



June 3, 2019

**BY EMAIL**

Dear Dr. Kristal Owens,

Thank you for submitting an application to establish a public charter school in the District of Columbia. The District of Columbia Public Charter School Board (DC PCSB) has completed the Spring 2019 Application Review process and, at its public meeting held on May 20, 2019, did not approve your application to establish Aspire to Excellence Academy Public Charter School.

DC PCSB's decision was based on a thorough evaluation of the written application and information gathered from the capacity interview and the public hearing. The reasons for this decision are specified in the attached memorandum, captured in the assessment of the applicant's weaknesses and subsequent analysis.

Should you choose to file a petition again, that petition must meet the requirements of the School Reform Act, D.C. Code § 38-1802.02. Specifically, it should appropriately resolve the deficiencies cited above and meet the standards for approval in each component of the application rubric: (a) a demonstrated need for the school; (b) sufficient progress in developing the plan; (c) alignment of the entire school program with the school's mission and philosophy; (d) inclusion of and adequate support for special populations; and (e) the founding group's capability to ensure that the school can meet the educational objectives outlined in the application. If you would like, DC PCSB staff would be happy to discuss with you in more detail your application's strengths and weaknesses.

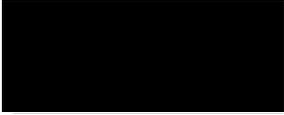
Should you want to appeal the denial of your application, you may seek review of this decision pursuant to D.C. Code § 38-1802.03(j).

We recognize the hard work and effort that went into the development of your application. Thank you for your interest in public charter schools and your commitment to improving public education in Washington, DC.

Sincerely,



Scott Pearson  
Executive Director  
DC Public Charter School Board



Rick Cruz  
Chairman  
DC Public Charter School Board

Attachment: Vote Memo

## DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD

### Charter Actions Requiring a Vote

- Approve / Deny a Charter Application
- Approve a Charter Renewal (15 yrs.)
- Approve Charter Continuance (5 or 10 yrs.)
- Approve a Charter Amendment Request
- Approve a Charter Agreement
- Give a Charter Notice of Concern
- Lift the Charter Notice of Concern
- Commence Charter Revocation Proceedings
- Revoke a Charter
- Board Action, Other \_\_\_\_\_

### Non-Voting Board Items

- Public Hearing Item
- Discussion Item
- Read into Record

### Policies

- Open a New Policy or Changes to a Policy for Public Comment
- Approve a New Policy
- Approve an Amendment to an Existing Policy

**PREPARED BY:** Paul Capp – Data Analyst, Financial and Academic Quality Team

**SUBJECT:** Charter Application – Aspire to Excellence Academy –\_Vote Memo

**DATE:** May 20, 2019

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*The following application to open a public charter school in the District of Columbia beginning in school year 2020-21 was submitted to the DC Public Charter School Board (DC PCSB) on March 11, 2019. It was released for public comment from March 11, 2019 through April 22, 2019, and a public hearing occurred on April 23, 2019. DC PCSB notified Advisory Neighborhood Commissions and the public via the DC Register, two newspapers, and the DC PCSB website, where the application and the hearing information were posted on March 11, 2019.*

### **Board Action**

DC PCSB staff requests that the Board vote to approve or deny the Aspire to Excellence Academy (Aspire Academy) charter application.

### **Background**

The Aspire Academy founding group is proposing to open an adult education public charter school to prepare adult learners for a National High School Diploma Program (NHSD) and career and technical education (CTE) training in the fields of construction, natural hair care, accounting, and bookkeeping. The founding group aims to provide diploma and CTE training services to adults 16 and older, and to provide an intergenerational program by offering a pre-kindergarten (PK) program for three- and four-year-old children of the adult students. The founding group plans for the PK program to adopt the Creative Curriculum, and to provide opportunities for interaction between parent learners

and their PK-aged children. Additional notes about the school’s proposed program are in the table below.

