

AGENDA ITEM EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Application for New Charter

Request

ARCHES Academy (“Applicant”) submitted a new charter application package on June 21, 2017. The Applicant is requesting a charter to serve grades K through 8 in Apache Junction. The Technical Review Panel (“TRP”) evaluated the application package and determined that the revised application package does not meet the minimum scoring requirements set by the Board for the 2018-2019 application cycle. ARCHES Academy has requested that the revised application package not meeting the scoring criteria move forward for Board consideration.

APPLICANT SUMMARY

Mission Statement

Inspiring scholars by honoring the gifts within each.

Proposed School Name	Target Start Date	School Location	Grade Levels	School Calendar
ARCHES Academy	July 30, 2018	Apache Junction	K-8	180 days

Target Population

The following summary was excerpted from the Applicant’s Educational Plan A.2: Target Population narrative.

The Applicant stated that: “The Apache Junction Unified School District, within which ARCHES Academy plans to locate, reports a current Average Daily Membership of 3855. District-wide, they report the following percentages of students in various ethnicities: 63% White, 31% Hispanic/Latino, 1.5% African American, less than 1% Asian and Pacific Islander, and 2.4% that identify as more than one race. Per the enrollment report provided by the Department of Education website as of November 2016, of those that identify as Hispanic/ Latino 9.42% are English Language Learners. In addition, a full 70% of the total student population within the Apache Junction Unified School District qualify for the Free/Reduced Lunch Program.”

Proposed Locations:

Unconfirmed locations (see Business Plan C.1: Facilities Acquisition)

- Superstition Boulevard & Delaware Drive, Apache Junction
- Meridian Road & Southern Avenue, Apache Junction
- 1130 East Broadway Avenue, Apache Junction
- 462 North Palo Verde Drive, Apache Junction

Program of Instruction

This summary is based on information submitted for the Applicant’s Educational Plan A.1: Educational Philosophy and A.3: Program of Instruction narratives.

ARCHES Academy proposes to implement ideals and methods of the Boy Scouts of America in an educational setting. These ideals include choice, hands-on learning, cooperative learning, recognition, leadership and community involvement. The Applicant proposes to use Standards-aligned curricula for all core subjects, with teachers using a “backwards design” method to plan lessons and units. Teachers will also utilize the Core Knowledge Sequence for Science, Social Studies, Music and Fine Arts curricula. ARCHES Academy also plans to implement The Leader in Me character education program from Franklin Covey.

Governance

Corporate Board and School Governing Body Members	Type
Jessica Droppo	Charter Organization
Michelle Edwards	School Staff
Rachel Lautenschlager	Charter Organization
Jessica Richardson	School Staff

See H: Principal Resumes

Three Year Plan

	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Grade Levels	K-8	K-8	K-8
Enrollment	325	350	375

TRP Recommendation and Scoring

The TRP assessed each application package against the published evaluation criteria. Approval is based on either receiving 95% or higher for each plan (Educational, Operational, and Business) and/or through showing capacity throughout the interview process. The following is a summary of the qualitative evaluation information in support of the recommendation by the TRP based on the revised application package and the capacity interview.

Overall Scoring Results

	<u>Preliminary TRP Scores</u>		<u>Revised TRP Scores</u>	
Any Falls Below the Expectations ratings?	Yes		No	
Any section in which more than one evaluation area scored Approaches ?	Yes		Yes	
		<u>Percent Meets</u>		<u>Percent Meets</u>
Educational Plan Score ≥ 95% Meet standard?	No	51%	No	84%
Operational Plan Score ≥ 95% Meet standard?	No	35%	No	87%
Business Plan Score ≥ 95% Meet standard?	No	32%	No	88%

The TRP provided the Applicant with written technical assistance based on its review of the preliminary written application package and the revised written application package prior to the in-person capacity interview.

TRP Qualitative Analysis Summary

The TRP recommends that the revised application package for ARCHES Academy be denied. The Applicant lacks the capacity to operate a charter school and failed to submit a substantively complete application. The resumes provided by the Applicant indicate a general lack of school leadership experiences from any of the team members. Additionally, the Applicant did not present a well thought out marketing plan that included a sufficient timeframe for the charter school to attract 300 students. The Applicant describes a cutting-edge system of ungraded students working on the specific skills needed to master their grade and move on to the next grade level. While this is indeed progressive, very little thought was given to the actual implementation of that approach working within the constraints of the Arizona Department of Education (“ADE”). The fact that the Applicant, specifically Mrs. Edwards, has worked on this “idea” for 5 years and has no knowledge of how this educational model would align with the given systems at the state level demonstrates a general lack of leadership capacity.

The educational plan presents a mastery level approach to skill acquisition for all students (Educational Plan A.3.1: Mastery and Promotion, pages 1-2). Students will be screened upon enrollment to determine the proper placement within the grade level bands. Using an assessment system that will monitor student’s progress five times per year and provide formative and summative assessments to drive instructional decisions and to determine mastery of skills and promotion to the next grade level, the charter school will be a constantly evolving unit that has students changing placement at any time during the school year. As stated above, this model will be difficult to administer within the set requirements of the ADE for tracking of students throughout the grade levels and administration of the AzMERIT exam.

