



**Edmonds Cofield Preparatory Academy for Young Men, Inc  
Peer Review Comments and Final Applicant Scores  
2023\_01 RFA**

| Application Details  |  |
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| <b>Application type:</b> New School                              | <b>Approved Budget:</b> \$1,319,250                        |
| <b>Grades Served:</b> 5 <sup>th</sup> – 8 <sup>th</sup> grade    | <b>New Seats created:</b> 375                              |
| <b>Application Status:</b> FUNDED                                |  |

The following are condensed Peer Reviewer comments and scores for Edmonds Cofield Preparatory Academy for Young Men, Inc’s application for the Great Schools for Connecticut Charter School Program, encompassing Sections 1 through 7 of the scoring rubric. The complete rubric can be found on the GSCT website in the Request for Applications [\(RFA\) Guide](#). Please refer to Appendix 3 of the RFA for a complete overview of the scoring rubric.

**SECTION ONE  
Board Capacity and Governance Structure**

A competent, trained governing board is essential to the success of a public charter school. Describe how your school has developed a strong governing board with a diverse set of skills. Be sure to include how board members understand their roles and responsibilities and have developed a transition plan and ongoing professional development to maintain board strength going forward.

**Subsection 1:** *Describe the composition (size, roles, committees) and selection process for the governing board. {Comments below}*

- The applicant described a governing board with a wide range of expertise necessary for the successful oversight and governance of a charter school. The applicant has clear plans to identify gaps in board knowledge and will prioritize recruiting for expertise in specifically targeted areas.
- The school has composed a board with wide-ranging skills and expertise. There is a plan, and resources identified for recruitment of new members, pages 2-3 (of the application). They have the resources of a consulting organization to guide their development.
- Composition of the governing council is described with four officers and three non-voting positions. The applicant affirms "knowledge and experience in advocacy and social justice, fiscal management, broker relationships with the New Haven community" and several other areas of

expertise essential to effective charter school oversight. Specific areas of expertise for the nine currently serving board members are listed. The applicant affirms a plan to capture identified skill gaps in job descriptions and a plan to recruit additional board members to plug gaps in identified gaps to recruit board members is specified. The response would benefit from more specific plans as to how the gaps in expertise will be recruited for and ways in which the capacity of the board will be built through additional training. Additionally, an explanation as to how the founding nine team members coalesced would enhance the explanation as to selection process. In the interview, the applicant spoke to the diverse background of the board members and affirmed two to three trainings per year but acknowledges the lack of written criteria for future board selection. A board member spoke to a basic process of advertising for recruiting Board members on the website. Additionally, it was proposed that collaboration with Achievement First in New Haven would assist with Board member selection.

- The proposal identifies the board members and clearly articulates each member's professional expertise. This shows that the board has a balance of knowledge and experience necessary to oversee the school. Moreover, the proposal identifies additional expertise that the board needs. While the proposal states that a plan is in place to add board members with additionally needed skills and experience, such as previous charter school experience, the specific activities of that plan are not clear.

**Subsection 2:** *The board has established clear policies and procedures that guide its oversight of the school.* {Comments below}

- The board has clear plans to ensure compliance with Open Meetings and Open Records Law as evidenced in the Board By-laws. The applicant broadly identified board roles and responsibilities (page 4 of the application) but did not outline a comprehensive set of board roles and responsibilities. The applicant did not describe clear policies and procedures that will guide its oversight of schools (including financial, legal, operational, reporting compliance), including an annual review of policies and annual completion of a Conflict-of-Interest form.
- Roles and responsibilities are defined, the school outlines how it will meet legal requirements for meetings / documentation of meetings, and foundational governing documents have been developed (pages 3 and 4 of application). Although these were submitted with the application the team wasn't able to speak to these much.
- The applicant affirms the drafting of Board Bylaws and a Code of Ethics, along with established procedures for compliance with Open Meetings Law and Open Records Law. Monthly meetings and adherence to rules regarding information and public access are properly affirmed. Board or Governing Council roles and responsibilities are identified to include "external accountability, internal oversight, and leadership". The applicant affirms the responsibility of school administration for day-to-day school operations with the Board responsible for the evaluation of the school's Executive Director.
- The proposal clearly describe the policies and procedures that guide the oversight of the school. In particular, these policies and particular clarify the roles and mechanisms for overseeing the operations of the school. This includes a process for reviewing the policies annually. While these policies and procedures clearly take into account the importance of negating conflict of interest, the proposal does not make clear that there is an annual conflict of interest form completed each year.

**Subsection 3:** *Applicant provides resume of board members, personnel occupying key leadership positions, governing council members.* {Comments below}

- The applicant provided resumes of board members and a detailed plan for board training (page 4 of application) that included specific topics and delivery methods. The applicant broadly identified board roles and responsibilities (page 4 of application) but did not outline a comprehensive set of board roles and responsibilities. The applicant broadly identified board roles and responsibilities (page 4 of application) but did not outline a comprehensive set of board roles and responsibilities. The applicant stated that there is a training plan for school leadership (page 5 of application), but specific details of the plan are not provided. This was addressed during the interview and additional detail was not provided. The applicant did not provide clear criteria and procedures for selecting officers and members of the governing council. The applicant stated that these exist (page 4 of application) but did not describe a full procedure for selection other than recruitment efforts. This was addressed during the interview and additional detail was not provided.
- Existence of training plan for school leadership, board members, and governing council (e.g. evidenced through inclusion in operating budget, including copy in application packet) Clear criteria and procedures for selecting officers and members of the governing council exists, no member or employee of governing council has financial interest in the school's assets (real or personal).
- Governance Council resumes are included as Appendix A and consistent with the knowledge and skills described in Section 1. Capacity building for Governing Council is described to include "Council orientations, workshops, self- development and professional retreats" (page 4 of application). While the response indicates that "council members are to undergo training on oversight for charter councils," specific information on the nature or scope of this training is not offered. These items were not directly identified within the operating budget without additional explanation in the narrative. Training plans for school leadership are affirmed if not described (page 5 of application).
- The proposal provides the CVs for the board members showing that they have extensive experience and know- how to oversee the school. In addition, the proposal shows that there is an emphasis on building the capacity of current and new board members. The capacity building interview offered some insights into how the school might recruit new board members, as needed. In particular, they cited utilizing their web site and partnering with another local charter management organization to learn about their process. Despite these details, it is not clear how the board specifically will be able to strategically select new board members to meet needed skills and know-how for the board.

