

**ALABAMA PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL COMMISSION**

# CHARTER SCHOOL APPLICATION RECOMMENDATION REPORT 2016

*National Association of Charter School Authorizers*

**September 9, 2016**

*New Charter School Application for*

**ACCELERATION (ACCEL) DAY AND EVENING ACADEMY**

*Submitted by*

**MOBILE AREA EDUCATION FOUNDATION**

*Evaluation Team*

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## INTRODUCTION

Following the passage of the Alabama School Choice and Student Opportunity Act (Act 2015-3) in March 2015, Governor Bentley created the Alabama Public Charter School Commission (Commission). The mission of the eleven-member Commission is to authorize high-quality public charter schools in accordance with the powers expressly conferred on the Commission in the act. To that end, the Commission executed a rigorous, high-quality process during 2016 to solicit and evaluate charter school proposals.

### *Focus on Quality*

The 2016 Request for Proposals and the resulting evaluation process are rigorous and demanding. The process is meant to ensure that approved charter school operators possess the capacity to implement a school model that is likely to dramatically increase student outcomes. Successful applicants will demonstrate high levels of expertise and capacity in the areas of curriculum and instruction, school finance, educational and operational leadership, and non-profit governance, as well as high expectations for excellence in student achievement and professional standards. An application that merits a recommendation for approval will present a clear, realistic picture of how the school expects to operate; be detailed in how the school will raise student achievement; and inspire confidence in the applicant's capacity to successfully implement the proposed academic and operational plans.

### *Evaluation Process*

For the 2016 RFP cycle, the Commission partnered with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) to manage the application process and to provide independent, merit-based recommendations regarding whether to approve or deny each proposal. NACSA assembled an independent evaluation team that included both national and local expertise related to charter school start-up and operation. This report from the evaluation team is a culmination of the following stages of review:

#### **PROPOSAL EVALUATION**

The evaluation team conducted individual and group assessments of the merits of the proposal based on the complete written submission.

#### **CAPACITY INTERVIEW**

After reviewing the application and discussing the findings of their individual reviews, the evaluation team conducted an in-person interview to assess the team's overall capacity to implement the proposal as written in the application.

#### **CONSENSUS JUDGMENT**

Following the capacity interview, the evaluation team came to consensus regarding whether to recommend the proposal for approval or denial. The duty of the evaluation team is to recommend the approval or denial of each application based on its merits against Commission-approved evaluation criteria. The authority and responsibility to decide whether to approve or deny each application rests with the members of the Commission.

### *Report Contents*

This evaluation report includes the following:

#### **PROPOSAL OVERVIEW**

Basic information about the proposed school as presented in the application.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

An overall judgment regarding whether the proposal meets the criteria for approval.

#### **EVALUATION**

Analysis of the proposal is based on three primary areas of plan development and the capacity of the applicant team to execute the plan as presented:

**Educational Program Design and Capacity:** curriculum and instructional design; student performance standards; high school graduation requirements and post-secondary readiness; school calendar and schedule; school culture; supplemental programming; special populations and at-risk students; student recruitment and enrollment; student discipline; parent and community involvement; and educational program capacity.

**Operations Plan and Capacity:** legal status and governing documents; organization charts; governing board; advisory bodies; staff structure; staffing plans, hiring, management and evaluation; professional development; performance management; facilities; start-up and ongoing operations; and operations capacity.

**Financial Plan and Capacity:** start-up and five year budgets; cash flow projections; revenue and expenditure assumptions; financial policies and controls; and financial management capacity.

## **RATINGS CHARACTERISTICS**

Evaluation teams assess each application against the published evaluation criteria. In general, the following definitions guide evaluator ratings:

### **Meets the Standard**

The response reflects a thorough understanding of key issues. It addresses the topic with specific and accurate information that shows thorough preparation; presents a clear, realistic picture of how the school expects to operate; and inspires confidence in the applicant's capacity to carry out the plan effectively.

### **Partially Meets the Standard**

The response meets the criteria in some respects, but lacks detail and/or requires additional information in one or more areas.

