



June 3, 2019

BY EMAIL

Dear Saymah Nah,

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 The Garden Education 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: Annie O'Brien – Senior Knowledge Management Specialist

SUBJECT: Charter Application – The Garden Education – Vote Memo

DATE: May 20, 2019

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 Garden Education charter application.

Background

The Garden Education is proposing to open a year-round community high school with a curriculum driven by project-based learning (PBL) and socioemotional support via an onsite counseling center. The school's founder and proposed head of school, Saymah Nah, is an Assistant Principal at Rocketship Public Charter School (PCS)—Rise Academy with previous experience as the Family Support and Student Engagement Manager at the same school. She is supported by Dr. Mercedes Ebanks, Ph. D, Coordinator of Counseling at Howard University, and Josh Pacos, founding and current Principal of Rocketship PCS—Rise Academy. It is the vision of The Garden Education "to use our comprehensive approach to equip students with the intellectual knowledge, socioemotional capacity, and cultural competence

needed to navigate their daily challenges and to progressively seek and create change within their lives.” Additional notes about the school’s proposed program are in the table below.

Name of Applicant Group	The Garden Education ¹
Mission and Program	The Garden Education’s mission is to “equitably transform student outcomes through rigorous and relevant teaching, consistent socioemotional support, and rewarding community partnerships.” It will offer year-round programming and PBL.
Grade Span	9-12
Proposed Enrollment	The school plans to open in school year (SY) 2020-21 with 120 9 th graders. The Garden Education will add one grade per year, reaching capacity in SY 2023-24 with 470 students.
Target Population	The Garden Education “expects to serve a population that reflects the Ward 7 and Ward 8 community.” During the capacity interview, the founding team said it plans to also recruit students who live west of the river and it has conducted light outreach in Ward 5.
Desired Location	The Garden Education has not identified a prospective facility but is focusing its search on Wards 7 and 8 given its target population.
Unique Elements of the Education Program	<p>The Garden Education wants to be “the first culturally affirming community high school...offering [PBL]” in the District. As such, it will center students’ education around their cultural knowledge, life experiences, and learning styles.</p> <p>The Garden Education will be a year-long program to provide time for additional learning, enrichment opportunities, work experience, and to not disrupt supporting students’ socioemotional development.</p> <p>The Garden Education will holistically serve students, prioritizing support for their socioemotional needs through an onsite counseling center.</p>

¹ The Garden Education redacted application available here: <https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/4WyyW1AkZZ/>

	<p>The school will monitor student progress through its Garden Portfolio, which will capture students' "academic and socio-emotional needs, plans, and goals along with their interest, talents, and important details about their family demographics." PBL will occur during a 1-2-week period following three weeks of core unit instruction. PBL will provide students the opportunity to "participate in fieldwork, meet with experts, [and] engage in research" to develop "21st-century skills to ensure that our students are equitably prepared for the world and the modern market."</p> <p>As a community school, it will rely on community partnerships and input to inform the development of its program and determine the scope of services provided. Community members will have regular opportunities to speak with the school and the school will make its facilities available for community use.</p> <p>The executive summary, which provides an overview of the program, can be found here: https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/27LX3LCzW8</p>
Community Support	<p>The founding team solicited feedback via a survey (administered to 100 adults and 100 students) to identify characteristics, features, and programs respondents wanted in a school. The team surveyed people at grocery stores, school meetings, community meetings, and local non-profits in Wards 7 and 8.</p> <p>The application identifies partnership opportunities with nine organizations, but the team has not solidified any yet.</p>

The applicant's strengths include:

- Community Engagement: The founding group prioritized community engagement and established a presence in Wards 7 and 8 for more than a year to inform this application. The founder sought input on school design

but also engaged with affected members of the community, including Principal Massey at HD Woodson.