**SECTION ONE OVERVIEW: *Board Capacity and Governance Structure Overall Comments***

- The applicant has provided a general foundation for this section; however, gaps in information exist.
- Foundation documents have been drafted and roles/responsibilities developed. There is a plan for ongoing professional development of the board and also a calendar of typical board cadence (launching a new school year, reviewing academic data, ED evaluation, etc.). It appears as if a thoughtful approach to governing has been developed.

| <b>Peer Reviewer Scores for Section 1</b> |           |
|---|-----------|
| Peer Reviewer 1                           | 11        |
| Peer Reviewer 2                           | 12        |
| Peer Reviewer 3                           | 12        |
| Peer Reviewer 4                           | 12        |
| <b>Aggregate Score for Section 1</b>      | <b>47</b> |

|                      |              |
|----------------------|--------------|
| <b>Average Score</b> | <b>11.75</b> |
|----------------------|--------------|

## **SECTION TWO**

### **School Leadership and Management**

Describe the intended leadership structure of the proposed school. A strong leadership and staffing plan are essential to ensure high-quality implementation and sustainability of a new school.

**Subsection 1:** *The leadership and administrative roles at the school are well-defined, and comprehensively cover the broad set of responsibilities required of charter school leadership. {Comments below}*

- The applicant presented a complete organizational and management plan for the school that included four school administrators (page 6 of the application) with a clear division of roles and management responsibilities. The applicant described how the school has designed its leadership team to ensure sufficient expertise to manage most charter school-specific matters; however, the plan is not comprehensive and did not address compliance for services to students with special needs or legal matters.
- The applicant described plans to evaluate the performance of the school leadership and teachers. However, the information did not delineate the specific plan for evaluating school leaders, including the evaluators, evaluation standards or tool, and timeline. The applicant did not describe an appropriate protocol for addressing performance concerns. This was addressed during the interview and the applicant stated that a specific plan has not yet been developed.
- Couldn't find detailed job descriptions for leadership positions - narrative didn't provide much detail. The school hasn't identified a leader at this point in time which is concerning.
- A process to identify candidates for the Executive Director position is appropriately described to assure highly qualified applicants are included in the pool. An interview process with the Governing Council is described in detail. The response describes the leadership structure to include the Executive Director, Director of Teaching and Learning, the Dean of Students, and Director of Finance and Operations. These positions are described in a manner that satisfies a clear division of roles and management responsibilities. The applicant affirms evaluation of school leadership in accordance with Connecticut Guidelines for Educator and Leader Evaluation and Support with standards aligned to the Professional Development and Evaluation Committee. While the evaluation process includes descriptions of the use of feedback to the leader, the response does not fully address the criterion of protocols for addressing performance concerns. Design of the leadership team to ensure sufficient expertise to manage charter school specific compliance, operations, finance, and legal matters is not found to be clearly articulated.
- The proposal clearly conveys that the school already has a strong board. In addition, the proposal lists the skills and experience needed to fill the leadership roles of the school. Moreover, the proposal clearly communicates organizational structure, which shows the relationship among different roles. Also, the proposal states the performance review process. For example, the Director of Teaching is responsible for the performance evaluation of all instructional and program staff. The Executive Director evaluates the performance of all non-instructional staff.

**Subsection 2:** *The school demonstrates sufficient leadership and governance capability to implement and sustain the new school or expansion projects outlined in this application. {Comments below}*

- The applicant did not respond to this prompt. The applicant was asked about challenges and risks during the interview. Financial risks and plans to mitigate them were satisfactorily addressed, but no operational risks and challenges were identified.
- The narrative didn't address identified risks or challenges that the school might face. The leader hasn't been identified yet (said to be done in Jan 2024). The process of recruiting and selecting the leader (and I assume other leadership positions) is well defined. I believe this group needs additional time to develop the school with an opening of Aug 2025.
- While key risk factors or material operational challenges are not found to be clearly identified, the applicant does describe appropriate leadership feedback protocols to identify and mitigate key factors of concern that may arise. The school's robust recruitment plan to identify a school leader is described in appropriate detail. However, the qualifications and skills for the Executive Director are not clearly articulated. In the interview, the applicants spoke to Cybersecurity experts to ensure the integrity of the school's networks. Financial compliance and sustainability was raised with reassurance from the vendor regarding the viability of the school. The applicant asserts academic strength and expertise in the design and implementation of the school. A network of partner schools will also be available to assist with the school in its early stages.
- The proposal demonstrates that the school will have sufficient leadership capacity. In particular, the proposal clearly communicates a process of goal setting and providing feedback to the leaders to show that the leadership team can be responsive to the needs of the school. The capacity interview identified some potential risk factors that can present challenges for the school's success. For example, this includes cyber security and establishing stable financial policies and procedures, since this is a new school. One element that is not clear from the proposal is the extent to which the school has identified potential operational challenges and risk factors that could inhibit the success of the school.