### **Does Not Meet the Standard**

The response is wholly undeveloped or significantly incomplete; demonstrates lack of preparation; is unsuited to the mission of the authorizer or otherwise raises substantial concerns about the viability of the plan or the applicant's ability to carry it out.

## PROPOSAL OVERVIEW

*Applicant Name:*

**MOBILE AREA EDUCATION FOUNDATION**

*Proposed School Name:*

**ACCELERATION (ACCEL) DAY AND EVENING ACADEMY**

*Mission:*

The mission of Accel Day and Evening Academy is to re-engage and inspire youth to unlock their academic potential and graduate high school as life-long learners ready for college, careers, and civic life.

*Proposed Location:*

Mobile County Public School System

*Enrollment Projections:*

<i>Academic Year</i>	<i>Planned # Students</i>	<i>Maximum # Students</i>	<i>Grades Served</i>
2017-18	300	300	9-12
2018-19	320	320	9-12
2019-20	320	320	9-12
2020-21	330	330	9-12
2021-22	350	350	9-12
At Capacity	350	350	9-12

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Recommendation:*

### **ACCELERATION (ACCEL) DAY AND EVENING ACADEMY**

**APPROVE**

#### *Summary Analysis:*

The evaluation team recommends approval for Acceleration (Accel) Day and Evening Academy. The application, in combination with the information provided in the capacity interview, provides a compelling case that Accel is capable of opening and sustaining the proposed school targeting over-age and under-credited students.

The educational program design is based on a successful evening school model designed by the applicants, serving the same student population in Mobile, Alabama. Accel's school model is built upon proven core strategies: an extended school year and an evening school program, dedicated time for teachers to plan, individualized student academic plans by way of counselors, and an online curriculum that provides accessibility and flexibility for students.

The applicant team also presents significant capacity to implement the proposed educational model. As a partnership with the Mobile Area Education Foundation (MAEF), the school brings board and staff members who (1) have played key roles in public education in the city, (2) have significant financial management and fundraising experience, and (3) have effectively designed and implemented an evening school program serving the target student population. Though the relationship between MAEF and the charter school board is unconventional, the applicant has proactively considered and planned for potential areas of conflict while leveraging the partnership.

The Alabama Public Charter School Commission 2016 Application did not require evidence of success in prior schools, a critical piece of evidence to consider in order to determine the viability of the applicant's future success. If approved, the review team recommends the Commission obtain detailed and current academic, operational, and financial performance information from the Evening Educational Options Program operated by MAEF.

#### *Summary of Section Ratings:*

Opening and maintaining a successful, high-performing charter school depends on having a complete, coherent plan and identifying highly capable individuals to execute that plan. It is not an endeavor for which strengths in some areas can compensate for material weaknesses in others. *Therefore, in order to receive a recommendation for approval, the application must Meet the Standard in all areas.*

#### **EDUCATION PROGRAM DESIGN & CAPACITY**

Meets the Standard

#### **OPERATIONS PLAN & CAPACITY**

Meets the Standard

#### **FINANCIAL PLAN & CAPACITY**

Meets the Standard

## EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM DESIGN & CAPACITY

### ACCELERATION (ACCEL) DAY AND EVENING ACADEMY

### RATING:

**Meets the Standard**

#### *Plan Summary:*

MAEF Public Charter Schools, a subsidiary of the Mobile Area Education Foundation, proposes to open the Acceleration (Accel) Day and Evening Academy to serve over-age/under-credited high school students in grades 9-12 in Mobile County and the surrounding areas. The applicant plans to use a student-centered approach, employing success seminars, blended learning labs, learning studios, and college and career coursework (dual enrollment and internships) to ensure students graduate college and career ready. The school will be a full day and evening model and is based upon the Evening Educational Options Program, also developed by MAEF. While the school will use the state's requirements for graduation, Accel will allow students to progress from grade to grade upon the demonstration of competency.

#### *Analysis:*

The Education Program Design and Capacity section of the application meets the standard for approval because it presents a comprehensive and realistic plan for implementing the proposed school model, including evidence that the applicant has a successful track record in effectively serving the target student population.

