



New Beginnings Family Academy Peer Review Comments and Final Applicant Scores 2024 RFA

Application Details	
Contact Person: Ronelle Swagerty	Contact email: rpswagerty@nbfacademy.or
Application type: Expansion	Approved Budget:
Grades Served: PreK-6	New Seats created:
Application Status:	

The following are condensed Peer Reviewer comments and scores for New Beginnings Family Academy’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}*

- Applicant described range of board member expertise and provided examples of support (legal, educational). Board bios and resumes are included. Noted a goal of replacing "an outgoing Director with a candidate whose skill set is similar."
- The applicant clearly described the board composition including expertise present among the board of directors and explained how these areas of expertise positively impact and support the school. The applicant further specified board committees (p. 5) and the selection process (p. 5, and Board by-laws, p. 35-36), including how the process ensures adequate expertise. Any gaps in skills are identified and a plan exists to address them through recruiting additional board members or through acquiring board training in specific areas.

- The applicant is governed by a Board of Directors, which may have between five and 24 members. The Board's function is policy making, advising and evaluating. Its principal responsibility is fulfillment of the applicant's mission and oversight of its operations. Directors act on behalf of the applicant's constituents and collectively establish a clear organizational mission, form the strategic plan to accomplish the mission, oversee and evaluate the plan's success, hire a competent head and provide adequate supervision and support to that individual. While the Board represents diverse skill sets, it is unclear what process the board will undertake to periodically identify that all the necessary skills and knowledge are represented.

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

- Applicant included policies or links to policies. Described annual retreat, 6 meetings per year. Noted "will resume collecting a completed Conflict of Interest Form from each member."
- The applicant did not provide sufficient evidence that the board has established clear policies and procedures that guide its oversight of the school. Although the applicant identified some board responsibilities (p. 4-5), the applicant did not outline a comprehensive set of board roles and responsibilities, inclusive of ensuring compliance with Open Meetings and Open Records Law. The applicant provided additional information during the interview that inspired confidence in board operations. The applicant clearly stated that the board conducts an annual review of policies and annual completion of a Conflict-of-Interest form (p. 5).
- The proposal states that the following committee structure helps the Board accomplish its functions: Governance, Development, Finance, Academic Excellence. Members will consider establishing an Ad Hoc Task Force of the Governance Committee to help complete a Succession Plan. The roles for the board members show oversight for the school, such as the treasurer overseeing the funds for the school.

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

- NBFA's governing council, The New Beginnings Family Alliance, went dormant during the pandemic but will be revived during the 2024-25 academic year. Clear criteria and procedures for selecting officers and members was described.

Training included: Annual participation "in a three-part Training Mini-Module - Acting Strategically; Raising and Using Resources; and Annual Board Training for New and Returning Charter School Board Members," offered by the CTCSEA. Members of NBFA's Board of Directors and key staff underwent a Theory of Change process in 2013. The three-day exercise resulted in the charter district's commitment to inoculate its students from the negative effects of poverty-related stress (high school drop outs, drugs, homelessness, teen pregnancy, underemployment) through delivery of developmentally appropriate academic programming embedded with mental health strategies, coupled with strong parental engagement and supports. In so doing, NBFA will change the life trajectory of its students and families for generations.

- The applicant provided resumes of board members and personnel occupying key leadership positions. The applicant explained that training for board members includes three-part module at the first meeting of each year (p. 6). No additional training was described. During the interview the applicant described additional training available to governing board members; however, it does not appear that a training plan has been developed for the full board. The applicant also stated that school leadership receives professional development training at the annual charter school conference, annual Emotionally Responsive Practice coaching, and in professional learning communities (p. 7). Professional development for staff is evident in the 5-year budget; however, funds for board training are not clearly identified. Clear criteria and procedures for selecting officers and members of the governing council exist (By-laws, p. 35-36, 40). It appears that one member of the board is a teacher at the school. It is unclear how the board addresses the potential conflict of interest with one director voting on policies and procedures that may directly impact his/her employment and life at the school. This was addressed during the interview; however the response did not provide assurance that the applicant is handling potential conflicts of interests adequately.
- At the first meeting of the year, Board members annually participate in a three-part Training Mini-Module - Acting Strategically; Raising and Using Resources; and Annual Board Training for New and Returning Charter School Board Members. School leadership receives ongoing professional development, internally and externally, including opportunities such as annual attendance at the National Charter Schools Conference, yearly Emotionally Responsive Practice coaching in the school's approach from Bank Street College of Education in New York as well as leadership Professional Learning Communities.