**SECTION TWO OVERVIEW: School Leadership and Management Overall Comments**

- The applicant has a school leadership and management plan that is consistent across the application and attachments.
- It appears as if the process for identifying leadership is strong, although the leadership team hasn't yet been selected. Would have liked to have seen detailed job descriptions to ensure they cover all the necessary responsibilities for running a charter school. Post-capacity interview thoughts are that the school needs more time to identify a leader and get systems in place before opening.

| Peer Reviewer Scores for Section 2 |            |
|------------------------------------|------------|
| Peer Reviewer 1                    | 5          |
| Peer Reviewer 2                    | 5          |
| Peer Reviewer 3                    | 7          |
| Peer Reviewer 4                    | 9          |
| <b>Total Score</b>                 | <b>26</b>  |
| <b>Average Score</b>               | <b>6.5</b> |

### **SECTION THREE**

#### **Student Demand and Community/Local/Family Support**

The school must demonstrate that a Community Needs Analysis has been completed in planning for the new school / expansion / replication. This includes demonstrated presence of community demand, and that the proposed new school / expansion / replication is in tune with community needs and priorities, and how management intends to engage with parents / families / community to enhance access and equity for at-risk populations.

**Subsection 1:** *School vision and design communicates high standards for student success.*  
{Comments below}

- The applicant clearly articulated how the school will positively impact school and community stakeholders and cited evidence with state and local data. The proposed school's specialized focus was clearly described. The applicant attached evidence of demand (Appendix E) to justify the key instructional and curriculum design elements of the proposed school.
- Extensive community engagement has been conducted, along with articulation of high expectations for academics and conduct (pages 8-10 in narrative).
- The response provides a description of the anticipated positive impact on stakeholders with an emphasis on the lifelong potential impact on students who attend. The applicant affirms the use of a Community Needs Analysis and that letters of support, petitions of support, and interest surveys were used to develop the concepts for the school (9). Community needs are cited as evidence to include the disparity between private school offerings and charter school offerings. There are no all-boys middle school options in New Haven and only two high school all-boys options, both religious schools. While the school would fill a specific gap that is lacking, there is insufficient evidence offered to indicate the demand for the school exists. A specialized focus and data to justify the key instructional and curriculum design elements are not found to be clearly articulated in this section.
- The proposal effectively describes the school's vision and design. Notably, the school will employ the house system, which has been effective through previous implementations. Moreover, the school engaged the community through a process of collecting feedback through focus groups. Furthermore, the proposal notes that the all-boys format is an innovative model for the New Haven community where the only currently established boys' schools are religiously based.

**Subsection 2:** *Enrollment forecast is well articulated, clear data, rationale for enrollment growth (includes grades and ages of students to be served, clear picture of community demand for school).*  
{Comments below}

- The applicant provided a clear and detailed analysis of the proposed school's projected student demographics and a description of the demographics of students attending public schools in the local community and the school districts from which the students are, or would be, drawn to attend the charter school. However, the applicant did not discuss the impact of the proposed charter school on



the racial and socioeconomic diversity of public schools and school districts from which children would be drawn to attend the charter school. The applicant listed specific recruitment strategies to ensure Access and Equity for at-risk student populations and establish and maintain a racially and socioeconomically diverse student body, and discussed how the school will engage and accommodate families from various backgrounds, including English learners, through the use of translated materials and translators as needed (p. 15). The applicant provided a clear and detailed Admission Policy in Attachment G.

- The applicant outlines the demographic composition of the New Haven area, the local school landscape, and the risk factors seen in a majority of the students in the area. Narrative (page 14 of application) outlines the efforts made to reach Multilingual families. Post interview - they really don't have concrete ideas on maintaining enrollment.
- The response identifies the target population as ages 9-14 and in grades 5-8 and a mostly black and brown population. Demographics for New Haven are offered to include 25.6% poverty rate, with the public school district 49.6% eligible for free and reduced lunch. Proficiency scores for the district are offered, though not disaggregated by sub-group or showing performance over time. Racial/ethnic demographics of anticipated target population are not clearly stated. The anticipated impact on schools that the charter will draw from is not found to be discussed. The applicant affirms non-discriminatory enrollment practices with concentrated recruitment activities in high-need communities. A three phase marketing, recruitment, and outreach process is described in appropriate detail (13). Access and Equity for At-Risk student populations are well protected by policies indicated.
- The proposal provides a clear and reasonable projection of student enrollment, which shows a gradual, year-by-year increase until the school is serving grades 5-8. The proposal shows that the school understands the demographics and characteristics of students in New Haven, who will be the students that the school will serve. In addition, the proposal makes clear that the school will make a commitment to recruiting high needs students. While the proposal notes that there will be students with diverse needs, such as English Language Learners, it is not evident what specific strategies or activities the school will employ in order to fully support those students.

**Subsection 3:** *Demonstrates significant planning and effort, can provide examples of strategies to meaningfully engage current and prospective families and community members (including current or former teachers and other educators) in implementation and operation of the school.* {Comments below}

- The applicant described detailed family engagement plans and strategies but did not outline specific and concrete roles of parents, community members, and current and former educators in the school's decision making on an ongoing basis. There was also no information provided about the role of parents, community members, and current and former educators in developing the instructional model to best serve targeted student populations. When asked about this during the interview, the applicant stated that stakeholders have not had a role in the development of the school's instructional model, but there will be a parent seat on the board in the future to ensure parent involvement in decision-making on an ongoing basis.
- The applicant clearly stated that the school will provide information on the school website about educational options and the school's state report card.