The application makes a strong case that the educational program of Acceleration Day and Evening Academy will be effective in meeting the needs of over-age/under-credited students. The applicant team includes a leader with experience running schools and school districts as well as operating an academic program for the target student population in Mobile. The plan to extend the school year and include an evening school program in addition to the traditional school day provides dedicated time for teachers to plan, provides individualized student academic plans by way of counselors, and uses an online curriculum that provides accessibility and flexibility for students. These are strategies that have proven successful in serving students that have not thrived in a traditional school setting.

The relationship between the school and MAEF will provide the school with ample resources to support student recruitment, financial management, and philanthropic and community engagement. MAEF's continued partnership with the Mobile County Public School System will provide opportunity for the school to recruit students. A strong recruitment pipeline is a benefit, as the proposed Year 1 enrollment goal of 300 students is an aggressive target for a new charter school in any market. MAEF's positive and long-standing community reputation will bolster recruitment and community engagement efforts.

Though the school leader has not been identified, the applicant has secured the CEO and COO of MAEF to serve as the CEO and COO of the charter school, thus lending significant capacity to the growing organization in the interim period before a principal is hired.

## OPERATIONS PLAN & CAPACITY

### ACCELERATION (ACCEL) DAY AND EVENING ACADEMY

## RATING:

**Meets the Standard**

#### *Plan Summary:*

MAEF Public Charter Schools (MPCS) will operate as a subsidiary under the 501(c)(3) of Mobile Area Education Foundation (MAEF). At least 20 percent of the board will be comprised of parent representation. To minimize conflict of interest, fewer than 50 percent of MPCS board members will be former members of the MAEF board (at no point will the two boards share current members). MPCS will contract with MAEF for executive management services, including financial management, communications, fundraising, and management of the principal.

The staffing plan for Accel includes evening and day teachers and at least one advocate counselor—a trained counselor who will provide individual support to students—per 75 students. The applicant team has members with extensive combined years of experience in public education including Carolyn Akers, CEO of MAEF; Jeremiah Newell, COO of MAEF and founder of the Evening Educational Options Program; and Harold Dodge, former Superintendent of Mobile County Public School System.

#### *Analysis:*

The Operations Plan and Capacity section of the application meets the standard for approval because the applicant presents a thoughtful governance and staffing plan and evidence of organizational and management capacity to operate the school.

By partnering with MAEF, Accel will open with the support of experienced staff and proven systems to implement the proposed educational model. The CEO and COO of MAEF will bring to Accel relationships within the education and philanthropic communities and experience in the design, implementation, and support of staff in a similar school. The application provides a sound operational plan to leverage this partnership. Additionally, Accel's board of directors will include individuals with strong ties to philanthropy and public education in Mobile. Though the relationship between MAEF and the charter school board is an unconventional structure, the applicant has proactively considered and planned for potential areas of conflict while leveraging the partnership to provide executive leadership capacity.

The application also outlines professional development and performance management plans with rigorous standards and robust plans for support that will help teachers be successful in their classrooms. During the interview, the applicant noted there is already a significant interest in the school leader role by current principals, which demonstrates the capacity of the applicant team to attract a deep candidate pool of qualified individuals. Finally, the applicant indicated that a school facility has been identified. This building was selected with the specific intention of instilling pride among the student body, showing a compassionate, mission-aligned approach to facility acquisition.

During the interview, the applicant proactively responded to concerns that the staffing plan outlined in the application was not adequate to meet the needs of the student population and described a corrected plan including six additional evening teachers. During the interview, the applicant also provided sufficient descriptions of segmented management for the day and evening programs that alleviated concerns regarding the capacity of a principal to oversee staff during a 12-hour day. The applicants were reflective throughout the interview, inspiring confidence in the leadership's ability to implement and adjust the model as needed.



## FINANCIAL PLAN & CAPACITY

### ACCELERATION (ACCEL) DAY AND EVENING ACADEMY

## RATING:

**Meets the Standard**

#### *Plan Summary:*

MAEF Public Charter Schools will contract with its parent organization, the Mobile Area Education Foundation to manage the finances of Accel. The organization will use the fiscal systems, policies, and procedures that have been in place at MAEF for the past eight years to guide financial management for the school. The school leader will provide input on the budget development and the charter school board will provide oversight of all fiscal management. Accel's budget reflects conservative revenue projections from state, local, and federal sources (\$7,556/pupil) and does not include a reliance on philanthropy beyond the start-up year. The budget also includes a contingency plan. Various members of the applicant team have financial management, fundraising, and accounting experience.

