, and finance committee, and submitted for approval to the full board. Any updated operating budgets with greater than a 5 percent variance in either revenue or expenses are required to have full board approval (after review by the finance committee). The approach to cost cutting, if necessary, is delaying the start dates of selected staff, while prioritizing an early start date for the school leader.

Analysis:

The Operations section meets the standard.

YACA presented a detailed start-up plan with specific tasks, timelines, and responsible individuals aligned with YACA's start-up budget.

Financial projections are based on accurate, conservative, and legally compliant assumptions. The total revenue from local, state, and federal sources is aligned with enrollment projections in the School section and are conservatively projected. Annual fees paid to YALA for essential services are clearly stated for each service component that YALA will provide and these amounts are not funded at amounts that would preclude YACA from implementing its plans. Annual reports for YACA contain no material findings and include unqualified opinions by CPA firms. Cash balances are positive and the cumulative fund balance grows to nearly \$950,000 by Year 3 (16 percent of total expenditures). Nothing in the proposed budgets for YACS – OP or in the financial audits for YACS – JP indicate that YACA would have any challenges with cash management or access to adequate cash. In all, the budget represents a sound financial plan for the proposed school.

YACA demonstrates the \$259,000 start-up loan is to be reasonably expected from YALA if a start-up grant is not awarded by the Walton Family Foundation.

YACA has not yet identified a facility. However, Charter School Property Solutions, Sizeler Thompson Brown Architects, and CORE Construction are three partners whom YACA has identified that represent a team with a record of charter school property acquisition, planning, and construction. The evaluation team is confident in the applicant team's capacity to work with partners on facilities acquisition and management. YACA is currently going through this process as it finalizes financing for a 175,000-square-foot non-district facility for YACS – JP.

EXPERIENCED OPERATOR ADDENDUM (IF APPLICABLE)

Young Audiences Charter School - Orleans Parish

RATING:

Meets the Standard

Plan Summary:

YACA currently operates one open-enrollment charter school in Jefferson Parish, serving more than 750 students in Kindergarten through Grade 7. At YACS – JP, approximately 83 percent of students are economically disadvantaged, 69.5 percent are non-white, and 20 percent receive special education services (including 4 percent who receive gifted and talented services). The applicant does not include plans to open any additional schools during the next five years beyond the Orleans Parish school proposed in this application. However, the proposal also states that the existing Jefferson campus was recently approved to expand from K-8 to K-12.

If granted a second charter to open a school in Orleans Parish, the YACA board will expand its capacity to manage multiple schools as a Charter Management Organization (CMO) composed of current mission-critical partner YALA staff and new hires: CEO Rickie Nutik (to lead the YACA CMO leadership team), CFO Mike Dunn, COO Richard Bates (currently YALA's Associate Director), a Chief Academic Officer (CAO) Bradley Philipson, data and technology support personnel, and a grant writer. Ms. Nutik will step down from her role as CEO of YALA to assume leadership of the YACA CMO.

Several people in leadership positions at YACS – JP will transition to YACS – OP, along with one teacher per grade (K-3) and three teaching artists. Transitions are as follows: School Leader Brandon House will transfer to YACS – OP, being replaced by current YACS – JP Assistant School Leader Brionne Stewart (Assistant School Leader will be an advertised position); Director of Arts Integration Roscoe Reddix Jr. will transfer, being replaced by Lead Teaching Artist Valorie Polmer; Director of Curriculum and Instruction Martha Mason will transfer, being replaced by Lead Teacher Tamara Watson; YACS – JP Data Manager Damien Sayles will become the data manager at the CMO level as the position is centralized; and YACS – JP's operations manager and dean of culture will remain in their positions.

Analysis:

The Experienced Operator Addendum meets the standard for approval.

YACA was genuinely reflective about its scale strategy; identified significant and realistic threats to its success; and identified steps to minimize threats. The four main threats YACA identified were adoption of a new behavior management plan; competition for student enrollment; talent; and board oversight in two parishes. To mitigate each of the four threats, YACA identified comprehensive solutions and resources that broadly include, but are not limited to, professional development, leadership training, hiring a communications manager, and board training.

It is evident that YACA put a significant amount of planning into the stability and continued improvement of YACS – JP as it plans for expansion to Orleans Parish. The evaluation team is confident in the applicant's capacity to expand while not derailing performance and progress at the existing school. The centralization of certain services at the CMO level, particularly in regard to CAO oversight of curriculum, will contribute to stability and consistency within the network. Several people in leadership positions at YACS – JP, including the school leader, will transition to YACS – OP, along with one teacher per grade (K-3) and three teaching artists. Brionne Stewart will become the new school leader at YACS – JP. At the capacity interview she exhibited a deep understanding of the instructional leadership strategies required for YACS – JP to drive student performance goals. The evaluation team is confident that YACA's intensive and sustained model for professional development will allow new teachers at YACS – JP to join a team of teachers highly qualified to provide peer-to-peer arts integration supports.

EVALUATOR BIOGRAPHIES

Evaluator's Name

Chakana Fowler

Ms. Fowler's 10 years of leadership in education management includes managing finance at Uncommon Schools and business development at Charter Schools USA. She also co-managed the \$23 million Florida Fund, which was a social venture capital fund created through a partnership between Charter School Growth Fund and the Florida Department of Education to support the expansion of high-performing charter schools throughout Florida. Ms. Fowler's career in education began in the classroom where she taught mathematics for two years at a South Bronx middle school as a New York City Teaching Fellow. Ms. Fowler's professional background also includes her work in investment banking; she was an Analyst at Morgan Stanley and an Associate at JPMorgan. Ms. Fowler has a Bachelor's in Accounting from the University of Miami. She attended graduate school at City College of New York, where she earned an Ed. M in Mathematics Education and at Columbia Business School, where she earned an MBA.

Evaluator's Name

Dr. Lisa Green-Derry

Dr. Lisa Green-Derry is an education strategist who knows that all children have assets and believes that expanding the definition of assets can influence ways in which professionals interact with children and ultimately produce positive outcomes. Dr. Lisa's expertise in student-centered instruction and assessment, implementation and evaluation of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) curricula, designing and facilitating culturally responsive modules for pre-service teachers, and educators in K-12 systems, graduate students, as well as faculty of social work programs has for more than 20 years influenced educational outcomes for students in urban and rural educational settings. Dr. Lisa's integrative approach to education connects assets of families and children to various systems in ways to provide opportunities that support equitable education for all children.

Evaluator's Name

Steve Robbins

Steve Robbins is an independent education consultant focused on school operations and finance. He received his Master's of Education from Harvard University with a focus on education policy and data science. Prior to earning his Master's degree, he was a founding member of Wolcott School, a high school in Chicago for students with learning differences, as their first ever Director of Finance and Operations. Previously he worked in New York City as both a corporate finance advisor and a hedge fund analyst for eight years.