



Jackson-Madison County School System

LETTER OF CLARIFICATION AND TRANSPARENCY – American Classical Academy Madison

Most recently, American Classical Academy Madison (i.e., ACAM) has appealed our Board’s denial of its charter school, petitioning to the Tennessee Public Charter Commission that the Board, *“did not keep politics out of the process; conduct a rigorous application review; and if the application meets the standard and authorization is in the best interest of the students, district, or community – to approve the charter.”*

In the spirit of clarification and transparency, this letter is being provided to avoid any breakdowns around the appeal to the Tennessee Charter School Commission from American Classical Academy Madison/ACE. Their appeal is found to be somewhat perplexing and laced with subtle untruths.

Let’s begin with the initial appeal around the Board not “keeping politics” out of the decision. As a part of the process, the Tennessee Department of Education established a scoring card (i.e., rubric) with 29 standards that applied to this charter school. A JMCSS review team conducted a review process of the application and recommended on both occasions to deny the charter school for the reasons listed in the established scoring card set by the State. Of those 29 applicable standards, the ACAM charter school **failed to meet or exceed 26 of 29 standards**. Observe the amended rubric below.

Section 1: Academic Plan, Design, and Capacity	Topic	Scoring
1.1	School Mission and Vision	Partially Meets Standard
1.2	Enrollment Summary	Partially Meets Standard
1.3	Academic Focus and Plan	Partially Meets Standard
1.4	Academic Performance Standards	Partially Meets Standard
1.5	Phrase-In/Turnaround	NA
1.6	High School, Graduation And Postsecondary Readiness	Partially Meets Standard
1.7	Assessments	Partially Meets Standard
1.8	School Calendar and Schedule	Partially Meets Standard
1.9	Special Populations and At-Risk Students	Partially Meets Standard
1.10	School Culture and Discipline	Meets or Exceeds Standard
1.11	Recruitment and Enrollment	Partially Meets Standard
1.12	Parent and Community Engagement and Support	Partially Meets Standard
Section 2: Operations Plan and Capacity		
2.1	Governance	Partially Meets Standard



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2.2	Start-Up Plan	Partially Meets Standard
2.3	Facilities	Does Not Meet Standard
2.4	Personnel/Human Capital	Partially Meets Standard
2.5	Professional Development	Meets or Exceeds Standard
2.6	Insurance	Meets or Exceeds Standard
2.7	Transportation	Partially Meets Standard
2.8	Food Service	Partially Meets Standard
2.9	Additional Operations	Partially Meets Standard
2.10	Charter Management Organization	NA
2.11	Waivers	Partially Meets Standard
2.12	Network Vision, Growth Plan, & Capacity	Partially Meets Standard
2.13	Network Management	Partially Meets Standard
2.14	Network Governance	Partially Meets Standard
2.15	Personnel/Human Capital- Network-wide Staffing Projections	Partially Meets Standard
Section 3: Operations Plan and Capacity		
3.1 & 3.2	Charter School Financing	Partially Meets Standard
3.3	Network Financial Plan	Partially Meets Standard
Section: 4 Past Performance		
4.1	Past Performance	Partially Meets Standard

Also, the Jackson-Madison County School System’s Board Resolution states the reason for denial, which has nothing to do with any politics that is stated in the Appeal from ACAM. Surprisingly, when observing the standards and rating, the area **“Facilities”** does not meet because the charter school does not have a location for the school, which is even more alarming.

According to ACE response, *“ACAM will be operated by American Classical Education (ACE), a nonprofit organization separate from Hillsdale College. ACE’s initial board members were affiliated with Hillsdale College. But, since the initial founding, we have worked actively to localize the board and ensure alignment with the community. All board members are residents of Tennessee, and only one has any prior affiliation with Hillsdale, having graduated from there in 1977.”*

Below, is an initial list of board members and an amended list of board members. ACAM expressed having all board members as Tennessee residents, and only one person has a prior affiliation with Hillsdale. Please compare the list. After further investigation, the majority of the newest board members have an affiliation with Hillsdale. For instance, Donna Ecton was named by the Board of Trustees to Hillsdale in August 2021. Still, according to the statement within the appeal, only one person has a prior affiliation with Hillsdale dating back to 1977.



