

ORLEANS PARISH SCHOOL BOARD

CHARTER SCHOOL APPLICATION RECOMMENDATION REPORT 2018

National Association of Charter School Authorizers

November 5, 2018

New Charter School Application for

The Community School

Submitted by

Community Exceptional Children's Services Centers

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.

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:

Community Exceptional Children's Services Centers

Proposed School Name:

The Community School

Mission:

The school's mission is to "provide behavioral and mental health care support throughout the Greater New Orleans area" (Part 1, page 21).

Proposed Location:

To be determined

Enrollment Projections:

<i>Academic Year</i>	<i>Planned # Students</i>	<i>Maximum # Students</i>	<i>Grades Served</i>
2018-19	0	0	9-12
2019-20	110	120	9-12
2020-21	195	200	9-12
2021-22	295	300	9-12
2022-23	330	335	9-12
At Capacity	400	425	9-12

SECTION RATINGS

The Community School

Recommendation:

Denial

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

Does Not Meet the Standard

EXPERIENCED OPERATOR ADDENDUM (IF APPLICABLE)

N/A

PEOPLE

Does Not Meet the Standard

TRANSFORMATION ADDENDUM (IF APPLICABLE)

N/A

OPERATIONS

Does Not Meet the Standard

SCHOOL

The Community School

RATING:

Does Not Meet the Standard

Plan Summary:

The applicant has proposed a school that will operate as three autonomous units working together under one roof to meet the needs of youth who experience mental and behavioral health concerns. The units are (1) an open-enrollment day treatment and therapeutic day school, (2) suspension abatement and incarceration diversion programs, and (3) a community-based behavioral and mental health clinic for adolescents and young adults. The target population is students up to age 25 who are chronically disruptive, who are dealing with emotional/behavioral disorders, and/or who are facing suspensions or expulsions. Students will be able to enroll via the OneApp process or by referral from their home schools. Upon enrollment, students will receive diagnostic assessments and a progress plan with measurable benchmarks to determine how well each student is progressing toward being prepared for a less-restrictive environment. The goal is to reintegrate students back into their home schools with support as soon as possible.

Analysis:

The School section does not meet the standard because much of this section neglected to provide all required information and sufficient detail to clearly communicate the applicant's plans. Due to a lack of detail in the written application, this analysis is based primarily on capacity interview responses.

For example, clear information about the school's academic program was not provided, including curriculum, instructional strategies, and assessment. When asked during the interview about the curriculum to be used, the applicant discussed athletics, therapy, and internships. When asked to specifically identify the math curriculum, the applicant was unable to do so. The applicant was also asked during the interview about key instructional strategies and was unable to identify key instructional strategies that will be effective for the proposed student population. Further, the applicant was asked during the interview about the assessments planned for the school, including interim and summative assessments. The applicant was unable to speak to the specific assessments that will be used. Given the lack of information about curriculum, instruction, and assessment, it is not clear how the proposed program will meet state requirements for graduation.

It is not clear that the applicant has sufficient knowledge about federal and state requirements for identifying and serving students with special needs. During the interview, the applicant was asked how the school would respond to a suspected disability in a student. The applicant stated that the school provides a periodic wellness survey and would develop a plan for the student based on the survey results. This response did not indicate that the applicant has thorough and accurate knowledge about the federal and state requirements for identifying students with disabilities and raises questions about the applicant's capacity to implement a high-quality program.

In several sections the application was not responsive to the questions asked or the criteria. For example, the applicant did not address plans for school culture, disciplinary system, and student engagement in the Student Experience section. The applicant did not provide clear, well organized information regarding diploma pathways; systems to address students at risk; ensuring preparation for college and career success; and supports for successful transition from Grade 9 in the High School section. The application did not describe efforts to build community/parent support, address roles that parents have taken in the school's development, or describe in the Family and Community Engagement section how information about the school has been shared.

Each of these concerns raises questions about the applicant's preparation and capacity to implement the proposed program.

PEOPLE

The Community School

RATING:

Does Not Meet the Standard

Plan Summary:

The applicant has a governing board of six people with backgrounds in education, business development, juvenile justice, law, and mental health. The desired board size is 11 members. The board will have four committees: (1) Finance, (2) Compliance and Risk Management, (3) Academic Resilience and Performance, and (4) Clinical Resilience and Performance. The management team includes a CEO/executive director, director of academics, clinical director, dean of students, school operations manager, and business manager. All staff members must successfully participate in an initial training that focuses on integration based on positive differentiation, the tenets of trauma-informed practices and environment, and ongoing job-embedded professional development.

The Community School will seek a number of community partnerships, including high school principals, local charter management organization leaders, the special education and student services department(s) of OPSB, The Metropolitan Human Services District, The Center for Resilience, Tulane Medical School, Louisiana State University Medical School, Opportunity NOW, and the State Department of Juvenile Justice Services.

Analysis:

The People section does not meet the standard because many parts of this section neglected to provide required information and/or did not provide sufficient detail and evidence to clearly communicate the applicant's plans. Due to a lack of detail in the written application, this analysis is based primarily on capacity interview responses.

The application stated that the board will have six members but stated in the Request for Clarification that the board will have 11 members. However, three members of the current board are proposed school employees. No information was provided about transitioning from a founding board to a governing board, desired board composition, recruitment and selection of future board members, parent representation, orientation for new members, ongoing board development for all members, or how the board's strengths and weaknesses will be assessed.

The application did not enumerate board powers and duties, so it is unclear if the board has a thorough understanding of their responsibilities, including school leader evaluation, and open records and open meetings, which were not addressed. When asked during the interview about board responsibilities, the board's vice president stated that the board's responsibility is to follow the mission, hold everyone accountable, and engage the community. The applicant's lack of knowledge of key board responsibilities raises concerns about the board's ability to provide effective oversight of the proposed school.

