



**MISSISSIPPI
CHARTER SCHOOL
AUTHORIZER BOARD**

Charter School Renewal Recommendation Report

The Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board will use the currently adopted Performance Framework for all 2019-2020 renewal decisions, including determining each school's renewal eligibility, renewal recommendation, and, if renewed, renewal term. The MCSAB will consider evidence from the academic, financial and organizational domains of the Performance Framework in making renewal decisions and will draw on the Annual Performance Framework Report, school site visit reports, the renewal application, and other official data. MCSAB will ground its decision in evidence of the school's performance over the term of the charter contract in accordance with the performance framework set forth in the charter contract.

Application for: Midtown Public Charter School

Report Date: March 31, 2020

RENEWAL APPLICANT SUMMARY

SCHOOL NAME: Midtown Public Charter School

GRADE STRUCTURE: 5-8

LOCATION: Midtown Jackson

ORIGINAL CONTRACT DATE: 7/1/2015

MISSION STATEMENT: Midtown Public Charter Schools will provide middle school students in Jackson with an academically rigorous education that develops 21st Century Skills and knowledge and prepares them to attend and succeed in high performing high schools and ultimately college and careers.

ORIGINAL CONTRACTED ENROLLMENT CHART EXHIBIT E (AS AMENDED):

Academic Year	Grades Served	Total Enrollment
2015-2016	5-6	104
2016-2017	5-7	156
2017-2018	5-8	244
2018-2019	5-8	244
2019-2020	5-8	244

PROPOSED ENROLLMENT CHART

Academic Year	Grades Served	Total Enrollment
2020-2021	5-8	244
2021-2022	5-8	244
2022-2023	5-8	244
2023-2024	5-8	244
2024-2025	5-8	244

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION

The evaluation committee recommends a **(3) Year RENEWAL with conditions** for Midtown Public.

Record of Performance

Effective Academic Program ~ Approaches Expectations

Financial Success ~ Meets Expectations

Organizational Success ~ Approaches Expectations

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

The evaluation team recommends a **(3) year renewal with conditions** for Midtown Public Charter School. Midtown Public Charter School opened its doors in August of 2015 serving 5th and 6th grade. Today, the school serves grade 5-8 with a contracted enrollment of 244. The school failed to approach academic expectations until 2019. With a state accountability rating of “D” in 2019, the school was eligible for renewal.

Midtown submitted the application for renewal on time and met the criteria for page numbers outlined in the application guidance. Beginning with the required Executive Summary, Midtown presented a brief history of the school including challenges and successes. Turnover in leadership and staff in years 1 - 3 presented significant challenges to the school. Improvements began in year 4 of operation. Most notably, the applicant describes the 2019 accountability results as “unprecedented” with overall growth at 55% placing them in the number one position for district growth.

The applicant acknowledged the school has not yet met its potential in meeting successful student outcomes but expressed a desire to provide middle school students with an academically rigorous education preparing them for success in the 21st century. In comparison with the local portfolio of schools, the applicant achieved amongst average of the group. Although Midtown has been operational for the past four years, the school did not increase student performance until the year prior to renewal. While this demonstrates the organization allocated appropriate resources to achieve this success it should not overshadow the fact it has taken the organization until the renewal year to allocate such.

Midtown’s application for renewal included a financial management plan that met expectations. The plan included a copy of the required financial manual, a financial history including challenges and accomplishments, and evidence toward a sustainable model. Related questions are addressed in the future fiscal plan.

The organizational success of Midtown fulfilling its mission and vision is wholly insufficient as described in the application. Although there have been ratings of Meets Expectations on the Performance Framework throughout the years, questions remain from external reviewers related to effective Board oversight and compliance.

RECORD OF PERFORMANCE

The following is an overview and analysis of the renewal application.

A. EFFECTIVE ACADEMIC PROGRAM ANALYSIS

Exceeds Expectations 0%

Meets Expectations 14%

Approaches Expectations 61%

Fails to Meet Expectations 25%

The academic program at Midtown Public Charter School **Approaches Expectations** as the school has demonstrated progress over time improving accountability ratings from an “F” in school years 2015 – 2018 to a “D” in 2019. The applicant does not present numeric academic data from across the charter term outside that of the letter grade.