<b>Name of Applicant Group</b>	<a href="#">Aspire to Excellence Academy</a> <sup>1</sup>
<b>Mission and Program</b>	Aspire Academy’s proposed mission is “to offer high-quality pre-school and vocational educational options for children, teenagers, and adults in the District of Columbia. In a supportive learning environment, Aspire Academy plans to serve as a guiding force for students to successfully navigate their educational careers toward achieving a purpose-filled life.”
<b>Grade Span</b>	PK3 - PK4, Adult (16 and older)
<b>Proposed Enrollment</b>	The school plans to open in school year (SY) 2020-21 with 130 students: 100 adults and 30 PK students. The school then plans to add 10-20 students a year, with a proposed enrollment of 190 students at capacity in the school’s 5 <sup>th</sup> year of operation.
<b>Target Population</b>	The applicant group identifies a target population of low-income and at-risk adult learners for the NHSD and CTE programs, and children of those learners for the PK program. In the application, the founding group expresses an interest in serving previously incarcerated young adults.
<b>Desired Location</b>	Ward 5 (Ward 7 if no suitable Ward 5 location found)
<b>Unique Elements of the Education Program</b>	Aspire Academy’s multi-generational approach would make it the second DC charter school to offer such a program. Additionally, Aspire Academy’s proposed NHSD and CTE training approaches would be a unique combination among the DC adult charter portfolio. The executive summary, which provides an overview of the program, can be found here: <a href="https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/HpqiBKLF82">https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/HpqiBKLF82</a>
<b>Community Support</b>	The Aspire Academy founding team has emphasized a potential partnership with the Empowerment Center, a counseling organization founded by Dr. Owens, the Aspire Academy founding Executive Director, currently serving at-risk young adults and families in Ward 5. Additionally, in the written application, the founding group provided memoranda of understanding with several non-profits and organizations in DC and Maryland to provide referrals and services such as soft-skills training and mental health counseling.

<sup>1</sup> The redacted Aspire to Excellence Academy application can be found here:  
<https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/HpqiBKLF82>

	However, there were no public comments submitted during the public hearing.
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**The applicant’s strengths include:**

- CTE programming: The founding group’s explanation of its construction program is thorough in its construction competencies-based approach and the founding team demonstrates experience in this field through private construction training schools.

**The applicant’s weaknesses include:**

- Consistency of mission and philosophy: The applicant group fails to adequately articulate reasoning for the school’s chosen CTE pathways or demonstrate the utility of having these differing pathways at the same school. For example, the application does not address how the selected CTE programs will resolve the school’s stated mission in supporting students in achieving a purpose-filled life. When asked during the capacity interview, the founding group’s answer suggested that programs were selected due to the networks of the founding group rather than due to mission or program alignment.
- Demand: The applicant does not clearly articulate a rationale for locating in Ward 5. The applicant’s analysis actually identifies that Ward 5 is already charter-saturated, particularly with adult programs. During the capacity interview, the founding group did not address potential competition from Briya Public Charter School (PCS), a high quality multi-generational adult charter program, and YouthBuild PCS, a program already offering construction training, currently located in Ward 5. Furthermore, adult education programs in Ward 5 face increased struggles to enroll and retain students, and staff did not see in this application a plan to address these challenges. Additionally, given what staff knows about the higher demand for English as a second language programming in adult education in Ward 5 relative to other wards, there is a possible misalignment of program offerings between the applicant and the target location not addressed by the applicant. Finally, the application provides very limited rationale for the selection of Ward 7 as a backup location. At the public hearing, there were no potential families submitting public comment and the Board did not receive any letters of support.
- Founding group ability: The founding team has a variety of professional backgrounds ranging from counseling and mental health to real estate and construction training instruction. However, the founding team does

not possess school leadership experience and outcomes relevant to the proposed school's mission.

