

**REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP) TO
ESTABLISH KNOX COUNTY CHARTER SCHOOLS**

(Opening in the 2026-2027 school year)

Knox County Charter Schools Authorizer

July 2024



Dr. Jon Rysewyk, Superintendent

Request for Proposal for Charter School Applicants

The Mission and Purpose for Charter Schools in Knox County

High-quality charter schools have the potential to be a useful structure to help effectively educate all Knox County students. Knox County Schools (KCS) seeks excellent schools, without exception, that will enhance quality public education options for students and their families. Charter schools are meant to serve as innovative learning centers where strong teachers and experienced administrators advance each child's achievement every day, regardless of race, color, national origin, religion, gender, disability, proficiency in English, academic ability, social capital, or family income. Every student in our district deserves high-quality opportunities to learn, grow, and achieve their full potential. The KCS Charter School Review Committee and Knox County Board of Education (KCBOE) have high expectations and use rigorous quality standards to ensure that the charter schools that operate in our district are of exceptional caliber and focus on increasing student achievement, eliminating disparities, and creating a positive culture.

KCS Request for Charter Schools

The KCS Request for Proposal (RFP) seeks to establish new charter schools in Knox County to begin operation in the **2026-2027 school year**. The RFP invites charter school applicants willing to collaborate with KCS to address our greatest educational challenges and improve student performance outcomes in accordance with the goals of the KCBOE. This request for proposal is a guide to the content and structure of the information that must be included in the application, including the application documents required by the Tennessee Department of Education. To the best of our knowledge, the information contained herein is accurate; however, as state laws frequently are amended, it is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure the application meets all the local charter school authorizer and state requirements. The application must include detailed information about the proposed charter school concerning the academic design and plan; operations plan and capacity; financial plan and capacity; and portfolio review and performance record (if applicable). Not only must the proposal demonstrate strength in each of these areas, but it should also be considered as a blueprint for the daily school operations because the charter school will be monitored, assessed, and evaluated on performance based on the contents of the approved application and the Knox County Schools Performance Framework.

KCS is looking for charter schools that specifically address an innovative approach to the following priorities:

- **Excellence in Foundational Skills:** By preparing students to read proficiently by third grade and to reach or surpass proficiency in Algebra I by ninth grade, every student will be equipped with the skills needed to succeed.
 - Increasing student academic achievement and growth, particularly in high-poverty and high-needs schools/populations where achievement outcomes are in the lowest quintile of the school system.
 - Enhancing student academic success by focusing on the learning needs of each student and providing access to high-quality, rigorous, differentiated instruction and high expectations in every classroom, every day.
- **Great Educators in Every School:** By investing in meaningful professional development and growth opportunities, and pursuing innovative strategies to retain and recruit high-quality educators, students will have access to great educators in each classroom.
 - Ensuring that the school is staffed with a cadre of highly effective educators who are continually working collaboratively to improve upon their instructional craft and their classroom management with trauma-informed practices and social/emotional learning as central tenets.
- **Career Empowerment and Preparation:** To prepare students for life after graduation, we believe that students should have early and meaningful opportunities to explore college and careers.
- **Success for Every Student:** All students have unique abilities, needs, personalities, and ambitions and we believe in individualized services. interventions, resources, and supports are needed to achieve success.
 - Closing achievement gaps defined by income, race, language, disability, or other student characteristics.
 - Engaging families and the school community meaningfully in the educational process.
 - Developing an operational infrastructure that enables, facilitates, and supports student learning and success.

Additionally, KCS is seeking:

- New or conversion charter schools that show a deep commitment to effectively educating every single child enrolled and that embrace diversity in all its forms.
- New or conversion charter schools that can successfully extend the school day, school week, and/or school year to provide more abundant and high-quality learning opportunities for students to achieve and succeed.

- Conversion schools that demonstrate the capacity to radically change both the culture and the results of schools in the lowest achievement quintile in the school system, that operate with a knowledge of and an emphasis on turnaround strategies.
- New and/or conversion schools that employ evidence-based innovative practices that provide high-quality and effective education to students while operating within a resource-constrained fiscal environment.

Additional priorities include new or conversion schools that:

- Present evidence that demonstrates outreach to and engagement with the community in which the applicant intends to locate.
- Present proof of the sponsoring organization's establishment of 501(c)(3) non-profit status as required by Tennessee state law.
- Have developed a robust instructional technology plan to support excellent classroom instruction.
- Have conducted detailed facilities research leading to the likelihood of minimal challenges in identifying and securing an appropriate facility that will support the mission of the school.
- Have identified an outstanding potential school leader or have a specific plan for doing so within 90 days of the approved charter.

KCS seeks charter school applications to cultivate strong school capacity and provide high-quality academic instruction. Proposals will be entertained both for new charter schools as well as potential conversions of existing schools to charters. Applicants interested in the creation of a new traditional charter school or the conversion of an existing school to a charter school should thoroughly review all guidance on the KCS Charter School web page before submitting a letter of intent by **December 3, 2024**. Each proposal should demonstrate substantial capacity to support its plans financially and execute its vision of excellence for every child.

All charter schools must employ non-selective admission criteria and ensure that students will achieve predetermined goals by the second year of operations. The detailed strategies, capacity, support, experience, and planning are necessary to ensure that operational and management issues do not distract from an overall focus on raising academic achievement. KCS will be incredibly selective in its evaluation of proposals on behalf of the children to be served. Our goal is to build a system of schools that provides every student with the foundation of knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary to excel in higher education, work, and life.