- Narrative outlines the Parent Association, communications, parent surveys, parent workshops and much more to engage with parents and see them as partners. Translated meetings and materials will further reach multilingual families. Decent amount of evidence in the application but limited in speaking about it during the interview.
- Applicant affirms the importance of family involvement in the education of students and will be encouraged "to read the subject novels, support the House system, and assist with finding hands-on real-life opportunities for their sons" (page 14 of application). A parent association is indicated and the use of communication plans between the parents and the advisor will be implemented. Other structures for parent involvement include monthly opportunities to meet with Executive Director and workshops for parents on how to support their young men. Systems and supports for parents in languages other than English are indicated as well (15). The extent to which parents, community, current and former teachers all coalesce around developing an instructional model that best meets the needs of the target population is not clearly described in this section of the application. In the interview, the applicants spoke to preliminary plans to hire a parent liaison and to develop a parent conference. Dr. Williams spoke to the importance of high levels of parental involvement and methods and strategies for engaging parents.
- The proposal generally shows that the school will involve the community in the planning of the school. A Parent Association (PA), parent task forces, parent workshops, and a reserved seat on the Board are some of the ways that EC Prep engages family members. With frequent updates from teachers, opportunities to be in the classroom, and optional times to learn together, parents will be engaged in their young man's education, and have a reserved seat on the EC Prep Governing Council. The school will also ensure that information is shared with the community. The school's website will ensure that families know about free, public, and open to all educational options available at our school. The capacity interview further emphasized that importance of parents and how the leadership will meet with parents at times and places that are convenient for the parents. In addition, the school will have a parent on the board. However, it is not clear parents will specifically be partners in ensuring that the school will be able to appropriately support student groups with different needs, such as English Language Learners or Special Education students.

**Subsection 4:** *Applicant details comprehensive approach to achieving / sustaining equitable access, including mitigating barriers, including practices around discipline, transport, enrollment and retention that could impede access to their programs. {Comments below}*

- The applicant detailed plans to ensure student success and retention but did not discuss strategies to mitigate barriers and ensure equitable access to their program.
- Mentors, real-life scenario learning, concepts of Houses (and strong relationships), parents as partners and more all help mitigate risk factors for their students.
- The applicant broadly affirms an inclusive model that is "structured through programs that deliberately individualize instruction to meet the needs of every learner" while collaborating on "real world projects, adventures, and experiences that reflect the adult working world" (16). These statements are interpreted to support the school's ability to retain students. The proposal asserts that school uniforms are intended to reduce socio-economic tensions or anxiety, though this claim is not supported by evidence. A transportation plan is outlined in the following section. Though it does not specifically explain or affirm how the school will prevent transportation from becoming a barrier to



access, it does confirm transportation to and from centralized bus stop stations will be provided and that the bus for Saturday Academy presents a viable transportation option. Practices around discipline are somewhat addressed in the form of House Competition frameworks but the applicant does not otherwise address these issues in the form of restorative practices or discipline policies.

- The proposal shows how the school will leverage a cohort model as a basis of serving all students and mitigating barriers to achievement. In particular, teachers will serve as significant arbiters of the school’s values and ensure that students realize they are significant members of a larger community. While these are productive approaches, the proposal does not make explicit how these general strategies can mitigate specific barriers that the school planners have identified.

**Subsection 5:** *Applicant outlines transportation plan for students (meeting requirements of C.G.S 10-66ff(f)) (page 11/27) {Comments below}*

- The applicant outlined transportation plans (p. 16) that include requesting services from the local school district and school-provided transportation for field trips and Saturday Academy.
- Per narrative, the school will provide ongoing daily transportation for school activities including field trips. Student Demand and Community / Local / Family Support overall comments (optional) It appears to this reviewer that the school applicant has made tremendous effort to engage the local community and partner with parents and local community organizations.
- A plan for transportation is adequately detailed and appears to meet legal requirements (16)
- The proposal states that the school will request student bus services from the New Haven School District which will provide student transportation to and from a bus stop and the school. The school will require any bus vendor to document and maintain the levels of insurance, levels of maintenance and driver screening standards as required by the State of CT.

**SECTION THREE OVERVIEW: *Student Demand and Community/Local/Family Support Comments***

- It appears to this reviewer (reviewer number 2) that the school applicant has made tremendous effort to engage the local community and partner with parents and local community organizations.

| <b>Peer Reviewer Scores for Section 3</b> |              |
|---|--------------|
| Peer Reviewer 1                           | 18           |
| Peer Reviewer 2                           | 22           |
| Peer Reviewer 3                           | 16           |
| Peer Reviewer 4                           | 21           |
| <b>Total Score</b>                        | <b>77</b>    |
| <b>Average Score</b>                      | <b>19.25</b> |

**SECTION FOUR  
Instructional Practices, Student Academic Achievement**

Fully describe the design of the academic program (including specialized focus, if any) of the school. Provide data that justifies / supports the school's mission and overall goals, providing a brief description of key instructional and curriculum design elements and how these will be leveraged to meet the school's performance objectives and community needs. Be sure to include data / references supporting the instructional and curriculum design and how these align to state and federal requirements.

Include a description of why this educational model was chosen and how students will be assessed, how assessment practices are aligned to state standards and state assessment requirements.

**Subsection 1:** *Explains key design elements for the proposed educational model (has clear plan for ongoing development, improvement of curriculum).* {Comments below}

- The applicant clearly explained key design elements for the proposed educational model (p. 17). Key curriculum materials were identified for ELA, Math, and Science. The applicant made a compelling case for why the chosen approach is likely to improve students' academic performance by citing outcomes for the Ron Clark Academy, a school with a similar design (page 17 of application).
- The school plans to align all curricular choices to the CT state standards, backwards mapping the standards from 9th grade objectives. Using novels they will integrate action-oriented learning, they will use Singapore math and use Next Gen science standards. The core model is based on the Ron Clark Academy in Atlanta which has a proven track record of success with similar populations. They will provide ongoing professional development to staff. All of the curricular choices have research-proven success.

Post interview thoughts - the team couldn't articulate much about the instructional program.

