



Review of Buckeye Community Hope Foundation as a charter school sponsor in Cleveland

The Cleveland Transformation Alliance is a nonprofit advocacy organization dedicated to growing a portfolio of high-performing district and charter schools in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. Our role is described in *Cleveland's Plan for Transforming Schools* and enshrined into law through House Bill 525, passed by the Ohio Legislature and signed into law by Governor John Kasich in 2012. Through that legislation, the Cleveland Transformation Alliance is granted the authority to review sponsors seeking to open community schools in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District when the sponsor's contract with the Ohio Department of Education is up for approval or renewal, and to make a recommendation to the Ohio Department of Education based on that review. (ORC Sec. 3311.86(E))

The review application process, created jointly by the Alliance, the Ohio Department of Education and the Ohio Association of Charter School Authorizers, and reviewed by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA), is designed to seek evidence of quality sponsorship and assess commitment to the Alliance's goal that every child in Cleveland attends a high-quality school.

Review of the Buckeye Community Hope Foundation

As a sponsor planning to authorize a new charter school in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District in 2015, Buckeye Community Hope Foundation (BCHF) was required by state law to submit an application to the Cleveland Transformation Alliance for its review and recommendation for continued sponsorship authority. Accordingly, the Alliance Board of Directors formed a sponsor review task force and requested that BCHF prepare its application (see attached letter). Buckeye Hope submitted the application to Alliance staff on Friday, February 13, 2015.

The Alliance task force reviewed the completed application materials in advance of its interview with BCHF representatives, which was held in Cleveland on Friday, February 27, 2015. The task force scored the sponsor's application on Thursday, March 5. On Monday, March 9, the Alliance's board of directors discussed the task force's work and voted on a recommendation regarding BCHF's continued authority as a sponsor.

Recommendation

After thorough review and consideration, the Cleveland Transformation Alliance recommends to the Ohio Department of Education that Buckeye Community Hope Foundation continue to sponsor charter schools in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. With this recommendation, the Alliance also outlines some concerns noted below. The Alliance strongly encourages Buckeye Hope Community Foundation to work to address these concerns so that every child in Cleveland can attend a quality school.

Scoring

Alliance task force members individually scored BCHF on nine measures of the sponsor review application (attached). After discussion, the group came to consensus scores that totaled 24 points out of a possible 34 points.

Section 1: Applicant Information

Consensus score: 1 out of a possible 2 points.

Section 2: New Charter School Application Process

Consensus score: 3 out of a possible 4 points

Section 3: Sponsor Contract

Consensus score: 4 out of a possible 4 points

Section 4: Ongoing School Oversight

Consensus score: 4 out of a possible 4 points

Section 5: Charter Renewal and Revocation

Consensus score: 2 out of a possible 4 points

Section 6: Oversight Capacity and Track Record

Consensus score: 3 out of a possible 4 points

Section 7: Technical Capacity and Track Record

Consensus score: 3 out of a possible 4 points

Section 8: Student Success, Dimension 1, Performance Index Score

Consensus score: 1 out of a possible 4 points

Section 8: Student Success, Dimension 2: Value-Added

Consensus score: 3 out of a possible 4 points

Section 8: Student Success, Dimension 3: Comparative Student Data

No rating, as data are not available to rate sponsors on this dimension.

Review Strengths

The Alliance task force found that BCHF engaged fully and collaboratively in the application process. The application was completed with fidelity and submitted by the deadline. Representatives from BCHF were responsive to additional requests for information before the interview. The interview team represented organizational capacity in areas of academics, finance, compliance and operations. In the interview, BCHF explained its criteria for sponsorship, contractual relationship with schools, oversight of schools, technical assistance to schools, ongoing efforts to improve academics at schools, and corrective action and closure. The sponsor provided clear examples of how it uses data to inform its oversight, and explained its tiered approach to corrective action for low-performing schools. The sponsor's financial review and considerations for new school applications and ongoing monitoring were clear. Overall, BCHF demonstrated increased rigor of its work related to charter school oversight in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District and across the state.

Identified Concerns

The Alliance task force identified five areas of concern related to BCHF's application. These concerns were discussed in the interview and BCHF indicated a willingness to consider these concerns, and indicated an intent to address some of these concerns going forward.

1. A lack of clear, proactive alignment to the Cleveland Plan, particularly related to seeking local input in the application and review process for new schools;
2. Insufficient attention to the track record of management companies that operate schools sponsored by BCHF in both initial school application and in renewals;
3. An unclear level of attention to and enforcement of the issue of school autonomy relative to management companies that operate schools sponsored by BCHF;
4. The need for increased urgency in intervening quickly and thoroughly when a school is underperforming; and
5. The need for increased urgency in achieving its mission to provide only high-quality school options for children against an absolute standard, regardless of the performance of other Cleveland schools.

Additional Issues Identified in the Review Process

Two other issues arose during BCHF's review that merit discussion, as they also apply to the charter school sector as a whole. The first is that BCHF, which receives public dollars for multiple lines of business, including charter school sponsorship, may not have sufficient transparency in governance or finances. The agency has a three-member board, one of whom is the salaried president of BCHF and none of whom have term limits. This fails to meet best practice standards for governance, and positions BCHF as an outlier in terms of NACSA member organizations. Additionally, citing its status as a private foundation, BCHF chose not to share certain financial documents with the Alliance task force. The Alliance task force did have access to the agency's 990, and a broad sense that revenues generated from charter school fees are used only for BCHF's sponsorship line of work, but we were unable to verify. This is an issue the Alliance considers problematic for transparency in Ohio's charter school sector.

Second, a review of schools sponsored by BCHF that fall within the boundaries of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District reveals that the percentage of special education students in these schools falls within a range of 10 to 24 percent, as compared to an average of 24 percent in the public school district as a whole. Many schools do not register any English Language Learners (two schools serve 11 and 13 percent) as compared to an average of 8 percent in the district. There are multiple reasons for these gaps, but we encourage BCHF to monitor the demographics of its schools to ensure that they are serving all students.

Conclusion

The Cleveland Transformation Alliance thanks Buckeye Community Hope Foundation for engaging in this review, and looks forward to a productive partnership with the agency as, together, we strive to ensure the highest quality schools for all Cleveland's children.

Alliance Sponsor Review Task Force Members

Darlene Chambers, Cleveland Transformation Alliance board member and President and CEO of the Ohio Alliance for Public Charter Schools

Ann Mullin, Cleveland Transformation Alliance board member and Senior Program Officer at The George Gund Foundation

Megan O'Bryan, Executive Director of the Cleveland Transformation Alliance;

Monyka Price, Cleveland Transformation Alliance board vice chair and Chief of Education for the city of Cleveland

David Quolke, Cleveland Transformation Alliance board member and President of the Cleveland Teachers Union

Piet van Lier, Director of School Quality, Policy and Communications of the Cleveland Transformation Alliance

Sajit Zachariah, Cleveland Transformation Alliance board member and Dean of the College of Education and Human Services at Cleveland State University

Alliance Sponsor Review Task Force Advisors

Rachel Costanzo, Director of the Acuity Group LLC

Stephanie Klupinski, Executive Director/Charter Schools, Cleveland Metropolitan School District

Margaret Lin, Senior Advisor to the National Alliance of Charter School Authorizers

Martin McGann, Senior Vice President of Government Advocacy, Greater Cleveland Partnership

Ben Stein, Alliance intern and doctoral student at Cleveland State University

Alesha Washington, Senior Director of Government Advocacy, Greater Cleveland Partnership