

**ORLEANS PARISH SCHOOL BOARD**

# CHARTER SCHOOL APPLICATION RECOMMENDATION REPORT 2018

*National Association of Charter School Authorizers*

**November 5, 2018**

*New Charter School Application for*

**InspireNOLA PK-8 and InspireNOLA 9-12 Transformations**

*Submitted by*

**InspireNOLA Charter Schools**

*Evaluation Team*

**TEAM LEAD:** **Dr. Iris Palazes**

**EVALUATORS:** **Wanda Guillame**

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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:*

**InspireNOLA Charter Schools**

*Proposed School Name:*

**InspireNOLA PK-8 and InspireNOLA 9-12 Transformations**

*Mission:*

The mission of InspireNOLA Charter Schools is to transform and inspire an educational movement.

*Proposed Location:*

To be determined

*Enrollment Projections:*

Academic Year	Planned # Students	Maximum # Students	Grades Served
2018-19	0	0	PreK-12
2019-20	1495	1611	PreK-12
2020-21	1520	1638	PreK-12
2021-22	1550	1671	PreK-12
2022-23	1565	1687	PreK-12
At Capacity	1565	1687	PreK-12

## SECTION RATINGS

InspireNOLA PK-8 and InspireNOLA 9-12 Transformations

*Recommendation:*

**Approve**

### 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)

Meets the Standard

#### OPERATIONS

Meets the Standard

**SCHOOL****InspireNOLA PK-8 and InspireNOLA 9-12 Transformations****RATING:****Meets the Standard***Plan Summary:*

InspireNOLA has proposed two transformation schools: one to serve students in pre-kindergarten (pre-K) through Grade 8 and one to serve high school Grades 9-12. The schools plan to open in 2019 with 715 students in pre-K-8, and 230 students in Grade 9, growing the high school one grade each year until it reaches 850 students at full capacity.

The educational model supports an approach to child-adolescent growth and development that includes “child-centered” environments in which students are able to discover information, analyze evidence, and evaluate relationships through inquiry-based experiences. InspireNOLA students will be engaged in programming that fosters intellectual preparedness and is associated with individual strengths and needs. InspireNOLA’s model provides discovery learning opportunities that integrate student exploration, interaction with one another, and problem solving with an emphasis on cultivating a positive attitude toward learning as a lifelong process.

*Analysis:*

The School section meets the standard.

The application provided a detailed explanation of the educational model (page 7), along with the research base, and addressed specific structures, policies, and practices that support both the mission and academics. These structures, policies, and practices are thoughtfully aligned with the school’s four main pillars: positive culture, rigorous academics, continuous growth, and accountability. The application provided a comprehensive list of planned curricula, along with the rationale for their selection, assessments, and an outline of planned professional development aligned with the curricula and assessments. During the interview, the applicant’s description of the academic model was consistent with the plan in the application, which provided evidence of the applicant’s depth of knowledge and solid plans.

The applicant provided a strong plan for creating school culture and discipline that aligns with the student population to be served. The application stated that a “positive student culture” (page 15) is established through the use of a positive behavior incentive system (PBIS) and a positive academic incentive system (PAIS). A clear explanation was provided indicating that both systems reward good choices and positive behavior with celebrations, privileges, and awards. When asked during the interview for further information about the school culture, the applicant stated that the school spends time ensuring students understand the core values and puts a great deal of effort into motivating students through the incentive systems.

During the interview, the applicant provided evidence of strong knowledge of federal and state requirements for identifying and serving special student populations, which inspired confidence in the applicant’s ability to comply with federal and state requirements. One concern is that there were gaps in the English Language Learner (ELL) section where required information was not provided. For example, the applicant did not discuss the use of grade-level materials, the specific strategies and supports to be provided to ensure student access to these materials, how student progress in the general curriculum will be monitored, or plans for including ELL students in standardized testing, extra-curricular activities, and culture-building activities. However, the review team was sufficiently impressed with the applicant’s knowledge during the interview to be confident that appropriate support will be provided to ELL students and their families. For example, the applicant stated that the school will use an English language proficiency screening to determine each student’s need for support and identify the services to be provided based on the results. Both pull-out and push-in models will be used for ELL services based on student need. Additionally, translation services will be available to families and students.

## PEOPLE

### InspireNOLA PK-8 and InspireNOLA 9-12 Transformations

#### RATING:

Meets the Standard

#### *Plan Summary:*

InspireNOLA has a governing board of eight people with backgrounds in academics, finances, legal issues, management and operations, and community relations. The board has established three committees – finance, strategy and legal, and academics – and each board member serves on at least one committee.

The board has established an evaluation process for the CEO that includes a formal scored evaluation by at least two peers or supervisees of the CEO, as well as a formal scored observation by board members, along with the review of established quantitative goals and performance objectives. The evaluation process culminates with an in-person review conversation between the board and the CEO.