New Traditional Charter Schools

Applications for new traditional charter schools must offer an innovative, compelling, and evidence-based plan for a high-quality charter school, and demonstrate that the plan was collaboratively developed by a diverse and expert design team. KCS greatly values the vision, plans, and intentions of new school applicants. The Charter School Review Committee will carefully examine and weigh the record of those applicants who are currently operating schools, especially for charter school expansion and replication purposes. For applicants not currently operating schools, the district will carefully examine and weigh the experience and capacity of the proposed school leadership team as well as the engagement and experience of the governing board.

All applicants must complete the state-mandated application and follow district policy and deadlines for submission. In addition to all state and local application requirements, applicants must show evidence of:

- A record of proven academic success in currently operating schools or a leadership team with experience of proven success in increasing student academic achievement.
- A strong and well-organized leader committed to educational reform possessing a background demonstrating success with the proposed educational plan and student profile.
- An educational plan rooted in high expectations, in line with the school's stated mission, providing a personalized learning environment for all students. Ideally, the educational plan will have a record of previous success with the target student population.
- A comprehensive and research-based curriculum and assessment program designed to hold all students; including those with disabilities, limited English proficiency, and specialized needs, to high-achievement goals.
- Strategies to attract and retain energetic and highly effective teachers and staff who will actively engage in professional development opportunities and sharing of research-based best practices.
- A strong understanding of the community to be served through demonstrated community support including strong community connections, a track record of service, and a documented measure of student demand.
- Meaningful opportunities to involve parents and community, including evidence of significant community and stakeholder engagement and overwhelming stakeholder interest in the charter school.
- A strong, knowledgeable, diverse, stable, and committed board of governance or a leadership team committed to best practices in school governance with a strong financial management background.
- A detailed and sustainable plan demonstrating growth and improvement.

Conversion Charter Schools

Proposals for conversion schools must meet all the standards for new traditional charter school proposals with the following additions:

- Proposals must clearly identify the specific school to be converted and provide substantial and detailed justification outlining the need for conversion.
- Proposals must offer specific and measurable strategies for achieving dramatic academic improvement by specifically addressing identified needs.
- Proposals must include documentation of how the interests of KCS, students, families, teachers, staff, the school, and the broader community would be well served by a conversion to a charter school.
- Proposals must identify the specific parameters of conversion as part of the operational and educational plan proposed.
- Proposals must detail the transition timeline including effective communication strategies and procedures for exercising options at the family, teacher, staff, and leadership levels recognizing the potential impact of disruptions to the academic environment.

Please note: Conversion of existing schools to charters may be initiated through reorganization decisions made by the Director of Schools (reconstitutions, etc.), through charter decisions by the Board of Education, or through consideration of charter petitions by 60% of faculty and/or 60% of families at the school to be potentially converted. While the Knox County Board of Education will consider applications for conversion schools based upon the petition of 60% of the school's faculty or families, preference will be given to petitions demonstrating at least 75% support of the school's faculty or families.

Review Process for Applications to Establish a Charter School

If the submitted proposal has been preceded by the required Letter of Intent (**due December 3, 2024**), the deadline for submitting a charter application this year **February 3, 2025**, at 11:59 pm CT. According to [T.C.A. §49-13-107](#), after the Letter of Intent (LOI) is received, applications may be submitted no earlier than 60 days after submission of the LOI or no later than February 1 at 11:59 pm CT the year preceding the year in which the proposed public charter school plans to begin operation. *(If any of the dates falls on a weekend or state observed holiday, then all dates will be adjusted to the next business day.)*

According to state law, the review committee has **ninety calendar days** to review all applications submitted and make recommendations to the Knox County Board of Education for approval/denial decisions. If the local

board fails to approve or deny the application by the end of the ninety days, then the public charter school application shall be deemed approved.

In the event the Knox County Board of Education does not approve the charter application, the applicant will receive a letter outlining the specific details that led to the decision to deny the applicant a charter. The grounds for a denial of the charter application by the local board of education “must be stated in writing and must specify objective reasons for the denial.” [\[T.C.A. §49-13-108\]](#). Should the applicant decide to remedy the deficits, the applicant has **thirty calendar days** to submit an amended application. The KCS Charter School Review Committee will then have **sixty calendar days** to review the amended application and make a recommendation to the Knox County Board of Education.

Any new information inserted in the application, including appendices, will be reviewed by the KCS Charter School Review Committee and a new KCS recommendation will be made based on the complete amended application. If the KCBOE denies the amended application, the applicant has **ten calendar days** to appeal to the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission.

The initial KCS review process includes the following:

- Individual review of the application by appropriate KCS staff and community members from academic, enrollment, operational, legal, and fiscal perspectives.
- Assignment of scores based on the state rubric.
- Review meetings to determine if the application has thoroughly addressed all required areas to advance to the next KCS Charter Application capacity interview phase.

The second phase of the review process includes the following:

- Applicants with proposals that meet all state, legal, and local requirements will be scheduled for capacity interviews with the review team and members of the proposed school’s founding group, proposed governing board representatives, and others who can speak knowledgeably about the proposed academic program, organizational capacity, budget, and governance structure.
- If the school proposes to partner with a non-profit CMO or a business, community, or educational partner organization, the review committee will conduct a due diligence process with the organization. The organization will answer questions regarding the organization’s structure, staffing, finances, and academic performance of other schools it serves with similar populations.
- Members of the review committee and/or the KCS Superintendent of Schools may also conduct an interview with representatives of the proposed management or partner organization to discuss the

responses to the questionnaire. The results of the due diligence and final interviews further inform the review committee's final recommendation.

Please note: Knox County Schools has supplementary guidance, in addition to the state website, for their application process. Supplementary guidance is provided in this RFP and listed on the KCS Charter website. [The KCS website](#) provides links to all documents and resources needed for the application process. If you need further assistance, you may email questions to charteringauthority@knoxschools.org or contact the KCS Office of Academic Supports (865-594-1787).