A **history of academic performance** is provided in the narrative with references to students coming to school “significantly behind” in year 1 and entering at “some of the lowest levels” in years 2 and 3. There are, however, no metrics for these claims leaving the section under-developed. Additionally, where success is defined as students who had been struggling behaviorally or socially being able to “make internal and personal growth”, the applicant provides no data to support the claim. The applicant outlines action steps taken in year 4 including the redesign of curriculum and a restructuring of schedules to promote literacy skills. “Raising the bar” for 8th grade exit requirements are included in the action steps presented however the applicant does not define the former or latter. Student performance of the lowest 25% in both math and ELA on the 2018 -2019 **Mississippi Academic Assessment Program (MAAP)** illustrate student’s ability to outperform both the state and local district; however, data points are presented using cumulative metrics and not disaggregated by grade level. With references to an unnamed site selected indicator or benchmark assessment and no student data presented, there is no evidence to indicate where students are performing or to support the claim students’ proficiency scores are higher to predict better student outcomes.

The applicant provided a data comparison table for reference on the **most recent state assessment – the Mississippi Academic Assessment Program (MAAP)**. The chart includes comparisons to 22 schools in the district in which Midtown is located with only 8 of those school’s total points exceeding Midtowns’ score of 301. When comparing data, Midtown Public schools have higher proficiency ratings than (6) schools in reading, (8) schools in math and (11) schools in science. Disaggregated data by subgroup or data by grade level subject area is not presented.

Midtown Public Charter School describes **challenges** in years 1-3 as the loss of a school leader, students entering school “significantly behind”, a new state assessment and a second school transition in leadership. While the school reflects the significant challenges regarding the start-up plan, this demonstrates a lack of stability within the organization and highlights a concern of the lack of succession planning for school leadership. Identifying the student performance as a challenge should have been planned for upon the design of the school model which coincides with understanding the student population intended to serve.

Midtown Public School began realizing **academic accomplishments** in the 2018-2019 school year with student growth of the lower 25% exceeding a majority of the feeder schools and the state in math and English Language Arts. Student growth of the lowest 25% plays a role in the state accountability model; nevertheless, there are other indicators of success such as proficiency. Midtown's proficiency levels on the MAAP are below the state average in math, ELA, and science.

The applicant presented **additional factors** explaining academic performance with evidence to support that efforts to improve student outcomes have been implemented. Examples of such include an effort placed on the recruitment of teachers, professional development for staff and the restructuring of student schedules. An emphasis on teacher recruitment that includes a candidate profile, screening procedures, interview questions, and application activities aligned to the profile has been established. Professional development with examples of topics covered in weekly meetings and personalized coaching are described in the application. Restructuring student schedules to support additional time for literacy, an effort to ensure the fundamentals of curriculum and pedagogy are in place and the addition of an educational software program to improve literacy are described in the application. Response to Intervention (RtI) plans were presented in the application.

B. FINANCIAL SUCCESS ANALYSIS

Exceeds Expectations 0%

Meets Expectations 63%

Approaches Expectations 25%

Fails to Meet Expectations 12%

The financials as presented in the application demonstrate that only in year 2 of operation – (2016-2017) was there a deficit of \$226,424.00. The organization contributes this deficit primarily to the loss of the 21st Century grant, not prompted by any issue with the school, but rather an issue related to federal funding from the Mississippi Department of Education. Unforeseen litigation also contributed to the financial challenges experienced by Midtown Public Charter School. The support provided by Midtown Partners, Inc. during this time of financial uncertainty demonstrated a commitment to the school.

The amount of debt has decreased over time through payment on loans associated with property. Using the Performance Framework's financial reporting and rating, the school has met expectations related to the fund balance, audit findings, debt to asset ratio, and timely reporting submitting annual audits and quarterly financials on time.

