



June 3, 2019

**BY EMAIL**

Dear Meaghan Shanahan,

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 BOLT 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 resolution of deficiencies from its prior application, additional 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**

<p><b>Charter Actions Requiring a Vote</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Approve/Deny a Charter Application</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Approve a Charter Renewal (15 yrs.)</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Approve Charter Continuance (5 or 10 yrs.)</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Approve a Charter Amendment Request</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Approve a Charter Agreement</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Give a Charter Notice of Concern</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Lift the Charter Notice of Concern</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Commence Charter Revocation Proceedings</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Revoke a Charter</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Board Action, Other_____</li></ul> <p><b>Policies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Open a New Policy or Changes to a Policy for Public Comment</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Approve a New Policy</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Approve an Amendment to an Existing Policy</li></ul>	<p><b>Non-Voting Board Items</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Public Hearing Item</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Discussion Item</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Read into Record</li></ul>
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**PREPARED BY: Nikhil Vashee – Specialist, School Quality and Accountability**

**SUBJECT: Charter Application – BOLT 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 BOLT Academy charter application.

**Background**

The BOLT Academy founding group is proposing to open a high school that will provide students the opportunity to travel and study abroad. To that end, the school plans to offer domestic and international travel opportunities at no cost to students. The school's primary founder and proposed executive director, Meaghan Shanahan, has experience teaching abroad and working in school operations internationally. The applicant plans to implement a model with blended in-person and computer-based learning to prepare students with computer literacy skills and individualized learning to allow students to progress

through content at their own pace. The school will not use social promotion and plans for all students to demonstrate mastery of the core course content or be at risk of retention for the course.

BOLT Academy applied for a charter in Spring 2018. The DC PCSB Board denied the application based on concerns about the school’s underdeveloped study abroad and residential program, lack of experience in the founding group, an underdeveloped curriculum, issues related to inclusion and access for students with disabilities (SWD) and English learners (EL), lack of demonstrated demand for the school’s model, and financial plan.<sup>1</sup> In order to be approved this review cycle, the applicant must resolve these previously identified deficiencies as well as meet DC PCSB’s standard for approval for any new sections or components of the application.<sup>2</sup> As further described below, while the applicant has addressed some of the concerns that led to the previous denial, many others have not been satisfactorily resolved.

<b>Name of Applicant Group</b>	<a href="#">BOLT Academy, which is short for Boundless Opportunities for Leadership and Travel</a> <sup>3</sup>
<b>Mission and Program</b>	BOLT Academy’s mission is to “prepare DC high school students with the knowledge, skills, and experiences they need to be successful in colleges, careers, and life.” To that end, BOLT Academy plans to offer individualized, blended learning, computer literacy and career skills classes, and fully funded student travel experiences within the United States and abroad.
<b>Grade Span</b>	9-12
<b>Proposed Enrollment</b>	The school proposes to open in school year (SY) 2020-21 with 100 9 <sup>th</sup> graders. BOLT Academy will add one grade per year, reaching capacity in SY 2023-24 with 400 students.
<b>Target Population</b>	The applicant group desires to target students living in Wards 6, 7, and 8, with the expected majority of the students being African American students from economically disadvantaged families.
<b>Desired Location</b>	The applicant wants to locate in Ward 6, with a prospective location identified at Calvary Baptist Church, 755 8th Street NW. The application cites the area’s location near public transportation, allowing

<sup>1</sup> BOLT Academy Decision Letter, June 2018, [https://www.dcpsb.org/sites/default/files/report/2018-06-04%20BOLT%20Decision%20Letter\\_Redacted.pdf](https://www.dcpsb.org/sites/default/files/report/2018-06-04%20BOLT%20Decision%20Letter_Redacted.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> See D.C. Code § 38-1802.03.

<sup>3</sup> The redacted BOLT Academy application can be found here: <https://dcpsb.egnyte.com/dl/2kKoUVHDFI>.

	access to students from Wards 7 and 8 as well as to potential employees living around the city, as reasons for locating in Ward 6.
<b>Unique Elements of the Education Program</b>	<p>BOLT Academy plans to implement an individualized blended learning model, with a complementary lab portion of every English and math class. BOLT Academy plans to use open-source lesson plans such as Khan Academy and EngageNY. The school will require all students to take courses in computer science and at least three years of Spanish in order to graduate. The school plans to implement Winter, Spring, and Summer Accelerators, periods between academic terms set aside for remediation and additional instruction.</p> <p>The school will provide opportunities for domestic and international travel at no cost to students during the summer through partner organizations such as Walking Tree Travel, Amigos de las Americas (AMIGOS), and CET Academic Programs, all of which have experience providing students with study abroad opportunities. The executive summary, which provides an overview of the program, can be found here:  <a href="https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/ITWjB00Xgl">https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/ITWjB00Xgl</a>.</p>
<b>Community Support</b>	<p>BOLT Academy submitted letters of support from community partners, including Achievement Prep Public Charter School and Building Hope, and national organizations that would oversee the school's travel programs, including Amigos de las Americas, Walking Tree Travel, and CET Academic Programs. Additionally, the founders submitted a petition of support signed by more than 450 community members. No community members came to support BOLT's application at the public hearing. All public comment received regarding the application can be found here:  <a href="https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/fl/OYafjValog">https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/fl/OYafjValog</a>.</p>