SECTION ONE OVERVIEW: Board Capacity and Governance Structure Overall Comments

- Follow up on evidence of governing council and conflict of interest commitments.

Peer Reviewer Scores for Section 1	
Peer Reviewer 1	12
Peer Reviewer 2	12
Peer Reviewer 3	13
Aggregate Score for Section 1	37
Average Score	12.333

**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 CEO supervises the district's Chief Finance and Operating Officer, Chief Academic Officer, Chief Development and Communications Officer, Data, Assessment and Research Administrator, Family and Community Engagement Officer, Principal and Assistant Principal. Leader is evaluated annually, 360-degree process, grounded in self-assessment and governance chair interviewing CEO's direct

reports. Other administrators set goals, self-evaluate and are reviewed by their immediate supervisor annually

- The leadership and administrative roles at the school are well-defined, and comprehensively cover the broad set of responsibilities required of charter school leadership (p. 7-8). The applicant presented a complete organizational and management plan (including the administrative and contractual roles and responsibilities) for the school that included a clear division of roles and management responsibilities (p. 8). The applicant clearly articulated a process that will be used by the board to evaluate the performance of the school leadership (p. 9), but did not identify an evaluation tool or standards, or a protocol for addressing performance concerns. This was asked about during the interview, but the applicant did not identify a specific, research-based evaluation tool. Satisfactory information was provided about the protocol for addressing performance concerns. The applicant clearly demonstrated how the school has designed its leadership team to ensure sufficient expertise to manage charter school- specific compliance, operations, finance, and legal matters.
- The proposal articulates the leadership structure for the school. The CEO reports directly to the governance board, which sets policy and works closely with leadership to establish annual academic, social emotional and financial goals. The CEO is responsible for overseeing the management of all aspects of the school: academics, climate and culture, operations, compliance with state and federal laws and regulations pertinent to school operations, relations with the parent community, development, keeping the Board promptly and adequately informed of school operations and coordinating relations with government officials. However, it is not clear how the school will select or has selected leaders for the roles of school management to ensure that they have or will have the necessary skills.

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 school has not yet identified a leader for the expansion but included a job description and noted the search will launch in the winter. A few examples of overcoming unexpected challenges were included in the narrative, but potential challenges in the enrollment expansion were not fully explored. Parking and staggered drop offs solutions were described. This expansion is reflective of a multi-year plan already in progress, with the phase out of 7th/8th grade and the addition of 4 preK seats.
- The school demonstrates sufficient leadership and governance capability to implement and sustain the new school or expansion project(s) outlined in this application. The applicant has demonstrated processes to identify and mitigate key risk factors faced in the past related to leadership, facilities, and safety (p. 9-10). However, the applicant has not sufficiently identified any material operational challenges / key risk factors related to the proposed expansion. During the interview, the applicant identified and discussed several potential challenges and risks with clear plans to mitigate them. The applicant clearly described how the school's leadership team has demonstrated the ability to operate soundly, strategically and in ways that staff and stakeholders can understand and follow. The applicant stated that the school has identified a school leader for the expansion school and provided a complete resume as part of application.
- The proposal communicates a leadership structure for managing the proposed school. The proposal has identified the CEO and shows the extensive experience and expertise that she possesses based on her resume. A yet-to-be-hired ELC Assistant Principal will hold a Connecticut Intermediate

Administrator/Supervisor endorsement, have early childhood experience, and a proven track record of supporting staff and collaborating with families. The proposal has identified parking to be a challenge and to deal with this challenge, the school will stagger drop off and pick up times for students.