The applicant's weaknesses include:

- Founding Group Ability: The founding group does not have experience working in recognized community schools or implementing a PBL curriculum. There is limited experience working in high schools.
- Demand: The founding group has not sufficiently demonstrated demand for its model. The founding group demonstrated broad interest based on its survey but failed to show demand through data for any aspects of the proposed model. In the capacity interview, the founding team was not concerned with its ability to meet enrollment goals even though all public high schools in Wards 7 and 8 are under-enrolled, including a Tier 1 public charter high school. However, DC PCSB staff believes opening with 120 9th graders may be difficult, especially when looking at historical enrollment of high schools in those wards.
- Inclusion: The application does not describe the systems and strategies the school will implement to adequately serve students with disabilities (SWD), and during the capacity interview the founding group stated that it has not yet finalized its plans to serve SWDs or English learners. The proposed curriculum will not reasonably result in the appropriate implementation of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), a requirement for all SWDs, including appropriate placements. There is no description of a continuum of services, and the application does not illustrate what the provision of special education will look like in inclusive settings and in resource and self-contained classrooms. The special education projections remain steady even over time as total student enrollment increases. During the capacity interview, the founding team indicated it would revisit these projections.
- Staffing Plan: Teachers are provided only 50 minutes of daily planning but have many responsibilities, including creating projects aligned to PBL, co-planning, grading, and leading restorative justice circles. Since there is not a Special Education Coordinator in Year 1, the founding team stated in the capacity interview that the Associate Head of School will be responsible for special education compliance.
- Finances: The applicant resubmitted a budget to address the numerous errors contained in the original budget. The resubmitted budget did not address all errors as the personnel budget was incomplete in the planning year.

- Curriculum: In the capacity interview the school clarified that it has not yet finalized the curriculum. The school provided samples of traditional English Language Arts (ELA) and math curricula without evidence of PBL. At the public hearing the founding group indicated it would partner with PBLWorks to develop the curriculum. The application explains that the school will offer an alternative curriculum to students who are two or more grades below grade level, but the alternative curriculum is not defined.
- Graduation Requirements: During the public hearing the founding group confirmed it would reduce the number of required credits from 32 to 26 (without dropping core classes). When asked how it would manage if students transferred to schools that required fewer credits, the applicant indicated it had not prepared for that yet.

Analysis

Using the standard for approval laid out in [DC PCSB's 2019 Charter Application Guidelines](#),² 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.

Criteria	Met/Not Met ³	Notes
Demonstrated Need for the School	Not Met	The applicant referred to demand citywide in 9 th grade but did not disaggregate the demand by ward. The applicant did not consider that all public high schools in Wards 7 and 8 are under-enrolled every year. The applicant shared that students showed interest in PBL based on the survey, but not other parts of the model, such as community school, focus on social justice, or the year-round program.
Sufficient Progress in Developing the Plan	Not Met	The application lacked detail regarding key components of the

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

³ 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 ³	Notes
		program, including PBL curriculum, continuum of services for special populations, counseling center/program, and job descriptions. Though the founding team resubmitted a stronger budget, it still contained errors. The applicant's decision to hire a PBL Coordinator and retain PBL Works for full curriculum development alone do not provide the required level of detail.
Alignment with the Mission and Philosophy	Not Met	The applicant has a clear mission statement. However, because the applicant group has not made sufficient progress in developing the plan regarding critical components (PBL curriculum, continuum of services for special populations, counseling center/program, budget, and job descriptions of the CEO/Head of School and Principal), it cannot be determined if those components align with mission and philosophy.
Inclusiveness	Not Met	The application discussed legal requirements of serving special populations but failed to provide a strategy on how the school plans to do so.
Founding Group Ability	Not Met	During the capacity interview the applicant group confirmed no one on the team has experience working in a community school or implementing a PBL curriculum. During the public hearing the applicant corrected the record to note that two proposed staff do have high school experience.

Resources

The Garden Education Spring 2019 Charter Application, found here:
<https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/4WyvW1AkZZ/>

The Garden Education Spring 2019 Charter Application Public Hearing Transcript, found here: <https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/3xVYOx3R4A>

The Garden Education Spring 2019 Charter Application Capacity Interview Transcript, found here: <https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/fYpOcz6DYM>

The Garden Education Spring 2019 Charter Application Executive Summary, found here: <https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/27LX3LCzW8>

The Garden Education Spring 2019 Charter Application Additional Submission, found here: <https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/bsRAZgg8Fo>

Date: 5/20/19

PCSB Action: Approved Approved with Changes Rejected

Changes to the Original Proposal:

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