**The applicant's strengths include:**

- Travel Opportunities: The applicant recognizes that lower income students have fewer opportunities to travel. The application includes

thorough research on the benefits of travel for student learning outcomes and evidences a clear desire to bring those benefits to students who may otherwise not have those opportunities.

- Appropriate Enrollment Projection: The applicant's projected demographic profile (e.g., share of at-risk students, share of students with disabilities, conservative English learner (EL) population) is appropriate given the school's targeted demographic and its desire to create opportunities for underserved high school students.
- Demand: The applicant's community engagement surveys and meetings found that parents and students wanted opportunities for students to travel both in the United States and abroad as part of their school program. Furthermore, the applicant demonstrated demand for more high-quality high school options in the city by showing that there are long waitlists for high school's serving Wards 6, 7, and 8.

### **Resolution of deficiencies from prior application:**

- Study Abroad Program: In the decision letter for BOLT Academy's previous application, DC PCSB stated that the applicant's study abroad program was generally underdeveloped, that "the application fails to disclose specifically where, when, and how long students will study abroad" and that there are no "explanations of how credits will be awarded to ensure students can graduate within four years." The applicant's changes to the proposed travel program have mitigated these deficiencies by shifting away from a model which offers study abroad during instructional months to instead offering domestic and international trips at no costs to students between instructional periods. The length, scope, and purpose of these trips are better defined in the current application.
- Residential Program: The applicant no longer plans to offer a residential program, so this is not applicable.
- Founding Group: The applicant did not address one of the deficits of its previous application, namely, "the founding team has limited school leadership experience, and none of the founding group members have experience in school finance or educational law. Furthermore, none of the founding group members have deep special education or English language learner (EL) expertise." While the applicant has added a member with some finance experience to its team, the other noted deficiencies remain. During the capacity interview, the applicant stated that the founder had special education experience and that the Advisory Group would fill gaps in the team's knowledge for educating EL and special

education (SPED) populations. The Advisory Group, however, would not be involved in the implementation and delivery of this instruction aside from possibly serving as board members for the school. The founder's limited experience with SPED was not sufficient to address the deficiencies identified in DC PCSB's denial of the school's previous application.

- Education Plan: Last year, DC PCSB stated that "The application does not describe a complete and comprehensive curriculum. Furthermore, the team mentioned adopting a competency-based educational approach yet offered few details." While the applicant has offered more details in its new application, DC PCSB staff remains concerned with the lack of specifics around the school's blended learning curriculum. The school has stated that it will offer a menu of blended learning options that it may choose from with little specificity about how the different resources will fulfill different educational needs and how it will respond to the needs of all learners.
- Demand: The school's first application insufficiently demonstrated demand, only citing two surveys, one of which had responses mostly from outside of the applicant's target Ward. While BOLT Academy's second application does not demonstrate demand for every aspect of the school's model, such as blending learning, it does demonstrate community engagement which shows a demand for the types of travel opportunities that the school plans to offer students at no cost. This community engagement was better targeted to the school's target student population.
- Inclusion and Access: DC PCSB's previous decision letter stated that "staff is concerned SWD [students with disabilities] with high levels of need may not be provided access to all components of the BOLT Academy program." While the new application has more details on how it would serve these students, it does not sufficiently address DC PCSB's concerns from the previous year. The school has projected a 20% SPED population and does not anticipate having a large EL population. The school's application does not describe specially designed instruction that would address the needs of students with disabilities, other than noting that special educators will "push in" to modify assignments. DC PCSB staff is concerned as to whether students requiring Level 3 or 4 disability services would be able to access BOLT Academy's program, and while the applicant has noted that it would receive additional funding to address the needs of those students, it does not have a detailed plan to do so. Furthermore, some sections of the application dealing with special education compliance—the section on secondary transition, for example—contained inaccurate or outdated information. As these sections are

largely identical to sections of Washington Leadership Academy Public Charter School's application, staff is concerned that the applicant is using boilerplate language in place of a specific plan to serve students. DC PCSB is also concerned that BOLT Academy is not prepared to offer all needed services to ensure that SWD and ELs are able to access travel opportunities. The founding team is relying on partner groups to organize trips abroad, and although these groups have experience with special populations, it is unclear what specific supports they would provide to make sure that these travel opportunities would be accessible to all students.