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

- No comments from any reviewers

Peer Reviewer Scores for Section 2	
Peer Reviewer 1	8
Peer Reviewer 2	9
Peer Reviewer 3	8
Total Score	25
Average Score	8.333

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}

- Reaching children earlier in the critical foundational years and fostering age-appropriate, social-emotional and academic growth will better position students for success in elementary school and beyond.
- The applicant explained how the school vision and design communicate high standards for student success, and clearly articulated how the school will positively impact students and school and community stakeholders. The applicant described the school’s specialized focus clearly (p. 13) and provided data to justify the key instructional and curriculum design elements. These data included evidence of the need for more preschool opportunities as well as evidence of demand from enrollment applications and waitlists (p. 11-12).
- The proposal argues that the applicant will increase student learning and developmental outcomes through its evidence-based, trauma-informed center for early learners, ages three and four. Connecticut has lost about 15% of its preschool slots since the pandemic. The applicant emphasizes that the applicant will have highly qualified educators and a low student to teacher ration.

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}

- Demographics: NBFA's student demographics, including its Pre-K, mirror that of their peers attending Head Start and traditional public preschools in Bridgeport. 98% Black and Hispanic. More than 13% are multilingual learners 12% receive special education services Need/interest evidence: In 2022, of 228 applications, 121 were for seats in Pre-K, for only approximately 60 open slots As of July, 83 students remain on the Pre-K waitlist for the 2024-2025 school year (NBFA's existing space only accommodates four Pre-K classrooms). CT lost ~15% of its preschool slots since the pandemic. From 2020 to 2021, slots dropped from 64,789 to 54,537 as childcare centers closed permanently. Class sizes for Pre-K in nearby traditional district schools average 24 with no paraprofessionals Current PreK-6 is authorized to enroll up to 499 students; 2023 enrollment was reported as 406 in annual report. NBFA administered Early Childhood Facility Planning Survey, within NBFA's own application pool. Did not include # of survey responses or specific findings from survey, only link to blank survey on website.
- The applicant's enrollment forecast is well articulated with clear data, and rationale for enrollment growth (includes grades and ages of students to be served, and a clear picture of community demand for the school) (p. 12-13). The applicant provided a detailed analysis of the proposed school's projected student demographics (p. 15). The applicant did not clearly discuss the impact of the proposed charter school on the racial and socio-economic diversity of public schools and school districts from which children would be drawn to attend the charter school. This was asked about during the interview; however, additional information about the surrounding schools and districts was not provided. The applicant provided a detailed description of how the school plans to ensure Access and Equity for at-risk student populations and establish and maintain a racially and socio-economically diverse student body, including proposed strategies (consistent with state statute and legal requirements) to recruit, admit, enroll, and retain a diverse student body (p. 15-17). This included a description of how the school will identify, engage and accommodate families from various backgrounds through the use of multilingual materials, enrollment and school events during non-standard work hours, and at community locations (p.16). The applicant did not specifically address how the school will identify, engage and accommodate families of students with disabilities. However, this was clarified during the interview. The applicant's admission policy was not evident.
- The proposal generally communicates the demographics of the students and the trajectory of growth for the school. For example, the current student body is 98% Black and Hispanic. More than 13% are multilingual learners and 12% receive special education services. And 80% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Also, the majority of their students are considered high-needs because they receive special education services, are on a 504 plan, or are multilingual learners. The enrollment policy is conveyed in the proposal. The applicant will employ a variety of strategies, explained in the proposal, to build awareness and recruit for the school.