The operational plan as presented in the revised application package provides roles and responsibilities for each member of the board and an explanation of the qualifications each member will bring to the operation. It is clearly stated that the Corporate Board and the Governing Board will be the same entity. While the board members have experience working in the education field, both public, private and charter schools, they collectively have little or no experience working with school budgets, facility development, oversight of day to day school business, and general school leadership tasks. As described in Section B.1 Applicant Entity pages 6 – 8, the board members have school experience from teaching to working with special populations to operating a program within a specific school, but they lack leadership capacity. Because of the lack of leadership experiences the TRP found the Applicant to lack the ability to oversee the operational and financial



components of the charter school. While Mrs. Edwards has achieved her Masters in Ed Leadership, she has not had any actual experience in the role of principal. The Applicant did indicate that a back office provider would be contracted to help with the business management services such as payroll, accounts payable and receivable, budget preparation and reporting, tax accountability and grant procurement and management, but there is not a strength of knowledge regarding these procedures within the team. (Operational Plan B.3.2: Contracted Services, page 1) This lack of experience and knowledge could be problematic in the future operations of the school.

The business plan provides a description of the facility needed for the proposed charter school, whether using the existing church facility or the new build option by the developer. The marketing plan does not appear robust enough to meet the target student population of 300 students in year one. While a variety of marketing strategies will be used including social media/word of mouth, print advertising/direct mail and community and enrollment events, the TRP finds these methods will not be sufficient to meet the targeted enrollment due to the fact that the plan as presented is yet to be implemented and does not contain robust activities to attract families to the new school. (Capacity Interview 53:45) Additionally, the Applicant indicated during the Capacity Interview (53:00) that they have talked to many people in the community along with the city leadership and the response has been positive. However, this does not represent people that will actually enroll their students in the charter school. The TRP found the source of start-up money to be problematic due to the fact that money is provided by the developer, but the charter school may not have sufficient enrollment to warrant a new building for several years making payback of the funds difficult. The Capacity Interview did not alleviate the concern.

In-Person Capacity Interview Summary

Two members of the Applicant team were present at the Capacity Interview –Mrs. Michelle Edwards and Mrs. Rachel Lautenschlager. Prior to the interview the TRP had concerns about the ungraded model and the interface with the state required Student Information System (“SIS”). The ungraded model proposes to allow students, as they master the content of one grade level and successfully complete the summative exams, to be promoted to the next grade level immediately. This promotion to a new grade level can occur at any time during the school year. The TRP also had concerns about the projected enrollment of 300 students in year 1, and the facility arrangements discussed in the application. These individuals were able to address each question asked by the TRP, but the degree of specificity needed to demonstrate the ability to open and operate a charter school was not present. The individuals spoke of lofty ideas of moving students throughout an ungraded curriculum as they mastered skills, but had yet to determine how the ungraded system would mesh with the SIS required by the ADE.

When discussing how students will realistically be moved from one grade to another mid-year, and have the grade level placements line up with the SIS the answer given by Mrs. Edwards was “that’s the trick”, (Capacity Interview 16:30) There was a general sense that the Applicant had their mind set on the manner in which students would be educated using a mastery approach, and that the biggest challenge would be alignment with the state system. As evidenced by the answers provided in the Capacity Interview, given that the Applicant has admittedly not yet discussed this issue with the ADE indicates a lack of overall capacity and understanding that school issues are also state issues.

During the review of the written application it was discussed by the TRP that, based on the experience of the charter leaders on the review team, a projected enrollment of 300 students during year one would be extremely difficult to achieve. Overall enrollment during year one of any new charter school is difficult, at best, to project. The marketing plan outlined by the Applicant must be robust and executed in a timely fashion in order to attract 300 students the first year of operation. During the Capacity Interview a question was asked regarding how they intended to meet this targeted enrollment number. The answer provided indicated that even though they have not begun a marketing plan, everyone tells them they will have a waiting list. (Capacity Interview 52:35) Even though the charter school has received 20 intents to enroll within the week and half prior to the interview, this was not reassuring to the TRP that 300 students would be present on opening day.

When asked about the facilities that would be utilized Mrs. Edwards indicated that they have a very good working relationship with the developer and he knows that they will eventually build. (Capacity Interview 1:03:44) The application indicated a local church had offered to partner with the charter school to provide space for the first few years of operation, and then the developer would work with the Applicant to provide a new building. The TRP has concerns that the school will not increase enrollment as quickly as projected and the charter school will have difficulty paying back start-up funds provided by the developer.

While the members of the team demonstrated passion for their project, they lacked many skills that would be needed to make the project successful.

APPLICANT BACKGROUND SUMMARY

Additional data is provided in relation to the Applicant's principals' experience and qualifications, as an indicator of the Applicant's ability to implement a charter or operate a charter school.

Principal Name: Jessica Droppo

Current Affiliation(s): None

Past Affiliation(s) of Note:

- 3 years as Instructional Assistant at American Leadership Academy (South Gilbert)
- 1 year as First Steps Intern/Lead PM Teacher at Bridges Preschool and Kindergarten (Queen Creek)

Principal Name: Michelle Edwards

Current Affiliation(s): 1 year as Teacher at Happy Valley School (SanTan Valley).

Past Affiliation(s) of Note:

- 5 months as Teacher at Hillcrest Academy (Mesa)
- 1 year as First Grade Teacher at Leading Edge Academy (Queen Creek)
- 1 year as Lead Teacher at Avalon Charter K-8 (Apache Junction)
- 3 years as Lead Teacher at American Leadership Academy (South Gilbert)
- 5 months as Preschool Director at Maxwell Preschool Academy (Mesa),

Principal Name: Rachel Lautenschlager

Current Affiliation(s): 4 years as a Teacher Education Evaluator at Western Governor's University.

Past Affiliation(s) of Note:

- 7 years as Online Teacher at Educate Online Schools
- 2 years as Third Grade Teacher at Guerrero Elementary School (Mesa)

Principal Name: Jessica Richardson

Current Affiliation(s): 3 years as Dean of Students at Happy Valley East School (Santan Valley).

Past Affiliation(s) of Note: 6 years as Vice Principal at Burke Basic School (Mesa).