The staffing plan is not clear because there is a lack of alignment among the organizational chart, staffing plan, and budget. For example, the organizational chart and staffing plan include interventionists and social workers but these positions are not evident in the budget. Additionally, the job descriptions did not include all essential information and responsibilities necessary to implement the school's plans. Further, the application acknowledged that there is a severe shortage of qualified professionals for the proposed student population but did not provide a recruitment plan.

It is not evident that the proposed school leader has an established track record of success with the proposed student population. Although the application identified academic programs for which the proposed school leader has been responsible, student performance data to demonstrate the leader's record of improving student achievement and/or ability to develop a high-performing team of teachers across multiple years were not provided.

The program appears to rely heavily on mission-critical partners but the partners named throughout the application and during the interview are not consistent and no contracts or memoranda of agreement have been executed. Each of these concerns raises questions about the applicant's preparation and capacity to implement the proposed program.

OPERATIONS

The Community School

RATING:

Does Not Meet the Standard

Plan Summary:

The facilities plan is a longitudinal plan that incorporates an incubation period followed by three distinct phases based on operational need and financial projection: (1) entering an agreement with the school district to renovate and occupy a vacant school building; (2) sharing a space temporarily with an existing, operating school; and (3) renting a space adequate for Year 1. An agreement with the local school district to occupy a school that is currently vacant at 3301 Sullen Place is the primary facility plan.

The school is planning to contract with 4th Sector Solutions for financial services. The start-up budget includes \$335,000 from the Walton Family Foundation and an HHT Fellowship, and a \$50,000 Innovative Education Programs Grant. Clinical operations will generate revenue as a certified community-based mental and behavioral health clinic; and the suspension abatement program will generate revenue on a per-pupil basis. The majority of expenditures are allocated for instruction and support services salaries.

Analysis:

The Operations section does not meet the standard because thorough information and specific detail were missing from several parts of this section and the applicant was not responsive to all the application questions or criteria. Due to a lack of detail in the written application, this analysis is based primarily on capacity interview responses.

It is not evident that the applicant has a sound facility plan. When asked during the interview if a facility had been identified, the applicant stated that an unused school district elementary school has been identified but the applicant has not talked to the school district about using the property.

The application included detailed information regarding the school's financial services plan, including contracting for back-office financial support with 4th Sector Solutions and hiring a qualified school business manager. However, no information was provided regarding cost-cutting measures if the school has a budget shortfall; the roles of the governing board and the school site leadership in the budgeting process; accounting and control systems; securing the annual audit; financial transparency; or awarding contracts. The Budget Narrative (Attachment 24) was not provided, as required. The absence of required information raises questions about the applicant's capacity to implement the proposed program and be fiscally responsible.

The budget included start-up funds from the Walton Family Foundation and the HHT Fellowship but the applicant stated during the interview that funds have not been awarded. The budget also noted \$10,000 in start-up funds from six schools but the applicant stated during the interview that these funds are not secured. The school's financial plan includes accessing Medicare reimbursement and fees from families, which raises significant concerns. The lack of supporting evidence raises concerns about the viability of the applicant's plan.

Finally, several aspects of the budget (Attachment 23) raise questions and concerns. For example, the salary structure does not seem realistic and it is unclear how salaries were determined. The executive assistant and office manager are to be paid the same rate as teachers, which does not seem reasonable or aligned with local salary structures. Custodial salaries seem quite high and the estimate of the facility lease does not seem reasonable (.4 percent of school revenue). These issues raise concerns about the fiscal viability of the proposed plan.

Each of these concerns raises questions about the applicant's preparation and capacity to implement the proposed program.

EVALUATOR BIOGRAPHIES

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 with clients to secure more than \$21 million in grant awards and more than 80 approved charter school applications. Dr. Palazesi served on the board of directors of a high-performing charter school in Tallahassee, Florida, for nine years, including four years as board chair. Dr. Palazesi has also worked for the Florida Department of Education as 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, Indiana, and Thomas University in Thomasville, Georgia. Dr. Palazesi earned her Bachelor degree in Elementary Education from the University of Illinois ; her Master degree in Gifted Education from Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago; and her Doctorate degree from the University of Illinois.

Evaluator's Name

Wanda Guillame

Wanda Guillame is an educational consultant providing support to schools and districts in the areas of instructional and leadership coaching, professional development, and school and district turnaround. In addition, she collaborates with state and local education agencies to offer charter school evaluation and recommendation expertise for authorizers in need of internal capacity to assess the organizational, operational, and educational rigor of charter school applications. Wanda has served as a teacher, principal and chief academic officer, and is a leader in building capacity among school leadership teams and developing innovative strategies to turn around failing schools. She holds a Bachelor in Elementary Education from Loyola University, a Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction and Educational Administration from the University of New Orleans, and holds an Educational Leader Level 3 certification for the State of Louisiana.

Evaluator's Name

Anthony Oliver

Anthony Oliver is currently an assistant principal in the Jefferson County School System in Birmingham, Alabama. Most recently, Anthony served as executive director at Breakthrough Birmingham, an education nonprofit dedicated to providing high-quality academic programming to underserved students and preparing the next generation of teachers. Anthony has also served as a high school mathematics teacher and coach, and has worked as a principal intern at Newton North High School where he worked to create access to challenging academic curriculum for African American students and students from low socioeconomic classes. Anthony holds a Bachelor in mathematics from the Virginia Military Institute, an Master in secondary education - mathematics curriculum and instruction from the University of Alabama at Birmingham, and a Master of Education in school leadership from the Harvard Graduate School of Education.