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}

- Word of mouth, strong social media presence, NBFA has followed the district's recent growth in multilingual learners, including students whose first language is Spanish, French Creole and Portuguese. This has changed how NBFA engages and accommodates English learners and their families: materials are distributed to existing families in English and Spanish, the primary languages. Two-sided, multilingual enrollment correspondences are strategically distributed in high-traffic locations (e.g. public libraries, after school centers, bodegas, bank branches and supermarkets) Website translatable in over 100 languages. Some videos feature non-English speaking families using their native tongue, which is then translated in English via captions. Captions are used strategically to accommodate families with diverse learning styles. Holds enrollment and school events during non-standard working hours, attend community events, FACE Coordinator role, listed a number of community partnerships and parent engagement activities
- The applicant provided examples of strategies to meaningfully engage current and prospective families and community members in implementation and operation of school (p. 17-18) that also include specific and concrete roles of parents, community members, and educators in the school's decision making on an ongoing basis. The applicant clearly discussed how the community, parents, and current and former teachers have been involved in developing an instructional model to best serve targeted student populations. The applicant ensures the school makes available to parents' information about educational options and posts the school's state report card on the school's website (p. 16).
- The proposal states that the school has extensive experience working with families. Staff members have regular communication with families to help troubleshoot and solve attendance obstacles. Staff have increased communication with select families and worked to build positive and trusting relationships with families whose children are chronically absent through in-person "home" visits that occur wherever the caregiver feels most comfortable (e.g. public library, local coffee shop or their home). Staff, family and community partners have regular input in school governance and operations. A parent, current teacher and educator from the Bridgeport Board of Education serve on the Board. Teachers and parents also serve on the school's alliance, the school's governing council, which works with leadership to ensure continuous school improvement.

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}*

- Work with district for busing, Included detailed information and rationale about restorative discipline practices (ERP Behavior/PBIS framework) did not explore barriers related to enrollment and retention that could impede access to their programs, but did describe initiative, inclusive of home visits, to reduce chronic absenteeism
- The applicant detailed a comprehensive approach to achieving and sustaining equitable access, including in practices around discipline, transport, enrollment and retention that could impede access to their programs. Notably, the applicant's educational framework and approach to discipline have resulted in a dramatic reduction in the number of school suspensions (p. 19).
- The proposal cites how the school has mitigated barriers in the past. Notably, the school worked with families to ameliorate students' attendance rate. The proposal also discusses how the school has lowered behavioral incidents and sought to improve social emotional wellness of students.

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

- Described coordination with district
- The applicant stated that the local district provides transportation for students (p. 18).
- The applicant partners with the Bridgeport Transportation Department to bus students to and from school daily. Although this arrangement is written into Connecticut statute, the relationship with host district leaders has afforded the applicant the opportunity to rent buses for field trips to enhance students’ educational experiences. One of the applicant’s administrative assistants liaises with the district’s transportation department and schedules PPT meetings between district, service providers, school staff and families to make pupils receive a free and appropriate education.

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

- CT lost 10K preK seats - how many in Bridgeport specifically? Is there more evidence of longer-term need/interest from the community (e.g., Bridgeport birthrates, etc.?) for PreK seats, etc. How are school's retention rates? Early Childhood Facility Planning Survey - how many respondents, what were trends?

Peer Reviewer Scores for Section 3	
Peer Reviewer 1	21
Peer Reviewer 2	23
Peer Reviewer 3	21
Total Score	65
Average Score	21.667

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}

- NBFA has selected core resources that rank “meets expectations” for alignment to the standards and usability, the highest rating by Ed Reports. HMH Into Reading as the primary resource for English Language Arts. Both Bridges Mathematics (used in grades PreK-5) and Open Up Resources (Grade 6) Sci-21, a product of the Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES)
- The applicant clearly explained key design elements for the proposed educational model throughout the application. Key curriculum materials for each content area are identified and described (p.

22-25). Further, the applicant identified the criteria for selecting curriculum resources, emphasizing alignment with the school mission, high quality, and support for the educational model (p. 21). These criteria and the clear rationale for curriculum selection make a compelling case for why the chosen approach is likely to improve students' academic performance.