- The applicant identifies key elements of the model to include its "Action Labs, Integrated curriculum action-oriented learning, the House System, and specific best practices (that) have been effectively used by The Ron Clark Academy" (page 17 of application). While specific practices from the Ron Clark Academy, other than the House System, are not identified in this section, the proposal offers evidence of the success of the Ron Clark Academy and affirms that staff will participate in in-person and online professional development from this institution (page 17 of application). The proposal describes curriculum mapping supported by an external organization and affirms alignment to NGSS and CCS with backwards mapping. The programming includes an "integrated curriculum that will weave a common 5 themes each year across all subjects" (page 18 of application). Curriculum choices supported by cited research include Singapore Math and STEAM Action Lab modules. The response presents a compelling case based on researched curriculum that the choices made will be effective for the target population. In the interview, the applicant affirms that the curriculum is not fully selected because the curriculum will be adaptive to the needs of the population.
- The proposal states that the proposed school model is based on a school in Atlanta, GA. The school will select curricular resources that are aligned with the state standards and work with a consultant to ensure that these resources are truly aligned. The proposal also shows that the curriculum development and selection process is guided by the Understanding by Design. And the proposal highlights specific curricular programs, such as Singapore Math. While all of the models and resources that the school is relying on are based on successful work, the proposal does not make explicit some of this previous success with data. In the capacity interview, the participants clearly conveyed a passion and commitment for the school and the success of the students who will attend the school. While this does not necessarily directly link with the curriculum development, their commitment relates to the importance of the students' success in the school, which relates to the curriculum that will be chosen.

**Subsection 2:** *Describes how the choice of curriculum will help the school meet Connecticut's required school performance standards for charter schools.* {Comments below}

- Although the applicant stated that the selected curricula are aligned with state standards, the applicant did not specifically address meeting state accountability standards for academic

achievement and growth. When asked about curriculum during the interview, the applicant stated that a curriculum has not yet been selected or developed, which makes it impossible to determine if the curriculum will help the school meet CT's required school performance standards for charter schools.

- The school plans to align all curricular choices to the CT state standards, backwards mapping the standards from 9th grade objectives. Using novels they will integrate action-oriented learning, they will use Singapore math and use Next Gen science standards. The core model is based on the Ron Clark Academy in Atlanta which has a proven track record of success with similar populations. They will provide ongoing professional development to staff. All of the curricular choices have research-proven success. Post interview thoughts - the team couldn't articulate much about the instructional program.
- Evidence of the effectiveness of Action Labs curriculum is presented as it pertains to satisfaction and levels of engagement along with graduation rate (19). Proficiency score improvements are also well supported for Singapore Math (18). The extent to which the ELA curriculum is likely to improve performance on SBAC assessment is not found to be articulated in this section. The applicant affirms that they have not yet determined what the curriculum selection will be. They state the reasoning is that the curriculum selections will be based on the individual student needs and that they envision highly differentiated curriculum based on student needs.
- The proposal clearly shows how most of the curricular resources that the school will employ are aligned with state standards. For example, the STEAM Action Lab modules are aligned with the goals, modules of learning and the standards for Connecticut's new 2022 release of their Model Middle School Science Curriculum. In addition, the proposal will work with a consultant to support the alignment process between curriculum and standards. The proposal does not make explicit how the curriculum that will serve the upper grades in the future years of the school will align with the state accountability standards. In the capacity interview, the school leaders emphasized that they have not chosen a curriculum and will develop a curriculum based on who the students are. However, it was not clear what the process will be to make the selection of curricular sequence and materials.

**Subsection 3:** *Describes instructional techniques / methods that will facilitate high quality teaching and learning, and how these are appropriate for all students (including educationally disadvantaged students).*  
{Comments below}

- The applicant described instructional techniques and methods that will facilitate high quality teaching and learning, and discussed how these are appropriate for all students.
- Multiple examples of learning strategies and techniques are provided in the narrative. Some include hands-on learning, action labs, CTE experiences, literacy instruction, thematic learning, STEAM, and more.

Post interview - strong responses in application and weaker responses during interview.

- The response contains several examples of instructional strategies such as "real world scenarios" for math and access to video lessons and student autonomy in lab choices, but a coherent philosophy or approach to instructional strategies could not be clearly identified (pages 18,19 of application).
- The proposal generally shows that the school will seek to integrate instruction and support hands-on learning experiences when possible. The proposal also emphasizes that the school will engage in partnerships and ongoing capacity building to improve their instruction, such as their implementation

of IEPs. The description of the instructional approaches are general and lack specificity, such as how and when content areas will be integrated.

**Subsection 4:** *Clear plan for monitoring and assessing student and teacher performance (including how school will use classroom and standardized assessments to determine needs of students and differentiate instruction. {Comments below}*

- The applicant described a plan for monitoring and assessing student performance using both formative and summative assessments (p. 20). The applicant stated that results will be used to determine needs of students and adjust instruction but did not describe the process or strategies for differentiation. This was addressed during the interview and no additional detail about differentiation was provided.
- Pages 20 – 21 of narrative outlines the types of formative and summative assessments that will be used as part of their overarching assessment calendar. Multi-tiered interventions are given to students based on interim assessment data
- Assessments aligned to state standards include formative and summative assessment practices, including end of unit IAB assessments as a means of evaluating learning mastery and state assessments at the end of the year. The response indicates appropriate levels of teacher-driven formative assessment examples and benchmark assessments that allow for intervention of students not reaching grade-level targets.
- The proposal presents a general description of the school's approach to assessment. Assessments will be aligned to state standards and state assessment requirements and as such, will be used to inform instruction such as formative and summative assessments. Formative assessment practices focus attention on teachers gauging the impact of their teaching by eliciting evidence of student learning, providing feedback, and adjusting their teaching. The CSDE 2022 Sensible Assessment Practices will be used to guide our protocols and will be applied to all students, including those with disabilities and English learners.

