

November 5, 2018

Paolo DeMaria
Superintendent of Public Instruction
Ohio Department of Education
25 South Front Street
Columbus, OH 43215-4183

Recommendation regarding the sponsorship authority of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District

Dear Mr. DeMaria:

As you are aware, the Cleveland Transformation Alliance is a nonprofit advocacy organization dedicated to growing a portfolio of high-performing district and community schools in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. Our role is described in *Cleveland's Plan for Transforming Schools* and codified in law through H.B. 525, passed by the Ohio Legislature and signed by Governor John Kasich in 2012. Through that legislation, the Transformation Alliance is granted the authority to review sponsors seeking to open community schools within CMSD boundaries and to make a recommendation to the Ohio Department of Education based on that review (ORC Sec. 3311.86(E)).

The application process, created jointly by the Transformation Alliance, the Ohio Department of Education, and the Ohio Association of Charter School Authorizers, was based on the standards of the National Association of Charter School Authorizers and designed to seek evidence of quality sponsorship and evaluate sponsor commitment to the Transformation Alliance's goal that every child in Cleveland attends a high-quality school. A primary goal of our review process is to provide a local assessment of community school oversight and quality.

Review of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District

As a sponsor planning to authorize a new community school in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District in 2018, CMSD is required by state law to submit an application to the Transformation Alliance for its review and recommendation for continued sponsorship authority. CMSD submitted its application by September 15, 2018, the Transformation Alliance deadline.

The Transformation Alliance Charter Review Committee prepared for its work with meetings on September 28 and October 12, 2018. During these meetings committee members and staff reviewed and discussed CMSD's application and drafted a list of questions for CMSD. Those questions were submitted to CMSD on October 16, in preparation for an interview of CMSD's charter team by members of the Transformation Alliance Charter Review Committee on October 19.

Following the dialogue with CMSD, four members of the Transformation Alliance interview team scored CMSD's application against the required criteria for community school sponsorship in a municipal school district, coming to a consensus on the score. On Monday, October 29, 2018, the

Board of Directors of the Transformation Alliance discussed their findings and voted on a recommendation regarding CMSD's continued authority as a sponsor of schools in Cleveland.

Scoring

The sponsor review application includes seven sections: the scoring results for the first six are listed below. Our task force determined that it could not complete the seventh section of the application according to the rubric, which assesses the academic success of the schools the sponsor oversees based on criteria developed in 2013. Given the significant changes to Ohio's accountability system and the information available through the Ohio Department of Education, the task force determined that it was not possible to score CMSD on the precise criteria established in this section. Instead, the task force reviewed the publicly available data on academic performance of schools sponsored by CMSD over the past three years. The task force's comments are noted below. For each of the remaining six sections, also listed below, task force members scored CMSD's application.

Overall Observations

CMSD engaged fully and collaboratively in the application process, contacting the Transformation Alliance when it became aware that it would be required to submit an application. Furthermore, CMSD's interview team represented the organization's staff leadership and expertise well in terms of the support the sponsor provides to charter schools.

Applicant Information

The application was complete and submitted on time per our deadline.

Score for Section 1: 2 out of a possible 2 points

Section 1: Oversight Capacity and Track Record to Oversee a Portfolio of High-Performing Community Schools

First and foremost, the mission and vision of CMSD as a sponsor is clearly aligned with *Cleveland's Plan for Transforming Schools*. The committee discussed, both internally and with the CMSD interview team, the departure of its executive director for charter schools, who has led work over the past four years to significantly strengthen CMSD's work as a sponsor. While the district has a transition plan in place and has a plan to replace the outgoing executive director, there is room to grow in this area. Given the small staff dedicated to sponsorship at CMSD – 2.5 FTE when fully staffed – we see potential for CMSD to tap into more of its in-house expertise to support CMSD-sponsored charter schools.

Score for Section 1: 3 out of a possible 4 points

Section 2: Process for Evaluating New Community School Applications and Making Sponsorship Decisions

The committee found the district's application demonstrates a commitment to using Transformation Alliance criteria to determine whether or not it will sponsor a new school in Cleveland. The sponsor's commitment to consistent and high standards of quality is clear, and supports quality applicants with missions aligned to the Cleveland Plan. We particularly noted the multi-step process the district has in place for reviewing and evaluating applications. This process is facilitated by the charter schools office, and starts with work by an internal review team, after which it is reviewed at the CEO level, and then presented to the Cleveland Board of Education. Modifications can be made at any step of the process, ensuring a rigorous review and evaluation of each application.