- Emotionally Responsive Practice (ERP) is a core practice that underpins everything at the applicant's school. This student-centered approach weaves well-child strategies into every classroom while encouraging experience-based learning and inspiring children to make sense of the world around them through hands-on activities both inside and outside the classroom. ERP is a relationship-based approach grounded in a deep understanding of child development and acknowledgment of the role that students' life experiences play in their ability to learn. In describing the curriculum, the proposal identifies the curriculum foci for the content areas and particular assessment tools that are designed to help the school be responsive to students.

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

- NBFA has selected core resources that rank "meets expectations" for alignment to the standards and usability, the highest rating by Ed Reports. The applicant has described, in detail, the strengths of each resource and its alignment to the school's mission and core beliefs. Some academic performance progress was evident; however, over half of the school's students are not currently proficient in ELA or math (2023). About 2/3 of students demonstrated growth.

ELA: 39.8% (decreased, 71.8% is goal)

Math 45.8% (improved slightly, 66.4% is goal)

Smarter Balanced tests: (annual report p.4) indicates small percentages of students on grade level (color key is not provided). When compared with last year, NBFA had about a 3% increase in math scores, a 7% decrease in overall scores in ELA, and a 3% decrease in science.

Fall 2022, 85.2% of K-6th graders were rated "typical" or "strength" in their SEL competencies. By spring of 2023, that percentage had increased to 91.1%.

- The applicant application did not specifically describe how the choice of curriculum will help the school meet CT's required school performance standards for charter schools. However, the applicant provided sufficient additional information during the interview.
- The applicant has selected core resources that rank "meets expectations" for alignment to the standards and usability, the highest rating by Ed Reports. In particular, the reading, math and science programs include formative assessments aligned with standard to help monitor student's progress toward and with the standards.

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}

- Small class sizes and two adults per classroom help support the full range of NBFA's learners, grades Pre-K through 8th. Experiential learning, field trips and individualized instruction are hallmarks of the model. Emotionally Responsive Practice (ERP) is a core practice that underpins everything at NBFA. This student-centered approach weaves well-child strategies into every classroom NBFA utilizes a

play-based approach in its preschool classrooms Students at every grade level are provided with instruction in small groups.

- The applicant stated that the school will use developmentally appropriate, play-based approach to teaching and learning with experience-based learning and hands-on activities.
- The proposal conveys that the instructional techniques employed by the teachers. For grades K-5, the DESSA Aperture portal provides a way to analyze SEL data and provides teachers and leaders with instructional tools to support students in developing specific SEL competencies. In the content areas, the teachers facilitate small group and whole group instruction. The curricular resources support instruction with formative assessment opportunities.

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}*

- For grades K-5, NBFA uses the DESSA to support wellbeing. Plans to purchase the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA). NBFA uses CT DOTS as a tool to monitor the growth and development of students at the preschool level. Curriculum-based assessments. Forefront, NBFA's data warehouse for mathematics, Forefront's reporting suite enables teachers and leaders to routinely monitor students' progress toward specific standards. In compliance with state mandates, certified administrators follow NBFA's board-approved Teacher Evaluation Plan, which involves goal-setting, self-evaluation, and observations or reviews of practice.
- The applicant identified the tools for monitoring student performance (p. 24-25) and stated that data will be used to inform instruction and determine interventions, but did not explain how this is implemented at the school or how instruction is differentiated. The applicant did not address how the school monitors and assesses teacher performance. Both of these areas were addressed in detail during the interview and addressed both the PreK expansion and the school.
- Assessment results from the math and reading curriculum will go into the applicant's data warehouse, which is the main vehicle for how the teachers can monitor student progress. Assessment in pre-K and early kindergarten is largely based on structured teacher observation and conversation that occurs when students are engaged in play. Across content areas, teachers will employ differentiated, data-informed, small group learning into the school day in each instructional tier to ensure positive effects on student outcomes.

