REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP) TO ESTABLISH KNOX COUNTY CHARTER SCHOOLS

(Opening in the 2018-2019 school year)

Knox County Charter Schools Authorizer

October 2016

Buzz Thomas, Superintendent

Knox County Schools

Request for Proposal for Charter School Applicants

A Vision for Charter Schools in Knox County

High quality charter schools have the potential to be a useful structure to help effectively educate all Knox County students. The Knox County Schools (KCS) seeks excellent schools, without exception, that will enhance quality public education choices for students and their families. Charter schools are meant to serve as innovative learning centers where strong teachers and experienced administrators advance each child's achievement every day, regardless of race, color, national-origin, religion, gender, disability, proficiency in English, academic ability, social capital or family income. Every student in our district deserves high quality opportunities to learn, grow and achieve their full potential. The KCS Charter School Review Committee has high expectations and rigorous quality standards to ensure that the charter schools that operate in our district are of exceptional caliber, and promote excellence for every child.

Our Call for Charter Schools

The KCS Request For Proposals (RFP) seeks to establish new charter schools in the Knox County school system to begin operation in the 2018-2019 school year. The RFP invites charter school applicants willing to collaborate with the KCS to address our greatest educational challenges and improve student performance outcomes in accordance with the KCS strategic plan, *Excellence for Every Child.* This request for proposals is a guide to the content and structure of the information that must be included in the application, including the application documents required by the State of Tennessee (see Appendix B). To the best of our knowledge the information contained herein is accurate, however as state laws frequently are amended, it is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure their application meets all the local charter school authorizer and state requirements. The application must include detailed information about the proposed charter school concerning the academic program; organizational structure and capacity; fiscal development, financial status and

future sustainability strategy; and, program and pupil governance models. Not only must the proposal demonstrate strength in each of these areas, it should also be considered as a blueprint for the daily school operations because the charter school will be monitored, assessed and evaluated on performance based on the contents of the approved application.

KCS is looking for charter schools that specifically address all an innovative approach to the following priorities as identified in the KCS Strategic Plan:

- Increasing student academic achievement and growth, particularly in high poverty and high needs schools / populations where achievement outcomes are in the lowest quintile of the school system.
- Enhancing student academic success by focusing on the learning needs and styles of each individual student and providing access to high quality, rigorous, differentiated instruction and high expectations in every classroom, every day.
- Closing achievement gaps defined by income, race, language, disability, and/or other student characteristics.
- Ensuring that the school is staffed with a cadre of highly effective educators who are continually working collaboratively to improve upon their instructional craft.
- Engaging students' families and the school community meaningfully in the educational process.
- Developing an operational infrastructure that enables, facilitates, and supports student learning and success.

Additionally, the KCS is seeking:

- New or conversion charter schools that show a deep commitment to effectively educating every single child enrolled, and that embrace diversity in all its forms.
- New or conversion charter schools that can successfully extend the school day, school week, and/or school year to provide more abundant (but universally high quality) learning opportunities for students to achieve and succeed.

- Conversion schools that demonstrate the capacity to radically change both the culture and the results of a low performing school (lowest achievement quintile in the school system), and that operate with a knowledge of and an emphasis on turnaround strategies.
- New and/or conversion schools that employ innovative and/or proven approaches to providing a high quality and effective education to students while operating within a resource-constrained fiscal environment
- Additional priorities include new or conversion schools that:
  - Present evidence that demonstrates outreach to and engagement with the community in which the applicant intends to locate,
  - Present evidence of the sponsoring organization having established itself as a 501(c) (3) non-profit as required by state law,
  - Have developed a strong instructional technology plan to support excellent classroom instruction,
  - Have conducted detailed facilities research leading to the likelihood of minimal challenges in identifying and securing an appropriate facility that will support the mission of the school, and
  - Have identified an outstanding potential school leader, or have a specific plan as to how to do so within 90 days of the charter being approved.

The KCS seeks charter school applications to cultivate strong school capacity and provide high quality academic instruction. Proposals will be entertained both for new charter schools as well as potential conversions of existing schools to charters. Applicants interested in the creation of a new traditional charter school or the conversion of an existing school to a charter school, should contact the Knox County Board of Education Office to consult with the Charter School Review Chair before beginning the process on February 1, 2017. Each proposal should demonstrate substantial capacity to support its plans financially and execute its vision of excellence for every child.

All charter schools must employ non-selective admission criteria and ensure that students will achieve predetermined goals by the second year of operations. The detailed strategies,

capacity, support, experience, and planning necessary to ensure that operational and management issues do not distract from an all-out focus on raising academic achievement makes KCS incredibly selective in its evaluation of proposals on behalf of the children to be served.

Our goal is to build a system of schools that provides every student with the foundation of knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary to excel in higher education, work and life. We seek proposals for innovative school management aligned with the goals and strategic plan of the KCS.

Charter School Models

New (Traditional) Charter Schools

Applications for new traditional charter schools must offer an innovative, compelling and evidence-based plan for a high quality charter school, and demonstrate that the plan was collaboratively developed by a diverse and expert design team. KCS greatly values the vision, plans, and intentions of new school applicants. The Charter School Review Committee will carefully examine and weigh the track record of those applicants who are currently operating schools. For applicants not currently operating schools, the district will carefully examine and weigh the experience of the proposed school leadership team as well as the engagement and experience of the governing board.

All applicants must complete the state-mandated application and follow district policy and deadlines for submission.

