

**ORLEANS PARISH SCHOOL BOARD**

# CHARTER SCHOOL APPLICATION RECOMMENDATION REPORT 2018

*National Association of Charter School Authorizers*

**November 5, 2018**

*New Charter School Application for*  
**Living School**

*Submitted by*  
**Living School, Inc.**

*Evaluation Team*  
**TEAM LEAD:** **Waynica Staples**  
**EVALUATORS:** **Dr. Lisa Green-Derry**  
**Carol Swann**

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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:*

**Living School, Inc.**

*Proposed School Name:*

**Living School**

*Mission:*

Living School cultivates equity by nurturing students to do work that improves their lives, communities, and environment through holistic health, citizenship, and entrepreneurship.

*Proposed Location:*

Strip Mall in New Orleans East just off of Bullard Ave.

*Enrollment Projections:*

| Academic Year | Planned # Students | Maximum # Students | Grades Served |
|---------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| 2019-20       | 80                 | 90                 | 8-10          |
| 2020-21       | 160                | 180                | 8-11          |
| 2021-22       | 240                | 270                | 8-12          |
| 2022-23       | 310                | 360                | 8-12          |
| 2023-24       | 320                | 360                | 8-12          |
| At Capacity   | 320                | 360                | 8-12          |

## SECTION RATINGS

**Living School**

*Recommendation:*

**Approval**

### *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)**

N/A

#### **PEOPLE**

Meets the Standard

#### **TRANSFORMATION ADDENDUM (IF APPLICABLE)**

N/A

#### **OPERATIONS**

Meets the Standard

**SCHOOL****Living School****RATING:****Meets the Standard***Plan Summary:*

The Living School plans to serve students in Grades 8-12 with the long-term vision of fostering holistic wellness, active citizenship, and social entrepreneurship in all of its 320 students. One of the school's goals is for all children to live healthy, rewarding lives in equitable, peaceful communities. Living School students will graduate with a college acceptance, a living-wage job offer, and the habits of a "holistically healthy life." Holistic health is defined by nutrition, exercise, rest, diverse relationships, and a strong sense of identity and belonging.

The school will start with Grades 8-10 and add one grade level per year until it reaches full capacity. The proposed school schedule runs from 7:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. with an optional two-hour period at the end of the day used for clubs, enrichment, and accelerated credit acquisition.

The Living School's professional development plan focuses on helping teachers create classrooms that are responsive to students' academic, social, and emotional needs.

*Analysis:*

The School section meets the standard for approval.

The proposed school model is comprehensive and research-based, suggesting that it will lead to high levels of student achievement. The Living School's model describes myriad programmatic elements that support student success. Specific examples include a multi-disciplinary, project-based learning approach infused with Career and Technical Education (CTE) training, three teachers assigned to a classroom of 40 students, a curriculum aligned to state standards, data collection to establish student performance goals and monitor progress, Personal Learning Plans, and a focus on developing effective habits for holistic health. Students are expected to graduate with a college acceptance and living-wage job offers. During the interview, the applicant's description of the academic plan was consistent with the narrative in providing evidence of depth of knowledge.

Living School's professional development plan is robust, multi-faceted, and individualized. It includes peer-to-peer mentoring, personal budgets for staff members to pursue areas of interest and opportunities for growth, quarterly and summer workshops, and schoolwide daily meetings. These strategies are consistent with best practices designed to raise student achievement and build teacher capacity.

Living School provides a well-developed plan for student recruitment. Over the past year, the applicant team has completed four pilots of the program around the city, serving nearly 100 students, 69 percent of whom have expressed interest in attending the proposed school. In the Request for Clarification (RFC), the applicant described how the pilots were used to inform and improve the program, including finalizing the number of students for each project team to provide a more individualized experience. The applicant displays a thorough understanding of varied marketing strategies to recruit students, increasing the likelihood that they will meet their enrollment projections.

The application describes a comprehensive plan for student retention and academic access that includes personalized supports and the creation of a positive school culture. For example, the school will implement, trauma-informed social-emotional supports, restorative disciplinary practices, and an inclusive learning environment for special education students and English Language Learners (ELLs) with a special educator in each classroom to ensure appropriately differentiated instruction to meet the needs of all students.

## PEOPLE

### Living School

#### RATING:

Meets the Standard

#### *Plan Summary:*

The Living School will be governed by the community board of directors. There are currently 16 board members with diverse professional backgrounds, including education, law, community organizing, management, operations, and accounting. The board provides strategic oversight of the school's academic outcomes, operational viability, and financial sustainability through the use of committees. Current committees include academic and culture, development, finance, governance, and CEO support and evaluation.

The Living School will use teacher preparation programs and industry partnerships to develop a teacher pipeline to meet its staffing needs. The applicant identifies several mission-critical partnerships that will be leveraged to support the program, including High Tech High Graduate School of Education (High Tech High), Big Picture Learning, and YouthForce NOLA.

#### *Analysis:*

The People section meets the standard for approval.

The governance structure and staffing plans suggest that Living School will be able to successfully implement both the academic and human resource components of the model. The Living School's governance structure, composition, and roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, suggesting that the board has the capacity to provide effective charter school oversight. The board's plan to set and monitor goals, annually evaluate the CEO, obtain training, and prioritize recruitment needs is realistic and is facilitated by the use of Board on Track, an organization with significant experience training charter school boards. Although the CEO contributed a great deal during the capacity interview, it was clear from the performance task that the board and CEO have a thorough understanding of the difference between governance oversight and day-to-day management. For example, during the performance task debrief, a board member asked the proposed school leader about his plans to respond to parental inquiries in a timely fashion.