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 address 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.
- No comments from Reviewer 2
- The proposal conveys that the school has autonomy over the curriculum and operations of the school. This autonomy positions them to improve achievement for traditionally under-served groups of students. The families for these students have a choice for their school attendance and the opening of this school creates a new choice. However, the proposal does not make evident

specifically how the school's elements have been selected based on the unique autonomy and flexibility afforded them as a charter school.

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

- Resources are generally high-quality, but academic performance is low.

Peer Reviewer Scores for Section 4	
Peer Reviewer 1	19
Peer Reviewer 2	18
Peer Reviewer 3	21
Total Score	58
Average Score	19.333

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}

- Project budget and 5y budget are provided. Beyond new classroom set-up costs (~500K), grant requests of 268K include salaries of CEO, CAO, P, instructional coach and teachers, as well as data administrator, admin asst.
- The applicant provided a budget template and narrative that are complete and demonstrate clear understanding of allowable, allocable costs. Implementation and planning periods are broken out clearly. The applicant provided a three-year CSP grant budget with justification for activities, and complete descriptions of activities and expenditures. In the budget narrative, the applicant described the plan to maintain financial sustainability after the end of the grant period and provided a five-year school operating budget in addition to CSP grant budget. However, many questions arose regarding the five year budget. First, several sources of revenue were unclear such as parent fees, interest, billboard revenue. Second, the budget includes revenue from "other grants" (line 7), but it's not clear what these grants are and if they've been confirmed. This was clarified during the interview. Third, it's not evident where facility costs such as payment on a loan or mortgage are included. Finally, the applicant has not included evidence of a balanced budget for each of the five years. Each year ends with a deficit.

- The proposal presents a full budget that aligns with the activities proposed in the narrative. The costs appear to be allowable and are commensurate with the intended impact for 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}

- No comments from Reviewer 1
- The applicant demonstrated understanding that charters have high degree of autonomy over budget, operations, personnel decisions by making requests in budget that are allowable but diverge from the suggested subgrant structure in Table 2 of the RFA - Size and Structure of Subgrants
- The proposal demonstrates that the applicant has a firm grasp of the autonomy that a charter school possesses. This is demonstrated in the choices of operations, personnel and the budget, more generally..

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

- No comments from Reviewer 1
- The applicant provided evidence of compliance with annual reporting requirements to CSDE.
- The applicant's financials are audited annually. The proposal states that the applicant has repeatedly produced a positive audit.

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}

- Described facilities plans.
- The applicant submitted a sound facilities plan that included a concrete location and plans for construction (p. 26-27). The applicant stated that the school has an established timeline for construction (p. 27), but did not include it or address the timeline for equipping the new facility.
- The proposal provides a map of the proposed early learning center. In addition, the proposal offers a property ownership agreement to further communicate the facilities plan. The applicant has formed a committee to help develop a universal design plan for the new facility. The applicant's construction firm is currently securing city permits. About a month behind the established timeline, contractors believe they will be able to redeem the lost time so that the building can open at the start of the 2025-2026 academic year.

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:

- No CMO. Indicates sufficient financial resources.
- The applicant did not provide evidence of sufficient budgetary resources to fulfill program requirements, including resources for educationally disadvantaged at-risk students, because the applicant has not provided balanced budgets.
- The applicant will not be working with a charter management organization. However, the budget appears to have sufficient resources to serve disadvantaged students.

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}*

- Finances are managed through tight internal controls, and strategic planning and strong fundraising efforts allow for the maintenance of a healthy cash flow balance. NBFA has a line of credit available to cover expenses, but has not tapped into it in 21 years.
- The applicant did not address a plan in place to mitigate risks associated with projected enrollment, but did provide evidence of demand from enrollment applications and waitlists (p. 11-12). As noted above, the applicant did not provide evidence of financial resources sufficient to adequately serve the student population.
- The proposal states that substantial money has already been raised that could mitigate the fact that the school receives less money per pupil than traditional district schools. The proposal clearly conveys that the applicant's finances are managed through tight internal controls, and strategic planning and strong fundraising efforts allow for the maintenance of a healthy cash flow balance.