- Student recruitment and retention: The applicant group's student recruitment plan does not address the unique needs of the targeted adult and at-risk population. The school does not adequately outline a student retention plan. While the applicant appropriately identifies the barriers facing adult learners, the team does not offer a developed plan to address these barriers.
- Teacher recruitment: The applicant's plan for recruiting, training, and retaining high quality staff is generic and not suited to the specific needs of the proposed school. The plan is underdeveloped and does not address teacher retention.
- Inclusiveness and special populations: The applicant group does not embed within the application a concrete plan or materials for supporting English learner (EL) students, students with disabilities, or academically struggling students. When asked during the capacity interview, the team cited the experience of non-present founding members for follow-up questions.
- Community engagement: The applicant's community engagement plan is not sufficient. The applicant group has knowledge of the relevant stakeholders but does not elaborate on how feedback informed the plan. The applicant team has a limited future community engagement plan. During the public hearing, there were no public comments submitted in support of the applicant.
- Goals and assessments: In the written application and during the capacity interview, the applicant group displayed limited understanding of the reasoning and implementation of the goals it has described. The application is contradictory between the adoption of individual school goals and the Performance Management Framework (PMF). The school identified both the TABE and CASAS assessments for measuring adult student progress, but did not express how and why it would use both. It is not clear that the founding group fully understands that these tests measure the same competencies. This suggests that the applicant does not grasp the intricacies of managing and administering multiple adult education assessments.

## Analysis

Using the standard for approval laid out in [DC PCSB's 2019 Charter Application Guidelines](#),<sup>2</sup> DC PCSB staff has completed an analysis based on the school's written application, capacity interview, and public hearing. A more detailed breakdown of this assessment can be found below.

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Met/Not Met<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>Notes</b>
<b>Demonstrated Need for the School</b>	Not Met	The applicant does not demonstrate the demand for several of the particular CTE pathways it has chosen, how they are an appropriate response to the needs of the DC workforce beyond the potential compensation they offer, or how these five programs are aligned with the school's stated mission. The applicant also has not fully addressed how it will recruit and retain its target population.
<b>Sufficient Progress in Developing the Plan</b>	Not Met	The applicant group does not display an awareness of gaps in the education plan, including providing appropriate and measurable goals, rationale for the selection of the National High School Diploma plan, rationale for the selection of an assessment, and plans for the recruitment and retention of the target student population.
<b>Alignment with the Mission and Philosophy</b>	Not Met	The applicant fails to provide a consistent philosophy and connect the education plan to the needs of the DC workforce. The applicant does not sufficiently articulate the benefit of a full pre-kindergarten program rather than providing childcare for adult learners.

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<sup>2</sup> 2019 Charter Application Guidelines, pages 14-15:  
<https://www.dcpsb.org/sites/default/files/report/2019%20Charter%20Application%20Guidelines%2010-07-2018.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> This analysis evaluates whether each applicant group met, substantially met, or did not meet the standard for approval. When an applicant has substantially met the standard for approval, staff has concluded that they have met approximately 75% or more of the standard included in DC PCSB's guidelines.

Criteria	Met/Not Met <sup>3</sup>	Notes
<b>Inclusiveness</b>	Not Met	The school does not adequately provide a plan for serving the needs of students with disabilities and ELs.
<b>Founding Group Ability</b>	Not Met	The founding group does not display sufficient prior experience in leading an adult education or pre-kindergarten program. Neither the school's proposed Executive Director nor the director of operations has any experience as a school leader in either adult education or pre-kindergarten.

**Resources**

Aspire to Excellence Academy Spring 2019 Charter Application, found here: <https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/3l4PeYtFSW>

Aspire to Excellence Academy Spring 2019 Charter Application Public Hearing Transcript, found here: <https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/F4jNWUwouJ>

Aspire to Excellence Academy Spring 2019 Charter Application Capacity Interview Transcript, found here: <https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/EWesUNAGbt>

Aspire to Excellence Academy Spring 2019 Charter Application Executive Summary, found here: <https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/UeBqGQ0PEv>

Date: 5/20/19

PCSB Action:  Approved  Approved with Changes  Rejected

Changes to the Original Proposal:

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