The pre-K-8 school leadership team will include the school leader, academy principals (pre-K-2, 3-5, 6-8), school operations manager, and dean of students. The high school leadership team will include the school leader, academy principals (9-10, 11-12), culture and data assistant principal, school operations manager, and head counselor. The school principals are supported by management organization staff, including the chief executive officer, chief academic officer, chief financial officer, and their staffs.

#### *Analysis:*

The People section meets the standard.

The applicant provided realistic plans for board composition. The board's roles and responsibilities are clearly identified and individual board members bring a wide range of expertise, including legal, education, finance, and development. Although additional detail is needed regarding board structure and operations, during the interview, the applicant inspired confidence in the board's capacity to provide oversight and effectively govern the proposed school. The applicant provided detail during the interview to indicate that the board has a detailed and realistic plan for evaluating the school leader.

Although specific metrics for gauging the effectiveness of the high school program were not detailed, the application identified specific metrics that the board uses to monitor and gauge academic, operational, and financial effectiveness. These include student performance on assessments, monthly financial reports, student recruitment and enrollment data, student retention and attrition data, and staff recruitment and retention data.

The applicant effectively described teacher recruitment, qualifications, evaluation, pathways to leadership, and salary and benefits. For example, the applicant identified a number of strategies for recruiting teachers, including referrals, local and national outreach, use of social media, job fairs, and partnerships with teacher preparation programs. Teachers will be made aware of their expectations through a variety of modes such as written communication, professional development sessions, and individual meetings with the human resources director. Teachers will be evaluated in two ways: instructionally through the TAP system and holistically through performance reviews conducted twice annually.

The applicant has a strong school leader with an established track record of improving student achievement and the ability to develop a high-performing team of teachers.

The mission-critical partners section of the application identified a number of nonprofits and support organizations that work with InspireNOLA to ensure achievement of the mission. The proposal included Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with Achievement Network, Instruction Partners, and STEM NOLA. Although the application discussed additional partnerships (such as Southern University of New Orleans [SUNO], Delgado Community College, and YouthForce NOLA) but did not attach MOUs, the inclusion of partnership agreements provided evidence that the applicant has a clear process for formalizing agreements with school partners.

## OPERATIONS

### InspireNOLA PK-8 and InspireNOLA 9-12 Transformations

### RATING:

Meets the Standard

#### *Plan Summary:*

The schools' facility plans are to remain in the existing facilities and campuses that the Transformation schools occupy currently.

Financial responsibilities for the schools will be managed by the chief financial officer, a licensed certified public accountant (CPA), and staff. The InspireNOLA finance department includes a CFO for financial strategy, budget management, and financial reporting; a director of finance to manage month-end and year-end accounting procedures; and support staff who handle purchasing, accounts payable, and special revenue.

Start-up funding has been procured by grants and awards funded by the Charter School Growth Fund (CSGF) replication initiatives and the federal Charter School Replication Program (CSP) grants.

#### *Analysis:*

The Operations section meets the standard.

The applicant provided reasonable facility plans. InspireNOLA will remain in the existing facilities and campuses that the Transformation schools currently occupy. InspireNOLA will work with OPSB and the existing operator to determine the appropriate timeline and transition of the facilities with an exact date of no later than July 1, 2019. The applicant provided evidence that a well-qualified team is in place to meet state, local, and OPSB standards for facility safety and maintenance, including adherence to occupancy and fire/life safety codes and ADA standards.

The application included a detailed start-up plan (Attachment 8) with the tasks critical for a successful school opening, a timeline, and responsible individuals. The application provided a clear financial services plan and identified well-qualified staff within the organization who will provide oversight over school finances.

The proposed budget is realistic and conservative with a clear awareness of potential financial challenges and plans to mitigate those challenges. The application provided a clear budget (Attachment 23) and a budget narrative (Attachment 24). The applicant clarified that start-up funding includes \$800,000 per new school encumbered from the CSP and \$5 million from the Charter School Growth Fund (CSGF) for growth in Orleans Parish. Although each of the budgets shows at least one year with a budget deficit, the applicant explained during the interview that the budgets were developed very conservatively and that they have sufficient resources to mitigate financial shortfalls.

The applicant clearly outlined the steps in the budgeting process that included the roles of the board, organizational leadership, and school leader. The accounting system was described clearly. Although the organization's and schools' systems and procedures for checks, balances, and segregation of duties were not described, the review team is confident in the credentials of the financial team and applicant's ability to manage funds appropriately. Finally, the applicant provided clear information about the schools' plans for an annual audit, for providing financial transparency, and the process for awarding contracts.

Given the organization's current financial status and history of securing philanthropic funding, it is reasonable to assume that the organization will be able to implement its operations plan successfully.

## EXPERIENCED OPERATOR ADDENDUM (IF APPLICABLE)

**InspireNOLA PK-8 and InspireNOLA 9-12 Transformations**

**RATING:**

**Meets the Standard**

### *Plan Summary:*

InspireNOLA currently operates five open-admission charter schools in Orleans Parish, serving more than 3,600 students in pre-K through Grade 12. The applicant anticipates serving a student population that is representative of New Orleans as a whole and is similar to the students whom InspireNOLA serves at its existing schools currently. No new schools are planned in Year 2 of the proposed schools. 2021-22 will be used as a year of planning and preparation for expansion of InspireNOLA to Baton Rouge in 2022-23 and 2023-24.