Fundraising efforts throughout the contract term have ranged from \$50,000.00 to \$450,000.00 with less of an emphasis on fundraising during the latter years. The balanced budget presented does not rely on external fundraising suggesting the financial model as presented is moving toward sustainability. A non-material deficiency noted on the annual audit for 2016-2017 was related to the upload of the annual audit to the Federal Clearinghouse. Midtown Partners failed to follow up to ensure the requirement was met. Since this time, there have been no external audit findings, material or non-material. In March of 2018, the school was audited by the

Mississippi Department of Education Office of Federal Programs. Although no fiscal findings were noted in the application, selected policies related to allowability and the approval process for purchases were identified as areas to address.

The extent to which the policies needed revision were not noted in the application. The application states all requested documentation has been submitted to the **Mississippi Department of Education**. It remains unclear as to how these findings and responses are directly or indirectly related to those noted in the **Organizational Success** of the report.

The **Financial Policy and Procedures Manual** raised questions from evaluators as the financial manual is not for the school, but rather for Midtown Partners, Inc. Financial policies have not been established specifically for the charter school. Given that Midtown Partners is a larger social service organization, it's important that the financial policies speak more directly to how internal controls, purchasing, credit card use, oversight and approvals work specifically at the charter school with state, local and federal charter school funds.

Previous Performance Framework ratings met expectations and the financial model appears to be moving toward sustainability with less reliance on fundraising. However, concerns remain related to financial planning and potential changes outlined in the renewal application in order to maintain fiscal soundness.

C. ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESS ANALYSIS

Exceeds Expectations

Meets Expectations 6%

Approaches Expectations 63%

Fails to Meet Expectations 31%

There is not a clear delineation provided with respect to the vision and mission for Midtown Public Charter School, rather both are combined when the applicant notes the “mission and vision” were experienced, but not fully implemented to the degree the board expected. The evidence that is provided is not quantifiable or presented in a way that measures impact. Although referenced in the application that the “mission focuses on an academically rigorous education”, the evidence presented is that of participation in a school choice rally and wrap around services provided to both students and adults which again is not measurable in terms of outcomes toward a rigorous education for scholars. Providing an environment that supports and promotes critical thinking and character education along with a rigorous instructional day is included in the application; however, no evidence is provided that these efforts are linked to “long term” or “sustainable” results.

As noted in the financial section, in March of 2018, the school was audited by the Mississippi Department of Education Office of Federal Programs. A report from the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE), Office of Federal Programs (OFP), found Midtown Public Charter School to be non-compliant with the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) of 2015 and the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR). Citations, corrective actions and/or recommendations for continued compliance are included in the MDE – OFP report. Of note, is

the unallowable expenditure reported and the need for reimbursement in the amount of \$110.30. This finding has been cleared.

The Mississippi Department of Education reached out to Midtown Public Charter School on or around 5/8/2019, 9/16/2019 and 2/5/2020 about clearing the outstanding findings from the federal monitoring conducted during the March 2018 visit. Compliance Indicators D-2, H-1 and H-11 remain uncleared as of 2/6/2020.

D-2 Finding: The Charter School shall provide the MDE OFP a policy or written procedures clearly identifying how employees and/or concerned individuals are provided the opportunity to report suspected waste, fraud, and abuse to those responsible for governance. The Charter School shall also provide evidence of implementation of the policy.

H-1 Finding: The Charter School shall provide to the MDE OFP a policy or written procedures regarding its procurement process that complies with all applicable Federal and State procurement requirements. The Charter School shall also provide to the MDE OFP evidence of the implementation of the policy.

H-11 Finding: The Charter School shall provide to the MDE OFP a policy or written procedure to ensure that the school does not contract with parties who have been suspended or disbarred. The district shall also provide to the Mississippi Department of Education evidence of implementation of the policy.

II. FUTURE PLANS

This section of the renewal application allows each charter school to detail its plans for the next charter term, specifically the areas in which the school plans to make changes or improvements. The MCSAB will consider this information in determining what conditions to impose, if any, and in developing the proposed contract for charter renewal.