The Living School staff recruitment and retention strategy is realistic and includes partnerships with teacher preparation programs and hosting student teachers. The teaching model is robust, with two dual-certified and one special education teacher in each classroom. During the interview, the applicant group stated that they've received two dozen applications for each position, suggesting that a pool of applicants exists and that the school has implemented effective recruitment strategies to meet their staffing needs. Both teacher and staff expectations are communicated clearly through the Staff Development Rubric and individual teacher professional growth plans.

The proposed school leader has a demonstrated track record with management, instructional leadership, innovative practices, curriculum development, and talent management. During the capacity interview, the proposed school leader displayed competence when describing research-supported best practices to raise student engagement and achievement. The school also has numerous mission-critical partners, such as NewSchools Venture Fund and New Schools for New Orleans, that will be able to assist them in accomplishing their goals.

## OPERATIONS

### Living School

### RATING:

**Meets the Standard**

#### *Plan Summary:*

Financial responsibilities for the school will be assigned to the director of finance. The annual budget will be collaboratively developed by the leadership team of the Staff Executive Council and the board finance committee. The draft budget is circulated to the Student Legislature and Family Advisory Council for input before final approval by the community board of directors.

The majority of expenditures are allocated for salaries and facility-related costs. The budget assumes a 2 percent contingency per year and revenue is based on 95 percent student enrollment. The applicant group has cultivated financial partners, as evidenced by the letters of support, including NewSchools Venture Fund and High Tech High.

The proposed location for the school is a commercial facility in New Orleans East, which is projected to require \$49,000 in construction costs.

#### *Analysis:*

The Operations section meets the standard for approval.

The facility plans, budget projections, and start-up plans are detailed and comprehensive, suggesting that the applicant team will successfully execute the operational model.

Through the RFC process, the Living School provided a detailed facility plan for the proposed location in New Orleans East. The facility plan aligns with the academic model, suggests construction costs that are reasonable, and describes additional space near the proposed site that could be further developed to meet the school's long-term needs. The applicant demonstrates a commitment to meeting OPSB standards for facility safety and maintenance by proposing plans to conduct regular self-inspections and cooperate with all external inspections, establish comprehensive emergency preparedness guidelines, and implement training for all staff and students. The applicant will provide comprehensive first-aid training for staff and will establish contacts with local first responders and service providers.

The start-up plan is detailed and includes the critical actions necessary for successful school opening, attainable timelines, and persons responsible for each task. The budget projections are conservative with an estimated cash balance of \$1,015,821 by FY2024. Living School provides a reasonable plan to garner philanthropic support to supplement their revenues and has received \$215,000 in grants from the NewSchools Venture Fund as part of the Invent Cohort and a \$10,000 planning grant from High Tech High.

The applicant group provides clear details about the budgeting process and internal controls, including examples of segregation of duties related to signatory authority and cash transactions. During the interview, the director of finance displayed competence and expertise when discussing Living School's financial position and plans to increase liquid cash reserves to mitigate unforeseen challenges such as a drop in enrollment or unexpected facility expenses. His depth of knowledge provided additional evidence of the staff's ability to effectively oversee both the school's finances and human resource functions.

## EVALUATOR BIOGRAPHIES

*Evaluator's Name*

### **Waynica Staples**

Waynica is a passionate reformer with nearly 20 years of educational experience and believes that all students can achieve at high levels if given the right tools and opportunities. Waynica is the founder and CEO of Inspire Success, LLC, a consulting firm that provides direct support to charter school leaders and boards by helping them navigate the school development or charter renewal process. Specific services include petition writing and/or review, project management, governance training, and strategy development. Prior to launching her consulting firm, Waynica worked for the Georgia Charter Schools Association (GCSA). Waynica's role at the association was to provide training and technical support to governing boards and school-level leadership related to academic success, operational compliance, and financial viability. During her tenure at GCSA, Waynica trained more than 20 governing boards. Waynica also held roles as a charter school developer, admissions and financial aid advisor, and college access coordinator.

*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. For more than 20 years, Dr. Green-Derry's expertise in student-centered instruction and assessment; implementation and evaluation of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) curricula; and designing and facilitating culturally responsive modules for pre-service teachers and educators in K-12 systems, and graduate students, as well as faculty of social work programs has influenced educational outcomes for students in urban and rural educational settings. Dr. Green-Derry's integrative approach to education connects assets of families and children to various systems in ways that provide opportunities that support equitable education for all children.

*Evaluator's Name*

### **Carol Swann**

Currently CEO and president of Swann Educational Solutions, Carol Swann has more than 30 years in education with extensive experience working with districts and states regarding the charter school authorization process, strategic planning, training, monitoring and oversight, and policy development for charter schools. Carol has been responsible for charter policy and procedures, writing and updating the charter application and scoring rubric in conjunction with state laws, and working with external partners such as the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) to ensure a quality authorizing process utilizing best practices from across the country. As a direct result of this work, Carol has developed training modules to assist authorizers, providing training for review teams, school boards, university charter offices, and state charter offices. Carol also organized the Tennessee Association of Charter School Authorizers (TACSA) and wrote the TACSA Principles and Standards and by-laws. She served as president for 2017-18. This organization is developing model authorizing policies and practices for authorizers in Tennessee as well as looking at model charter laws around the nation in order to inform and educate legislative work.