**Subsection 5:** *Consistent with the definition of a charter school in ESEA §4310, the school can justify how key elements have been chosen to utilize autonomies and flexibilities granted to charter schools under state statutes to create programs that meet the unique needs of the school's anticipated demographic. {Comments below}*

- The applicant did not justify how key elements have been chosen to utilize autonomies and flexibilities granted to charter schools under state statutes to create programs that meet the unique needs of the schools anticipated demographic. This was addressed during the interview and the applicant did not identify key elements that have been chosen to utilize autonomies and flexibilities granted to charter schools.
- The school uses the flexibility offered to charter schools to choose their own curriculum, professional development and assessments to tailor their instructional program directly to the needs of their students.
- While the programming is sufficiently demonstrated to be suitable for the needs of the target population, the criteria regarding how the school will utilize the autonomy and flexibility granted to charter schools does not appear to be directly addressed. In the interview, the applicant spoke with

credibility to the ability to gather baseline data and respond with flexible curriculum options for students to provide more individualized instruction.

- The school is proposing a model of learning to support the success of students in their target region. In particular, the school learning environment encourages success through male-focused literacy, an action-oriented curriculum, and House teams designed to naturally breed curiosity, critical thinking, and friendly competition. The capacity interview also emphasized that the board has been visiting schools in other cities and talking with leaders in other cities. They are using this information to create the best experience for their students.

**SECTION FOUR OVERVIEW: *Instructional Practices, Student Academic Achievement Comments***

- The school has spent considerable time and energy researching and planning for a wide range of instructional strategies and curriculum designed specifically for their target population. Post interview thoughts - well developed on paper but clearly less developed when speaking to the team, which would be okay if they had another year to plan for opening.

| <b>Peer Reviewer Scores for Section 4</b> |           |
|---|-----------|
| Peer Reviewer 1                           | 14        |
| Peer Reviewer 2                           | 17        |
| Peer Reviewer 3                           | 16        |
| Peer Reviewer 4                           | 17        |
| <b>Total Score</b>                        | <b>64</b> |
| <b>Average Score</b>                      | <b>16</b> |

**SECTION FIVE  
Financial Management and Monitoring**

Describe how the school intends to achieve financial stability and viability through implementation of proposed activities, keeping in mind federal guidelines around Allowable Costs. Refer to 2CFR 200 as the guiding document for a comprehensive understanding of allowable costs, non-regulatory guidance, and the Allowable Cost Guide when constructing a school budget. In this section explain the school's plan to be strategic, compliant and a responsible fiduciary of federal funds. All proposed expenditures and grant-supported activities will need to align with at least one of the SMART Goals applicant indicates in Section 6 (SMART Goals).

**Subsection 1:** *Budget Template and Narrative: Are complete and demonstrate clear understanding of allowable, allocable costs. Implementation and planning periods are broken out clearly (planning period not to exceed 18 months). School provides three-year CSP grant budget with justification for activities, complete descriptions of activities and expenditures. School provides five-year school operating budget in addition to CSP grant budget to show that there will be financial sustainability after the CSP grant period ends.*

{Comments below}

- It is not clear that the applicant has a clear understanding of allowable, allocable costs. There are concerns about salaries, professional services (tech services line 37), and maintenance and repair costs. An additional concern is that the salaries identified in the CSP budget do not clearly align with the salaries in the 5-year operating budget. Implementation and planning periods are indicated. The applicant provided a three-year CSP grant budget with justification for activities but did not provide complete descriptions of activities and expenditures. For example, the applicant has allocated funds for "seven different vendors" (Grant Budget Narrative p. 1) but did not identify the vendors or their

specific services to the school. This was addressed during the interview but did not provide further clarity. The applicant provided a five-year school operating budget in addition to the CSP grant budget to show that there will be financial sustainability after the CSP grant period ends.

- The budget and narrative are sound and outline appropriate expenditures in each category. Post interview - they are relying heavily on consultants.
- A budget template and a narrative are submitted with defined planning and implementation expenditures. An expenditure of \$130,000 for Accounting Support during the five months of planning is not clearly explained in a manner that would justify the amount. The "Various Consultants" should be more clearly itemized. A five-year budget indicates projected sustainability at the termination of the grant with an anticipated annual surplus at around half a million dollars, allowing a school of this size to build sufficient reserve funds. In the interview, the applicant spoke in general terms on a variety of needs regarding marketing, consultants, etc. However, a more detailed explanation of the various consultants and individual expenditures was not clearly articulated as the applicants acknowledge that the specific consulting needs have not been locked down.
- The budget conveys a clear list of anticipated expenditures in order to carry out the vision of the school. The expenses are allowable and reasonable based on the expected impact of the school.
- The budget and narrative are sound and outline appropriate expenditures in each category. Post interview – they are relying heavily on consultants
- The budget conveys a clear list of anticipated expenditures in order to carry out the vision of the school. The expenses are allowable and reasonable based on the expected impact of the school.

**Subsection 2:** *Applicant demonstrates understanding that charters have a high degree of autonomy over budget, operations, personnel decisions (e.g. by making requests in the budget that are allowable but diverge from the suggested subgrant structure in Table 2 of the RFA (Size and Structure of Subgrants)).*  
{Comments below}

- The applicant demonstrated understanding that charters have high degree of autonomy over budget, operations, personnel decisions by making requests in the budget that diverge from the suggested subgrant structure in the RFA (Size and Structure of Subgrants).
- The school is using their autonomies to partner with consultants and purchase from vendors specific to their needs.
- The applicant does not appear to have drawn attention to such expenditures within the budget or narrative. In the interview, the applicant spoke to the capacity of the charter to provide 3 square meals, Saturday School, professional dress code, and opportunities to complete homework at school before going home. The applicant spoke to the awareness of the charter schools in Connecticut and their rankings and the ability to learn from these networks of schools.
- The budget demonstrates an autonomy of financial decision-making. These decisions are articulated through the financial oversight of the school's board and ensures that there are not financial conflicts of interest within and among the board.