MISSION, VISION AND ESSENTIAL TERMS

The applicant does not request any changes to the schools' mission. The applicant does not request any changes to the schools' vision. The applicant requests a change in the **Essential Terms**. Agreed upon Essential Terms in the schools' current contract are as follows:

- Increased Instructional Time
- Character Education
- STEM Education
- Collaborative Teaching

Increased instructional time remains an **Essential Term**, however based on academic performance over the term of the contract, this did not yield results. Questions remain for evaluators as to how the organization has analyzed the impact of additional time and how next steps were determined.

The application suggests that STEM education is “authentically” integrated into the curriculum; however, there is little evidence to support the statement other than references to student participation in a variety of STEM related activities as opposed to embedded into the curriculum where student outcomes can be measured against a set of standards.

Midtown Public Charter School seeks approval to remove the **Collaborative Teaching Essential Term** and replace it with “**Parent/Community Focused**” reading “Parent/Community Focused School: Midtown Public will support an environment of a true “community school” whereas supports and opportunities are solicited for students and families while adding the reciprocal feature of the students understanding community engagement and where they learn about policy and community problem solving”.

While the removal of collaborative teaching and addition of a Parent/Community Focused is offered, key components of the “reciprocal” focus are needed. In addition, the National Education Association (NEA) Education Policy is not a clear research citation nor is the correlation to student achievement clear. How parents will be involved beyond common ways is not well-defined and the examples provided do not relate directly to how students learn about “policy and community problem solving”. Including a parent/community focus, while important, is not described in a way that is measurable or clearly executed.

GOVERNANCE

The applicant did not propose to make changes to the current **governance structure** nor did the applicant indicate the way(s) in which the structure of governance supports student achievement. Recent performance reviews of the governance structure including on-site interviews of board members and staff as well as a comprehensive analysis of the renewal application by evaluators leave questions regarding the effectiveness of the governance structure in particular as it relates to providing strong oversight of the academic program and adequate stewardship to ensure the needs of the school are met.

FUTURE FISCAL PLAN ANALYSIS

Exceeds Expectations 0%

Meets Expectations 0%

Approaches Expectations 0%

Fails to Meet Expectations 100%

The future fiscal plan put forth by Midtown Public Charter School contemplates reducing the number of intervention teachers, overenrolling by 20%, keeping salaries constant, moving from four to three sections of each grade, all of which present concerns given the current academic performance of the school. The plan does not indicate contingency regarding an influx of special education students, rather a decrease. Further, decreases in enrollment of special education students will negatively impact the school in terms of the **MCSAB Performance Framework and the Intervention Ladder** potentially placing it in **Level 2: Notice of Breach**. On February 11, 2020, Midtown Public Charter School entered Level 1 of the Intervention Ladder of the Mississippi Charter School Performance Framework.

Applicant states in portions of the narrative that “no fundraising” will take place therefore zero fundraising dollars are injected into the five-year budget. However, the applicant indicates that although no fundraised dollars are presented in the budget, it is “fully expected” the school will be “actively engaged” in seeking out additional funding opportunities outside of a capital campaign. Grant funding and fundraising are presented together in the narrative.

Fiscal goals are presented, though not measurable with no clear indication as to how the future fiscal plan supports the academic program.

FACILITY PLAN ANALYSIS

Exceeds Expectations 0%

Meets Expectations 50%

Approaches Expectations 50%

Fails to Meet Expectations 0%

No changes are recommended to the current facility.