Score for Section 2: 4 out of a possible 4 points

Section 3: Agreement to Come to a Formal Contract Between the Sponsor and Each Community School

Both in the application itself, which included sample contract information, and in the interview, CMSD made it clear that the sponsor's contract addresses all required criteria in a detailed manner that has been successfully used.

Score for Section 3: 4 out of a possible 4 points

Section 4: Tools and procedures for Ongoing School Oversight and Evaluation

CMSD's application and interview clearly described the systems, tools, and procedures for ongoing school oversight and evaluation. The sponsor's approach and resources related to oversight articulate high standards for quality and ensures compliance.

Score for Section 4: 4 out of a possible 4 points

Section 5: Capacity and Track Record to Provide Ongoing Technical Assistance to Schools

While CMSD clearly demonstrated that it provides ongoing high-quality technical assistance to its sponsored schools, our committee determined that a more proactive approach could be employed in this area. The sponsor does solicit and assess feedback from sponsored schools, but may consider doing so more regularly, and doing more regarding professional development. It is clear that an active relationship with the governing authorities of sponsored schools is in place. Concerns discussed by the committee in this area related to the capacity of the district's relatively small charter office, and the need to either expand capacity of that office or tap more deeply into the district's expertise to support sponsored charter schools.

Score for Section 6: 3 out of a possible 4 points

Section 6: Formal Process for Community School Renewal and Revocation

CMSD's application demonstrates a formal, complete, and rigorous process for charter renewal and revocation, driven by the evaluation of academic, operational, and financial performance and legal compliance. There is a defined process in place for school closures, including planning to assist students and families impacted by closure.

Score for Section 6: 4 out of a possible 4 points

Section 7: Academic Performance

A review of three years of publicly available data on CMSD's 10 K-8 schools (see attached) reveals strengths and weaknesses. For the 2017-18 school year, five of the 10 CMSD-sponsored K-8 schools scored a C or better in Gap Closing. Six schools scored above 0 in Value-Added, which means students at these schools showed at least one year of academic growth, while four schools showed, on average, less than a year of academic growth. On the state's Performance Index measure, CMSD-sponsored K-8 schools ranged from 45.3 to 87.4.

CMSD sponsors one dropout recovery school, which exceeded state standards for gap closing, did not meet standards for Value-Added, and posted a Performance Index score of 37.2. The school did not meet the state standard for test passage, but met standards for combined graduation rate.

The committee was encouraged by the sponsor's focus on academic improvement in all aspects of its sponsorship, from its initial approval of new schools to clear steps for corrective action and the careful consideration of academic performance during renewal.

Overall Score

CMSD's score on the six rated sections totaled 24 points out of a possible 26 points, or 92.3 percent.

Recommendation and Conclusion

After thorough review and consideration, the Cleveland Transformation Alliance recommends to the Ohio Department of Education that the Cleveland Metropolitan School District continue to sponsor community schools in Cleveland.

The Cleveland Transformation Alliance thanks CMSD for engaging in this review. We look forward to a productive partnership with the sponsor as, together, we strive to ensure the highest quality schools for all Cleveland's children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Piet van Lier". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Piet van Lier
Executive Director

cc: Eric Gordon, Chief Executive Officer, Cleveland Metropolitan School District
Christine Fowler-Mack, Chief Portfolio Officer, Cleveland Metropolitan School District

Attachments:

Sponsor review application (available online at <https://bit.ly/2PQn6bd>)
List of reviewers and interview participants
School performance data addendum

Transformation Alliance interview team

Victor A. Ruiz
Chair, Charter Review Committee
Cleveland Transformation Alliance Board Member
Executive Director, Esperanza, Inc.

David Quolke
Member, Charter Review Committee
Cleveland Transformation Alliance Board Member
President, Cleveland Teachers Union

Philip Hewitt
Member, Charter Review Committee
Cleveland Transformation Alliance Board Member
Youth Development Manager, St. Clair Superior Development Corporation

Piet van Lier
Executive Director, Cleveland Transformation Alliance

Catherine Smith
Program Coordinator, Cleveland Transformation Alliance

Cleveland Metropolitan School District Interview Team

Christine Fowler-Mack
Chief Portfolio Officer

Stephanie Klupinski
Executive Director for Charter Schools

Matt Rado
Charter Schools Director

Jessica Baldwin
Executive Director, Intervention Services

Nicholas D'Amico
Executive Director for School Performance

Tom Hutton
Consultant, Education Adjuncts