#### *Analysis:*

The Financial Plan and Capacity section meets the standard for approval because the outlined fiscal policies, procedures, and systems are sound; the proposed budget is appropriate and aligns with the educational program; and there is clear evidence of capacity to implement, manage, and oversee the finances of a start-up charter school.

Accel will implement fiscal policies and procedures that have proven effective for MAEF over the past eight years through a contract for services MAEF. The application also provides a detailed chart defining the role of MAEF staff, school leadership, and the governing board in finance that displays appropriate checks and balances and adherence with best practices. The applicant team has robust financial management experience, including an auditor with 30 years of experience, a CFO with 10 years of nonprofit finance experience, and a CEO with 25 years of management and fundraising experience.

The budget as presented contained reasonable assumptions and was sound and conservative, with no reliance upon philanthropy past the start-up year. MAEF and the proposed members of the charter school board have significant experience in fundraising in Mobile and it is likely that the organization will have significant philanthropic support. During the interview, the applicant expressed an intent to direct any additional funds toward additional staff or other student-directed services. Though the applicants do not have specific clarity on revenue projections from the state, Accel used a reasonable, conservative per pupil estimate, acknowledged the likelihood of difficulty in finalizing revenue projections in short order, and displayed the capacity to make financial adjustments and implement contingency plans if necessary.

The applicant does not yet have confirmed sources of revenue for the start-up year, but confirmed in the interview that funder meetings have already been set and confirmation of gifts are contingent upon the approval of the charter application.

## EVALUATOR BIOGRAPHIES

### *Evaluator's Name*

#### **MORGAN RIPSKI**

Morgan Ripski is an independent consultant working with charter schools, management organizations, and entrepreneurs to plan and implement scaling strategies, build fundraising plans and teams in support of growth, and manage projects. Previously, Morgan served as the President for Collegiate Academies where she helped the growing charter management organization triple in size by successfully leading charter application processes to secure nine charters, as well as facilitating and authoring strategic growth plans. Morgan has also served as the Executive Director of the Foundation for Science and Math Education (the former fundraising entity for Collegiate Academies) and the Communications and Development Director for New Schools for New Orleans. Morgan holds degrees from Stanford University and Bates College.

### *Evaluator's Name*

#### **MARK MARTIN**

Mark Martin is a Resident Fellow with Jobs for the Future's Pathways to Prosperity team. Mark is currently completing his third year as doctoral resident at the Harvard Graduate School of Education Leadership program (EDLD). As a Gordon M. Ambach Fellow, he served with the Alabama State Department of Education's Division of Career/Technical Education and Workforce Development during the summer of 2015. As the co-founder and School Director of Langston Hughes Academy, Mark led the preK-8 charter school to six consecutive years of academic growth. He also authored the proposal to build New Orleans' first post-Katrina school, a \$32M project. Mark is a founding Board Member of THRIVE, Louisiana's first urban residential school, which posted the highest academic gains in state history. Mark graduated with a B.S. in Finance from the University of Alabama and earned an M.B.A. from the University of Georgia.

### *Evaluator's Name*

#### **ANTHONY OLIVER**

Anthony Oliver is currently an Assistant Principal in the Jefferson County School System in Birmingham, Alabama. Most recently, Anthony served as Executive Director at Breakthrough Birmingham, an education non-profit dedicated to providing high quality academic programming to underserved students and preparing the next generation of teachers. Anthony has also served as a high-school mathematics teacher and coach, and has worked as a principal intern at Newton North High School where he worked to create access to challenging academic curriculum for African-American students and students from low socioeconomic classes. Anthony holds a B.A. in Mathematics from the Virginia Military Institute, an M.A.E. in Secondary Education - Mathematics Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Alabama at Birmingham, and an Ed. M in School Leadership from the Harvard Graduate School of Education.