



OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT  
*Dr. Marlon D. King*

May 02, 2022

RE: ***School board denies American Classical Education Charter Application***

It's no secret that I am a proponent of choices for families, and I think many educators and parents can agree with me on this position. However, I believe that we should offer alternatives that will further the vision and mission of educating all students. Over the past twenty-two months, the Board, administration, community, and families of JMCSS have worked in concert to provide choices for learning. Our school district choice portfolio is comprised of:

- *Prek - 8 schools*
- *Prek - 5 schools*
- *Prek - 3 school (Early Learning)*
- *6 - 8 schools (Traditional)*
- *4 - 8 school (Career and Technical)*
- *PreK Early Learning Center*
- *Montessori school*
- *9-12 Workforce Development Center*
- *6-12 school*
- *9-12 Traditional High Schools*
- *Early College High School*
- *9-12 Technology Magnet High School*
- *Academic Middle School*
- *Academic Magnet High School (on University of Memphis, Lambuth campus)*
- *K-12 CyberSchool - virtual option*
- *Prep Academy (Day treatment and credit recovery)*

Most recently, the School Board and County Commission both unanimously approved building a Prek-8 school (Pope School). When factoring this new addition to the portfolio of schools aforementioned, we have a rich palette of choices for our students and families. With a new, strong emphasis on academics, arts, and athletics, our System is seeing unprecedented progress. Ultimately, schools/districts are in the business of graduating students. Every graduate has to meet the specified criteria as prescribed by the Tennessee Department of Education in order to receive a high school diploma. I could not be more proud of the incremental progress as we compare our graduation data to what is happening in Tennessee.



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**GRADUATION RATES**

YEAR	STATE	+/-	JMCSS	+/-
2019	89.1%		84.9%	
2020	89.7%	+0.6	87.4%	+2.5
2021	89.6%	-0.1	88.1%	+0.7

Let the data speak for itself. We are seeing an upward trajectory in our System. For reference, please go to: <https://www.tn.gov/education/data/report-card.html>. In looking at the Ready Graduate data, the same trend exists - the State is flatline while JMCSS continues to make progress.

**READY GRADUATES**

YEAR	STATE	+/-	JMCSS	+/-
2019	40.3%		22.6%	
2020	40.7%	+0.4	30.6%	+8.0
2021	40.5%	-0.2	32.9%	+2.3

Again, it is apparent that progress is being made in JMCSS. Please make no mistake about it; our progress is because of the community's strong support and commitment to the public school system. We have a community that believes our public school system can and will be a system of choice in the foreseeable future.

The School Board's commitment to creating the best options and opportunities for our System led to the American Classical Education Charter School (Hillsdale College-sponsored) application being denied at a Special Called Meeting with a 7 (*deny*) - 1 (*pass*) -1 (*absent*) vote. Here is a list of concerns that led the Board to believe that this charter school option was not the right choice for our portfolio.

1. *No building site was identified, which makes it difficult to evaluate the start-up and consider safety requirements.*
2. *Because no location was identified for the charter school, operational plans and descriptions are unverifiable.*
3. *The Academic Plan lacks clear evidence of supporting the academic growth of all students, specifically students with disabilities, ESL students, and students struggling academically and behaviorally.*



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4. *No plan was provided to address learning loss, remediate students' academic underperformance, or a plan for intervention to support growth for all students.*
5. *No evidence of a concrete plan was provided to implement services for students with IEPs, who may also need related services (Speech, OT, PT, Counseling, Behavior Support).*
6. *Handling parent grievances and concerns would be difficult when all board members reside out of state.*
7. *Limitations exist to hiring effective teachers and a diverse workforce based on their teacher recruitment plan.*
8. *No definitive plan is provided to include any technology in teaching and learning.*
9. *No recruitment plan exists that prioritizes the selection of a diverse student body or students with diverse learning abilities.*
10. *There is no contingency plan to meet financial needs should the grants or other revenues discussed come through lower than anticipated/expected.*

I want to bring some unique observations to the forefront, which were not included in the rubric, but these observations are significant for context when considering choices for students. These observations did not affect the charter school application score; however, full transparency of this process is critically important.

1. *All charter school board members reside in another state other than Tennessee.*
2. *Three letters of support were provided, but none of them were from Jackson-Madison County or even from Tennessee.*
3. *No one from the organization attended the Special Called meeting to answer potential questions.*
4. *The charter school suggested using third-party services for transportation, food services, and services needed for students with disabilities.*
5. *The decision to pursue JMCSS was based on proximity because it is between Memphis and Nashville - the decision was not about the needs for students.*

While we want to provide choices for our students, the choice must be the right choice. When you think about this choice, we are contracting out students in our community to another organization to educate them when we know what's best for our cultural context and community. When we start the business of contracting kids out to companies and organizations miles away from our community, we should probably go ahead and throw in the towel. If we continue to provide quality choices for students in Jackson-Madison County, families will continue to CHOOSE US. Now that's a WIN!

Yours in service -M