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INITIAL BOARD		
Name	Current Job/Employer	Board Role
Michael H. Harner	Chief of Staff, Hillsdale	Board Chair
Patrick H. Flannery	Vice President Finance, Hillsdale College	Board Treasurer
Micheal D. Banbury	Vice President Admissions, Hillsdale College	Board Secretary
Dr. Daniel Coupland	Education Dept., Chair, Hillsdale College	Board Member
H. Kenneth Cole	Financial Officer, Retired	Board Member
Jason J. Kohout	Attorney; Partner, Foley, & Lardner	Board Member
Neal W. Cole	Lead Associates, Booz, Allen & Hamilton	Board Member
Tyler Horning	Director, The Delp Company	Board Member
Luke R. Robson	Law Student, University of Notre Dame	Board Member

AMENDED BOARD		
Name	Current Job/Employer	Board Role
Michael H. Harner	Chief of Staff, Hillsdale	Board Chair
Patrick H. Flannery	Vice President Finance, Hillsdale College	Board Treasurer
Micheal D. Banbury	Vice President Admissions, Hillsdale College	Board Secretary
Donna Ecton	CEO, EEI	Board Member
Delores Gresham	Former TN State Senator, Education Committee	Board Member
Jason J. Kohout	Attorney; Partner, Foley, and Larder	Board Member
Oscar O. Duarte	Superintendent, Heritage Classical Academy	Board Member
Tyler Horning	Director, The Delp Company	Board Member
Luke R. Robson	Law Student, University of Notre Dame	Board Member

The Jackson Madison County School System administration and Board followed and adopted the Tennessee Department of Education policy for charter school application and processes. The State set the standards and the review team followed the rubric. The Jackson-Madison County School System's Board of Education maintains its decision around the resolution passed to deny America Classical Academy Madison and is unapologetic for its support for teachers and administrators. For clarity, please read the full resolution below regarding why this charter school was denied. In summary, deficiencies in



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the ACAM application were apparent when judged against the scorecard provided by the Tennessee Department of Education. Those application deficiencies remain - to say nothing of the conflicting statements concerning the makeup of the American Classical Academy Madison Board.

**RESOLUTION DENYING CHARTER SCHOOL AMENDED APPLICATION
SUBMITTED BY AMERICAN CLASSICAL EDUCATION, INC.
FOR AMERICAN CLASSICAL ACADEMY MADISON**

WHEREAS, pursuant to the Tennessee Public Charter Schools Act of 2002, ("the Act"), the Jackson-Madison County Board of Education ("Board") has received a completed charter application from American Classical Education, Inc. for the proposed American Classical Academy Madison on February 1, 2022 (the "Application");

WHEREAS, the Board appointed a Review Team to assist in reviewing and evaluating the Application;

WHEREAS, after careful review and evaluation of the Application, the Review Team recommended, in writing, that the Board of Education deny the Application finding that the Application does not meet or exceed the standards established by the Tennessee Department of Education's Tennessee Charter School Application Scoring Criteria;

WHEREAS, on April 28, 2022, after review and consideration of the written recommendation of the Review Team, the Board denied, by resolution, the Application submitted by American Classical Education, Inc. for the proposed public charter school American Classical Academy Madison and timely notified American Classical Education, Inc. in writing of the denial and the objective reasons for denial;

WHEREAS, the Board received a completed Amended Application from American Classical Education, Inc. for the proposed American Classical Academy Madison on May 27, 2022 (the "Amended Application");

WHEREAS, after careful review and evaluation of the Application, the Review Team has recommended that the Board of Education deny the Application finding that the Application does not meet or exceed the standards established by the Tennessee Department of Education's Tennessee Charter School Application Scoring Criteria; and

WHEREAS, the Board, pursuant to Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-13-108, has reviewed and considered the Amended Application, the written recommendation of the Review Team including the Tennessee Charter Application Scoring Criteria completed by the Review Team which was submitted with the Review Team's recommendation, and the requirements of the Act;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board finds it is in the best interests of the Jackson-Madison County School System, its pupils and the community that the Amended Application be denied, and therefore, the Amended Application is denied based upon the objective reasons as stated in the written recommendation of the Review Team including the Tennessee Charter

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Application Scoring Criteria completed by the Review Team and incorporated herein by reference; and

THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, by the Board of Education that the Amended Application submitted by American Classical Education, Inc. for the proposed public charter school American Classical Academy Madison is DENIED.

Adopted and approved this the 14th day of July, 2022.

Jackson-Madison County Board of Education

By: _____
James "Pete" Johnson, Chairman

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ACAM's position that Jackson-Madison County School Board members denied the application for political reasons is wholly unfounded. Community schools are annually tasked with meeting challenging standards set by the state. The Charter School Commission would have to ignore its own charter school standards to reverse the fair and impartial decision made by our Board.