InspireNOLA's executive and leadership team will provide support, training, and oversight to the leadership team of the transformation schools during intensive spring and summer trainings and professional development. During the six-to-eight month (depending on the district siting decision timeline) planning and launch period, network staff and transformation school leaders will focus on identifying and meeting the specific needs of the Transformation school community and assisting the implementation of InspireNOLA best practices and strategies.

### *Analysis:*

The Experienced Operator section, including plans for growth, scale strategy and risk mitigation, and staffing, meets the standard. Additionally, the applicant's past school performance provided evidence of the applicant's ability to implement effective programs and school operations. For example, Alice Harte received its fourth consecutive A letter grade for the 2016-17 school year. Edna Karr met or exceeded the district average for end-of-course assessment results in every subject in 2016-17 and exceeded the state average in four of six subject areas; achieved a graduation rate of more than 95 percent; and more than 20 percent of the senior class scored a 21 or above on the ACT in 2016-17. Andrew Wilson previously ranked in the bottom 5 percent of schools in New Orleans but is now in the top 40 percent of schools, as determined by school SPS and the percentage of students achieving "Mastery" or above on LEAP assessments. Wilson achieved the highest growth of any school in New Orleans in the 2015-16 school year, increasing the percentage of students scoring "Mastery" or above by 14 percent.

The applicant has provided a reasonable and realistic growth plan with no additional charter school openings planned until 2022. The sensible proposed growth plan will ensure that network staff and resources are not overwhelmed.

The applicant clearly described effective plans to scale the model and provide network support. For example, InspireNOLA created a turnaround playbook, which describes in detail the foundational elements of InspireNOLA schools, including instructional design and strategies, cultural systems and expectations, and parent and community engagement approaches and practices. Because InspireNOLA is currently operating a transformation school that achieved notable growth in its first three years, new school leaders will observe and replicate the successes of Wilson, McDonogh 42, and McMain, and learn from the challenges experienced there.

The applicant provided required information regarding the organizational chart and job descriptions that are inclusive of the experiences necessary to implement the operator's scale strategy effectively. The applicant also provided a clear description of effective succession planning that includes developing systems and policies that allow anyone to step in and use available resources.

## TRANSFORMATION ADDENDUM (IF APPLICABLE)

RATING:

**InspireNOLA PK-8 and InspireNOLA 9-12 Transformations**

**Meets the Standard**

### *Plan Summary:*

InspireNOLA is applying for charters to operate one transformation elementary (pre-K-8) school and one transformation high school (9-12).

The Transformation elementary school will work closely with InspireNOLA's four existing elementary schools, while the two high schools will partner with InspireNOLA's existing high schools. The new school leaders will spend time in existing InspireNOLA schools, learning the systems, structures, and model that have produced successful results in current InspireNOLA schools. Teachers and support staff will engage in summer and ongoing professional development in job-alike teams across the InspireNOLA network, creating and sustaining relationships between those in similar roles from multiple schools. The parent organizations from each InspireNOLA school will have multiple opportunities to engage with and support one another, creating a networkwide parental support group. InspireNOLA will also engage its existing community networks and partnerships to support the transformation schools.

### *Analysis:*

The Transformation Addendum section meets the standard.

The applicant provided a clear plan for ensuring that all students will be served at the school, including the existing student body and other students selected through the OneApp process. The applicant also presented sound evidence of the ability to transform the school by specifically identifying how past experiences will inform their current efforts. Proposed strategies include engaging parents early and often, focusing on culture, staggering academy start dates, offering summer professional development, providing a full expanse of extracurricular activities and athletics, and investing in the neighborhood.

The applicant identified the key tenets of its transformation model with very specific measurable goals related to each tenet. The applicant's transformation plan clearly supports achievement for all students and includes effective and comprehensive plans to recruit and retain students, and create a positive school climate and culture, as well as establish high expectations for students, teachers, and staff.

The application provided sufficient evidence of planning with regard to recruiting highly effective teachers and staff. The applicant also discussed additional financial resources available to them through the CSGF and federal Charter Schools Program Replication and Expansion grant to support transition efforts, as supported in the Request for Clarification.

The application described the specific, effective strategies to be used for engaging parents, guardians, families, and residents of the community surrounding the school, including information and feedback sessions, a summer welcome session, open houses, report card nights, school celebrations, field trips, performances, showcases, and extracurricular activities. The applicant's plan will create the conditions to ensure a positive relationship with the parents and other stakeholders in the community they serve.

## EVALUATOR BIOGRAPHIES

*Evaluator's Name*

### **Dr. Iris Palazes**

Dr. Palazes 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. Palazes 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. Palazes 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. Palazes was a university professor at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, and Thomas University in Thomasville, Georgia. Dr. Palazes 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.