Successful proposals will include the following (in addition to all state and local application requirements):

- a track record of proven academic success in currently operating schools or a leadership team with experience of proven success in increasing student academic achievement
- a strong and well-organized leader committed to educational reform possessing a background demonstrating success with the proposed educational plan and

student profile. The strength of school leadership will weigh heavily in the decision process.

- an educational plan rooted in high expectations, in line with the school's stated mission, providing a personalized learning environment for all students. Ideally, the educational plan will have a record of previous success with the target student population.
- a comprehensive and research-based curriculum and assessment program designed to hold all students; including those with disabilities, limited English proficiency, and specialized needs, to high-achievement goals.
- strategies to attract and retain energetic and highly effective teachers and staff who will actively engage in professional development opportunities and sharing of best practices anchored in research.
- a strong understanding of the community to be served through demonstrated community support. Ideally, the school will have strong community connections, a track record of service, and a documented measure of student demand.
- meaningful opportunities to involve parents and community. Proposals must offer evidence of significant community and stakeholder engagement and overwhelming stakeholder interest in the charter school.
- a strong, knowledgeable, diverse, stable, and committed board of governance or a leadership team committed to best practices in school governance with a strong financial management background.
- a detailed and sustainable five-year plan demonstrating growth and improvement

<u>Charter School Models (continued)</u>

Conversion Charter Schools

Proposals for conversion schools must meet all of the standards for new traditional charter school proposals with the following additions:

- Proposals must clearly identify the specific school to be converted and provide substantial and detailed justification outlining the need for conversion.
- Proposals must offer clear and measurable strategies for achieving dramatic academic improvement by specifically addressing identified needs.

- Proposals must include documentation of how the interests of the KCS, students, families, teachers, staff, school community, and the broader community would be well served by a conversion to a charter school.
- Proposals must identify the specific parameters of conversion as part of the operational and educational plan proposed.
- Proposals must detail the transition timeline including effective communication strategies and procedures for exercising options at the family, teacher, staff, and leadership levels recognizing potential impact of disruptions to the academic environment.

Please note: Conversion of existing schools to charters may be initiated through reorganization decisions made by the Director of Schools (reconstitutions, etc.), through charter decisions by the Board of Education, or through consideration of charter petitions by 60% of faculty and/or 60% of families at the school to be potentially converted. While the Knox County Board of Education will consider applications for conversion charter schools based upon the petition of 60% of the school's faculty or families, preference will be given to petitions demonstrating at least 75% support of the school's faculty or families.

Review Process for Applications to Establish a Charter School

If the submitted proposal has been preceded by the required Letter of Intent **(due February 1, 2017)** with satisfactory evidence of community outreach, the deadline for submitting a charter application is **April 1, 2017** and the KCS Board of Education will only accept applications for a period of 15 days prior to the deadline. According to state law, the review committee has ninety (90) calendar days to review all applications submitted, make recommendations to the Knox County Board of Education for approval/denial decisions.

In the event the Knox County Board of Education does not approve the charter application, the applicant will receive a letter outlining the specific details that led to the decision to deny the applicant a charter. A denial means that the local board of education has determined that the charter school application is not "in the best interests of the pupils, school district or community."[T.C.A. 49-13-106(b) (C)] Should the applicant decide to remedy the deficits, the applicant has thirty (30) calendar days to submit an *amended* application to the Knox County Board of Education. The KCS Charter School Review Committee will then have thirty (30)

calendar days to review the amended application and make a recommendation based on the amended application to the Knox County Board of Education.

Any new information inserted in the application, including appendices, will be reviewed by the KCS Charter School Review Committee and a new KCS recommendation will be made based on the complete *amended* application. If the KCS Board of Education's recommendation is "amended application denied", the applicant has ten (10) calendar days to appeal to the State Board of Education.

The initial KCS review process includes the following:

- Individual review of the application by appropriate KCS staff and community members from academic, enrollment, operational, legal, and fiscal perspectives.

Once this review has occurred and individual review committee members have assigned scores based on the state rubric, the review committee team will meet to determine if the application has *thoroughly* addressed all required areas to advance to the next KCS Charter Application review phase.

The second phase of the review process includes the following:

- For proposals considered high quality and which meet all state, legal and local requirements from the review process, an interview will be scheduled with members of the proposed school's founding group, which should include the applicants, proposed governing board representatives, and other members who speak knowledgably about the proposed academic program, organizational capacity, budget and governance structure.
- Proposals of sufficient quality and completeness may undergo a Request for Amendment process in an attempt to resolve review committee concerns and assure compliance with all applicable laws and regulations.

In addition, in cases where the proposed school would partner with a non-profit CMO or a business, community or educational partner organization, the review committee will conduct a due diligence process with the organization. The due diligence process requires the organization to provide a written response to a questionnaire regarding the organization's structure, staffing, finances, plans for the future and the academic performance of other schools it serves that enroll similar populations.

The review committee and/or the KCS Director of Schools may also conduct an interview of representatives of the proposed management or partner organization to discuss the responses to the questionnaire. The results of the due diligence and final interviews further inform the review committee's final recommendation.

Please note: Knox County Schools has supplementary guidance (in addition to the state website) for their application process. The Knox County Schools charter school supplementary guidance is provided in this RFP and also listed on the KCS Charter web page. Please contact the Knox County Board of Education Office well in advance of submitting your application for any additional guidance.

Please reference the KCS website for additional documents needed for the application process.

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