**Subsection 3:** *Applicant completes annual reporting requirements to CSDE (including submission of financial audit, other required submissions). {Comments below}*

- Not required
- A statement affirming compliance with these reporting requirements was not found.
- As part of the monitoring plan, the charter school has a policy that requires an annual independent audit that is publicly reported. In addition, the governing board reviews and approves budget and budget amendments as part of the financial oversight policies and procedures.

**Subsection 4:** *Applicant submits a sound facilities plan that includes: Concrete location, a timeline for acquiring, developing, and / or remodeling as well as equipping the new school or expansion facility. If facility is not identified there is a viable plan for obtaining one to ensure timely opening / expansion of the school. {Comments below}*

- The applicant submitted a facilities plan that includes a concrete location, but did not include a detailed timeline for acquiring, developing, and / or remodeling as well as equipping the new school or expansion facility. The applicant's planned use of grant funds for renovation raise concerns as funds are not allowable for these expenses. This was addressed during the interview. It appears that the applicant has thoughtful facilities plan and a consultant who is aware of allowable CSP expenses
- The school plans to use a building that formerly housed a charter school for the first few years. It has the appropriate building code designation, size and spaces, and costs that are needed. Some renovations will take place. This is a shared use facility.
- A facilities plan appears largely viable and aligned with the budget and narrative within Years 1 and 2 and possibly Year 3. However, for years 4 and beyond, the applicant does not present a viable plan for a facility sufficient to meet the needs of the student population. Additionally, the budget for Years 4 and 5 appear to allow for rental of the same space when the facilities plan briefly affirms that a new location will be needed by then. The initial space will not be sufficient for Years 4 and 5 and a sufficient argument is not presented for how it will be sufficient for year 3. In the interview, the applicant spoke to a revised building plan that included the original building described in the application for approximately 2 years and then moving into the former Amistad Academy after a purchase financed by the State of Connecticut. More specifics on the issuance of a bond and potential payments of the financing were not available for evaluation.
- The facilities plan shows that the school has found a building that is highly suitable. For example, it offers the required number of classrooms, precisely 12, which can comfortably accommodate the school for its initial three years of operation. Additionally, the facility is already zoned as a school, ensuring compliance with building code regulations and providing a conducive learning environment. Moreover, the fact that this building was previously utilized as an incubator space for a charter school, specifically Elm City College Preparatory Middle School, further shows that the building is suitable.

**Subsection 5:** *The budget contains the following:*

- *CMO fees, if any, and delineates how these will be paid*
- *Sufficient budgetary resources to fulfill program requirements for educationally disadvantaged, at-risk students.*



Comments:

- The budget contains sufficient resources to fulfill program requirements for educationally disadvantaged at-risk students.
- No CMO is identified. The Director of Teaching and Learning, along with consultants, will provide supports and planning for at-risk students.
- Budgetary expenditures appear appropriate to meet stated program requirements and meet the needs of an educationally disadvantaged population.
- The proposal has aligned the expenditures with the SMART goals for the project. Since the SMART goals general address the vision for the school serving educationally-disadvantaged students, the budget generally shows how the school will meet the needs of those students. However, the proposal does not specifically articulate the extent to which resources are sufficient.

**Subsection 6:** *Applicant has a plan to mitigate the risks associated with projected enrollment, and financial resources sufficient to adequately serve student population. {Comments below}*

- It is not evident that the applicant has a plan in place to mitigate risks associated with projected vs. actual enrollment. This was addressed during the interview and the applicant seemed confident that enrollment goals will be met, which may not be realistic.
- No mention (that I could find) discussing what they would do in the case of low enrollment. The school is sustainable when fully enrolled at 300 students in year 3.
- Plans for mitigating the risks of enrollment variances were not located within the application.
- The proposal presents an incremental increase of enrollment until 5-8 grades are filled. The proposal takes into account a planned 5% attrition and will actively market the school to backfill those places in enrollment. The capacity interview emphasized the lottery process and how the school plans to have a waiting list for the school. However, despite the expectation of students applying for admissions, the proposal and capacity interview did not specifically address how the school might mitigate low enrollment for each year, either for admissions or in attrition.

**SECTION FIVE OVERVIEW: *Financial Management, Monitoring Overall Comments***

- There are significant concerns about the applicant's proposed use of grant funds as several items are not allowable.
- The budget is sound and long-term financial sustainability should be attainable.

| Peer Reviewer Scores for Section 5 |             |
|------------------------------------|-------------|
| Peer Reviewer 1                    | 20          |
| Peer Reviewer 2                    | 24          |
| Peer Reviewer 3                    | 15          |
| Peer Reviewer 4                    | 27          |
| <b>Total Score</b>                 | <b>86</b>   |
| <b>Average Score</b>               | <b>21.5</b> |

**SECTION SIX**

## Grant Project Goals

Identify 3-5 SMART grant project goals. Justify each goal through its value in supporting the planning and implementation of the proposed school. All grant spending, including future budget revisions must fit clearly within your stated project goals. All proposed expenditures and grant-supported activities need to align with at least one of the SMART Goals outlined in your Project Narrative.