- Finances: DC PCSB's financial concerns with the previous application were largely with the school's proposed residential program, which the applicant no longer plans to offer.

**The applicant's additional weaknesses include:**

- Teacher Recruitment and Retention: The applicant has not articulated a teacher recruitment and retention strategy that would address teacher capacity challenges. The applicant group would expect teachers to work at least 47.5 hours per week, a longer day than District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) teachers, while also being paid less than DCPS teachers. During the capacity interview, the founders cited entrepreneurial energy, which is generated from the founding of a new school, as well as other unspecified supports to prevent burnout. DC PCSB staff is concerned that the applicant has not shown a thorough understanding of the difficulties teachers will face working at BOLT Academy and the issues this presents for recruitment and retention and has as a result not articulated a convincing plan for overcoming these issues.
- Support for Learning: The school's competency and standards-based instructional policy would require a student to master more than 70% of standards before being promoted to the next course, a rigorous standard. With additional necessary courses needed to graduate, such as Computer Literacy and three years of Spanish, BOLT Academy would have higher graduation standards than DCPS and many charter high schools. While the school plans to offer "Accelerator" programs for remediation, details of these programs remain unplanned. Blended, self-paced learning that involves computerized lessons is the only form of instruction; there is no discussion about how to engage students who are not motivated by this model. The applicant's strategy for addressing behavior such as truancy rests mainly on the belief that students will behave in order to not miss out on the school's travel opportunities.

- Integrity of Application: DC PCSB staff determined that both the 2018 and 2019 BOLT Academy applications had considerable overlap with the 2017 application for Washington Leadership Academy Public Charter School, with over 15% of the applications being identical without properly attributing credit or otherwise sourcing the material. The applicant has argued that this overlap is not plagiarism because all three applicant groups shared a common member, Seth Andrew, and this common language was his intellectual property. However, staff remains troubled, both that the reused language was not disclosed or attributed, and that this could indicate the use of boilerplate language in lieu of the applicant team organically determining aspects of the school design.

**Analysis**

Using the standard for approval laid out in [DC PCSB's 2019 Charter Application Guidelines](#),<sup>4</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>5</sup></b>	<b>Notes</b>
<b>Demonstrated Need for the School</b>	Substantially Met	The founding group successfully demonstrates the need for additional high-quality high schools in the city with some evidence of student and family interest in its travel program, although not necessarily the other aspects of the school's model.
<b>Sufficient Progress in Developing the Plan</b>	Not Met	The applicant has failed to sufficiently develop plans to deal with key challenges of implementing the program, including the recruitment and retention of high-quality teachers and addressing student behavior, truancy, and lack of student engagement. The applicant has not presented specifics with regards to their blended learning curriculum,

<sup>4</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>5</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.

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Met/Not Met<sup>5</sup></b>	<b>Notes</b>
		<p>instead presenting a “menu” of options which may be used without a plan for how the different resources will be used. The applicant was not able to adequately answer how they would keep all students engaged in the blended learning curriculum. The applicant has not presented a sufficient plan to ensure that students who are in need of remediation, students with disabilities, and ELs can access all parts of the school program.</p>
<b>Alignment with the Mission and Philosophy</b>	Met	<p>The school’s mission is to provide knowledge, skills, and experiences necessary to be college and career ready. The founders have articulated how the various aspects of the school’s model are in alignment with this philosophy.</p>
<b>Inclusiveness</b>	Not Met	<p>The applicant’s plan to meet the needs of all learners is not sufficient; serious concerns remain about the accessibility of the school’s program for all students. The school’s application does not describe a full program for educational accessibility, contained inaccurate and outdated information with regards to secondary transition, and did not feature a sufficient plan to allow special education and EL students to access the school’s travel program.</p>
<b>Founding Group Ability</b>	Not Met	<p>The applicant group lacks substantive school and non-profit leadership experience. DC PCSB notes that the team has insufficient fiscal, legal, and deep special education and EL expertise.</p>

**Resources**

BOLT Academy Spring 2019 Charter Application, found here:

<https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/2kKoUVHdfT>

BOLT Academy Spring 2019 Charter Application Public Hearing Transcript, found

here: <https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/Bnuuw7iMSP>.

BOLT Academy Spring 2019 Charter Application Capacity Interview Transcript,

found here: <https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/uYbbzCGsys>

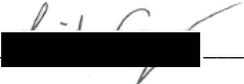
BOLT Academy Spring 2019 Charter Application Executive Summary, found here:

<https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/WTnAG1Qjtp>

Date: 5/20/19

PCSB Action:  Approved  Approved with Changes  Rejected

Changes to the Original Proposal:

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\_\_\_\_\_