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

Peer Reviewer Scores for Section 5	
Peer Reviewer 1	26
Peer Reviewer 2	20
Peer Reviewer 3	28
Total Score	74
Average Score	24.667

**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:

- Goals 1 & 2: By addressing gaps in instructional knowledge and practice (not specific enough - which gaps, which students, etc.)

Goal 3: By educating parents on attendance regulations and expectations (not specific enough - how, what, when?)

Goal 4: 60% of NBFA students who attended its preschool program will score at or above benchmark on the beginning-of-year Dynamic Indicators of Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) composite score (is this goal appropriately high enough?)

Goal 5: looks good

- The applicant provided five quality goals (p. 27-28). The set of goals fulfill minimum requirements for content. Two project goals address how the school intends to achieve Connecticut's targets for school performance (School Performance Index) in Math and ELA. All five project goals are clearly articulated with trackable time-bound measures and outcomes for each goal.
- The proposal provides five SMART goals to guide the work, which are measurable and time delimited. The goals address students' performance in math and reading as well as other important school success factors like attendance and social emotional competency.

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}*

- Consider higher goals for student academic proficiency for students who have experienced this PreK.
- Clear alignment exists among project goals, and overall mission and goals of the school. Each goal has a justified purpose that supports the charter school in reaching performance goals. All grant measures are appropriately rigorous for the targeted student population and measured by standard assessments.
- The proposal generally shows alignment between the SMART goals and the applicant's mission. The proposal notes that while the academic and attendance goals are whole school goals, their success relies heavily upon the district's long-term ability to build a culture of learning and attendance among the school's youngest learners.

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

- Goals 1-4 need to be revised, but are in the right ballpark

Peer Reviewer Scores for Section 6	
Peer Reviewer 1	7
Peer Reviewer 2	10
Peer Reviewer 3	9
Total Score	26
Average Score	8.667

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 school works with a number of community organizations to recruit students. Builds teachers capacity in NBFA's emotionally responsive practice (ERP) through ongoing training and coaching in the district's social emotional learning (SEL) programs including, but not limited to Caring Schools Community, Responsive Classroom and Restorative Justice
- Although the applicant proposed deep community connections, the applicant did not describe how their proposed project was developed in meaningful and ongoing engagement with current or former teachers and other educators, and informed by an authentic assessment of community assets. A timeline that includes key milestones during the school's planning, development, and implementation was not included.
- N/A

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}*

- Builds teachers capacity in NBFA's emotionally responsive practice (ERP) through ongoing training and coaching in the district's social emotional learning (SEL) programs including, but not limited to Caring Schools Community, Responsive Classroom and Restorative Justice -To earn these priority points, applicant could share (b) a project plan that includes roles and responsibilities, timelines and resources being contributed; and (c) provided evidence of participation (which must be submitted within 120 days of award receipt or 120 days of the date the collaboration is scheduled to begin, whichever is later).
- The applicant described the nature of the collaboration between the traditional public school district and the charter school in regards to bussing and services for students with disabilities (p. 28-29) as well as conversations about best practices. The applicant did not include a specific project plan that includes a timeline, roles and responsibilities, resources being contributed by each member of the collaboration, or at least one measure to show how the success of this collaboration will be measured.

- The proposal provides limited evidence as to how the applicant collaborates with the local board of education. This has been limited to presenting at a conference together and increasing the school day.

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.

Peer Reviewer Scores for Section 7	
Peer Reviewer 1	2
Peer Reviewer 2	4
Peer Reviewer 3	0
Total Score	6
Average Score	2

TOTAL SCORES
Across all sections

Peer Reviewer Scores for all sections	
Peer Reviewer 1	95
Peer Reviewer 2	96
Peer Reviewer 3	100
Total Score	291
Average Score	97