PROPOSED GRADES AND ENROLLMENT - No changes are requested

III. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Annual Performance Framework Report

Midtown Public Charter School received its first Annual Performance Framework Report in the fall of 2019. School visits had been conducted and feedback had been provided to the schools in years prior. The school’s Annual Performance Framework Report included references to areas outlined in the Mississippi Charter School Performance Framework. Scores were reflected only in areas where prior or current data was available. Notices of concern, if applicable, were reflected in the comment or note sections of the report. A partial list of what was included in the school’s Annual Performance Framework Report is provided below:

- **Measure 1 State Accountability Score Components**
 - Proficiency levels below state average
 - Refer to SQR for academic areas of concern and opportunities for improvement
- **Measure 2 School Selected Indicators – Final End of Year Data**
 - Students did not meet goals as presented increasing by one sub level
- **Financial Performance Rating**
 - Audit Finding – non-material deficiency resulted in partial credit
- **Organizational Performance Rating Section A**
 - School Meets Attendance Goals – refer to spring site visit report <90% in February 2019
- **Organizational Performance Rating Section B**
 - Transfer Rates During the School Year – refer to spring site visit report actual 11% with requirement <7.5%

- **Organizational Performance Rating Section C**
 - Discipline – school has low in school and out of school suspension and expulsion rates – note variation in self-reported and MDE reported numbers – numbers appear higher than the district in which school is located
- **Organizational Performance Score - Section E School Environment**
 - Indicator vi. issues related to this indicator should be addressed directly with MCSAB and not the Mississippi Department of Public Safety
- **Organizational Performance F - Governance**
 - Governance – refer to SQR findings for areas of concern and opportunities for improvement

IV. CONDITIONS FOR RENEWAL

Midtown Public Charter School shall establish performance targets in partnership with MCSAB by June 15, 2020. Areas for improvement are directly related to current contract term(s) and/or The Mississippi Charter School Performance Framework. Performance Targets shall be measurable, time specific and reflect areas of improvement in the following:

Statutory References

§37-28-31 Annual review of charter school performance and legal compliance; performance report; charter school to be given opportunity to remedy problems

§37-28-33 Renewal, nonrenewal or revocation of charter

§37-28-33 Section (9) Notwithstanding any provision to the contrary, the authorizer may not renew the charter of any charter school that during the schools' final operating year under the term of the charter contract is designated an "F" school under the school accreditation rating system.

Academics

Midtown Public Charter School shall meet all three of the academic targets:

- Midtown Public Charter School will be rated a "D" or higher in 2021
- Midtown Public Charter School will be rated a "C" or higher in 2022
- Midtown Public Charter School will be rated a "C" or higher in 2023
- Annual performance targets must be set by the Charter Operator in conjunction with the authorizer and must be designed to help the school meet applicable federal, state and authorizer expectations.
- Midtown Public Charter School is encouraged to select a predictive indicator of student success for English Language Arts and Mathematics. A formative assessment instrument would allow student data to be disaggregated and analyzed quarterly and reported to the MPCS Board and the MCSAB during quarterly meetings. MCSAB must approve the quality and rigor of selected indicators. (Contract reference 2.15.3)

Student Recruitment and Enrollment Plan

- Midtown Public Charter School shall enroll the required number of underserved students in accordance with Miss. Code Ann. §37-28-23(5)
(5) The underserved student composition of a charter school's enrollment collectively must reflect that of students of all ages attending the school district in which the charter school is located, to be defined for the purposes of this chapter as being at least eighty percent (80%) of that population. If the underserved student composition of an applicant's or charter school's enrollment is less than eighty percent (80%) of the enrollment of students of all ages in the school district in which the charter school is located, despite the school's best efforts, the authorizer must consider the applicant's or charter school's recruitment efforts and the underserved student composition of the applicant pool in determining whether the applicant or charter school is operating in a nondiscriminatory manner. A finding by the authorizer that a charter school is operating in a discriminatory manner justifies the revocation of a charter.
- Midtown Public Charter School shall demonstrate through a revision of both its recruitment and enrollment plan/policy a dedicated and specific effort to ensure student enrollment of the underserved meets the statutory requirement by August of 2020

Board Governance plan for additional oversight to include:

Midtown Public Charter School shall restructure its governance plan to ensure all Board Members are knowledgeable in the following:

- The contract terms between the MCSAB and Midtown Public Charter School
- The Mississippi Public Charter School Performance Framework
 - The Annual Performance Framework Report
 - Annual Student Performance by Grade Level, Subject Area, Subgroups, Growth and Proficiency
 - Midtown Public Charter School shall restructure its governance and oversight plan to ensure the following is in place
 - Develop a Plan for Communication with Parents and Stakeholders
 - Using the MCSAB Closure Protocol, Develop a Communication Plan for Potential Closure
 - Using Specific Measurable and Time Specific Goals, Midtown Public Charter School shall Develop a Plan for Measuring Outcomes and Progress of Essential Terms

Future Fiscal Plans

- Align future fiscal plan to improving student outcomes
 - Ensure fiscal plan includes sufficient funding to address the academic needs of all students
 - Develop a financial policy and procedures manual for Midtown Public Charter School independent of Midtown Partners, Inc.

The Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board must approve the quality and rigor of above Performance Targets. **Initial draft version of the plans shall be submitted as follows:**

Academic Plan ~ May 1, 2020

Student Recruitment and Enrollment Plan ~ May 1, 2020

Governance ~ May 15, 2020

Fiscal ~ May 15, 2020

MCSAB Feedback to School on Draft Plans ~ May 30, 2020

Final Plans ~ June 15, 2020

New Contract Begins July 1, 2020

MCSAB will schedule ongoing monitoring of activities and goals in accordance with the charter contract, the Performance Framework and authorizer expectations.

INDEPENDENT EVALUATORS

Dr. Vanda Brumfield

Dr. Vanda Brumfield is the Director of Schools and Accountability for the Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board. As the director, she is responsible for monitoring operating charters, as well as overseeing the renewals, revocations, and non-renewals of charters in the state. Dr. Brumfield coordinates and leads school site visits, pre-opening procedures, and the renewal process. She has served as an elementary and middle school teacher, college instructor, and as the Director of Dual Enrollment and Dual Credit at Hinds Community College. Dr. Brumfield holds a bachelor's, master's, Educational Specialist, and a Doctorate of Education from Delta State University

Lauren Iannuccilli

Lauren Iannuccilli is an independent consultant providing tailored services in areas including program evaluation, project management, strategic planning, and charter authorizer development. Prior to independent consulting, Lauren led evaluation and accountability work for the School District of Philadelphia's Charter Schools Office. This included managing the teams responsible for comprehensive renewal reviews, annual reporting, and ongoing engagement to support the quality and legal adherence of over 80 charter schools. Before her work in authorizing, she led program evaluation efforts and executed a research study on teacher networks at an education nonprofit and taught middle school math and science for the School District of Philadelphia. Lauren holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in sociology from Villanova University and a Master of Public Policy degree from the George Washington University.

Dr. Lisa Karmacharya

Dr. Lisa Karmacharya is the Executive Director of the Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board. She leads the development and implementation of the organizational structure required to operate the office and carry out the activities of the Authorizer Board. Dr. Karmacharya ensures the work and decisions of the board align with national best practices to maintain high standards for charter schools, uphold school autonomy, and protect student and public interests. Before her work in authorizing, she served as the Executive Director of the Mississippi Association of School Administrators where she honed her skills for marketing, budgeting, conference and program planning. Dr. Karmacharya has over 25 years of experience in public education, having served as a teacher, assistant principal, principal, superintendent, and executive director of federal programs curriculum and elementary schools. Dr. Karmacharya holds a

Bachelor of Special Education from the University of Mississippi, a Masters in Supervision of Instruction from Mississippi College, and an Educational Specialist and Doctorate of Education in Educational Leadership from the University of Southern Mississippi.

Dr. Kelli Peterson

Dr. Kelli Peterson, a native of Flint, Michigan, serves as the Chief Portfolio Innovation and Accountability Officer for NOLA Public Schools. She has served in the capacity as a charter school elementary teacher, middle school teacher, school administrator and district charter school authorizer. Through educational pursuits, her efforts to alleviate inadequate educational opportunities and experiences for students of color is embedded within the equity, accountability, and charter authorizing work that she leads, and it is the core of her current role. Dr. Peterson earned her bachelor's degree from Spelman College, Master of Education from the University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign, and Doctor of Education from Tennessee State University.

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