**Subsection 1:** *Each grant project goal is a quality goal, and the set of goals fulfill minimum requirements for content including:*

- *At least one project goal addresses how the school intends to achieve Connecticut's targets for school performance (School Performance Index) and academic growth (Smarter Balanced Growth) in Math and ELA*
- *A minimum of three project goals are clearly articulated with trackable time-bound measures and outcomes for each goal (at least one goal must address how to meet the needs of educationally disadvantaged students).*

Comments:

- The applicant did not provide quality SMART goals that are clearly articulated with trackable time-bound measures and outcomes for each goal. Each of the applicant's goals are for the school to be in a strong position to "ask for renewal..." (p. 22) rather than specifically addressing how to meet the needs of educationally disadvantaged students or how the school intends to achieve Connecticut's targets for school performance (School Performance Index) and academic growth (Smarter Balanced Growth) in Math and ELA. This was addressed during the interview and additional, specific detail was not provided.
- The SMART goals could be better flushed out with measurements, tools, timing, etc.
- Three goals are identified related to academic performance, organizational success, and financial position. The academic goal is lacking in specificity as it is only identified as male students performing better than their district male peers. Specific metrics or assessments are not identified. The organizational performance goal is unclear. There is a high degree of subjectivity as to whether the Board is sufficiently well-trained and diverse and teacher motivations, along with how well-known the school is. Fiscal position goals are more specific, with a target of fiscal surpluses during operating years of 3-5 and liquid cash flow for at least 90 days by operating year. It is unclear, however, how the school will reach the surpluses cited in the budget in years 3-5 with the question of a larger facility remaining. Two-thirds of the goals presented are not SMART. They are not specific, and measurement of these goals is not clear. In the interview, the applicant was not able to affirm clear SMART goals for the school.
- The proposal provides three SMART goals to guide the development of the school. These goals are relatively specific and represent important aspects of the school, like organizational capacity and student achievement. However, it is not clear how all of the SMART goals are measurable. For example, the goal aligned with organizational capacity does not make evident how the different components of the board's capacity will be measured.

**Subsection 2:** *Clear alignment exists among project goals, and overall mission and goals of the school. Each goal should have a justified purpose that supports the charter school in reaching performance goals. All grant measures must be appropriately rigorous for the targeted student population and measured by standard assessments. {Comments below}*

- Each goal has a justified purpose, but quality SMART goals are not provided. It is not evident that clear alignment exists among project goals, and overall mission and goals of the school.
- The goals directly relate to the mission of the school.
- The goals are generally aligned with charter school mission and principles, seeking high academic performance for the male youth serviced by this charter and sustainability to allow for the full projected enrollment in four years requiring organizational stability and financial strength. However, the criteria cannot be fully met without more specific goals to assess full alignment.
- The budget narrative for the proposal communicates a general alignment between the SMART goals listed in the proposal and the goals of the school. In addition, this alignment is further communicated showing the roles of the staff with the SMART goals. However, as mentioned for a previous criterion, some of the SMART goals lack specificity in how they will be measured. This specificity would be important for monitoring and achieving the proposed performance goals.

**SECTION SIX OVERVIEW: SMART Goals / Grant Project Goals Overall Comments**

- The applicant did not include clear SMART goals in the required areas, which raises concerns about the applicant's knowledge in this area.
- It's not unusual to make refinements to the goals after being awarded - I would suggest they be made a bit clearer while not changing the overarching ideas.

| <b>Peer Reviewer Scores for Section 6</b> |           |
|---|-----------|
| Peer Reviewer 1                           | 4         |
| Peer Reviewer 2                           | 7         |
| Peer Reviewer 3                           | 3         |
| Peer Reviewer 4                           | 6         |
| <b>Total Score</b>                        | <b>20</b> |
| <b>Average Score</b>                      | <b>5</b>  |

**SECTION SEVEN  
Grant Points**

Priority points may be awarded to applicants for the competitive priorities below. Applicants will have to provide supporting documentation to evidence that their project narrative in the grant application meets the criteria for priority point awards.

**Subsection 1:** *Two additional priority points may be awarded to applicants that demonstrate in their grant application how they will promote high-quality educator and community centered charter schools to support underserved students. {Comments below}*

- The applicant is proposing a community centered charter high school that provides numerous opportunities for students to engage with the local community (page 8 of application).
- The school is thoughtfully being designed with the community in mind.
- The applicant cites Section 4 in an attempt to receive these priority points, although Section 3 contains more relevant information. A needs analysis of the community and relevant research

informing school design (pages 8-9 of application) adequately meet criterion B. The collaboration with the Ron Clark Academy sufficiently meet criterion A (page 8 of application).

**Subsection 2:** *Two additional priority points may be awarded to applicants that articulate how they will collaborate with at least one traditional public school, or traditional public school district. {Comments below}*

- No comments or scores from any reviewers

**Subsection 3:** *Two additional priority points may be awarded to applicants that articulate a plan to serve and intentionally meet the unique needs of students in rural geographic areas. {Comments below}*

- Not applicable and no comments or scores from any reviewers

**Subsection 4:** *Two additional priority points may be awarded to schools that provide a high-quality high school program. {Comments below}*

- Not applicable and no comments or scores from any reviewers

**SECTION SEVEN OVERVIEW: *Priority Points Overall Comments***

- The applicant did not include clear SMART goals in the required areas, which raises concerns about the applicant's knowledge in this area.

| <b>Peer Reviewer Scores for Section 7</b> |            |
|---|------------|
| Peer Reviewer 1                           | 2          |
| Peer Reviewer 2                           | 2          |
| Peer Reviewer 3                           | 2          |
| Peer Reviewer 4                           | 0          |
| <b>Total Score</b>                        | <b>6</b>   |
| <b>Average Score</b>                      | <b>1.5</b> |

**TOTAL SCORES  
Across all sections**

| <b>Peer Reviewer Scores for all sections</b> |             |
|--|-------------|
| Peer Reviewer 1                              | 74          |
| Peer Reviewer 2                              | 89          |
| Peer Reviewer 3                              | 71          |
| Peer Reviewer 4                              | 92          |
| <b>Total Score</b>                           | <b>326</b>  |
| <b>Average Score</b>                         | <b>81.5</b> |