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Cinzia DeLange, Ed.D

June 24, 2021

Mr. Mark Graves, President, Acceleration Academies (ESP)
Hillsborough County Acceleration Academy
714 West Melrose St.
Unit 1E
Chicago, IL 60657

Dear Mr. Graves:

Thank you for submitting an application to open Hillsborough County Acceleration Academy for the 2022-2023 school year. Your application was one of nine received by the District.

Careful consideration was given to your application. Our process for reviewing and developing a recommendation for the Board included the following steps:

- A review team composed of district staff from various departments and an external charter operator representative. The team represented areas such as Curriculum & Instruction, Finance, Exceptional Student Education, English Language Learners, Assessment & Accountability, Human Resources and Charter Schools Office staff.
- The applicant was given the opportunity to present the application to the review team prior to review.
- The review team developed a comprehensive assessment of each application including its strengths and weaknesses.
- Interviews were held with all applicants to discuss the application and address any concerns or questions that were generated from the review team.
- The recommendations from the review team were provided to the Superintendent and his staff.
- The Superintendent's recommendations were presented to the School Board, on June 15, 2021, at a School Board meeting.

The process resulted in the identification of some concerns and are reflected in the Florida Charter School Application Evaluation Instrument presented to the School Board. Although there were criteria that 'partially met the standard', the concerns described below resulted in the Superintendent's recommendation to 'deny' your application. The School Board approved the Superintendent's recommendation on June 15, 2021.

The recommendation to deny the application is based on the following reasons:

The application does not comply with F.S. 1002.33(7)(a)2 because:

- The educational program design and learning environment the school proposes is not consistent with the requirements in Florida Statutes for charter schools.
- The proposed daily schedule does not comply with statutory requirements due to instructional minutes being completed outside of the brick-and-mortar setting.

The application does not comply with F.S. 1002.33(16)(a)3 and F.S. 1002.33(6)(b)2 because:

- A comprehensive and compelling plan for appropriate identification of students with special needs is not clearly articulated in the application.
- The application does not clearly describe the continuum of service for Exceptional Students that will be provided at the school.
- The application does not provide a clear understanding of how to ensure appropriate placement of students through the IEP process.

The application does not comply with F.S. 1002.33(10)(f) because:

- The application reflects limited understanding of the legal obligations regarding the education of English Language Learners and the school's obligation under state and federal law.
- The application lacks a comprehensive and compelling plan for educating English Language Learners.
- The application lacks a clear plan for identifying, monitoring and evaluating the progress of English Language Learner students, including exiting students from ELL services.
- The application does not include an enrollment projection of ELL students, nor a staffing plan aligned to projections.

The application does not comply with F.S. 1002.33(6)(a)5 and 1002.33(6)(b)2 because:

- Budgetary projections are not consistent with all key aspects of the application including planning for appropriate instructional seat time to ensure revenue is earned, appropriate staffing to ensure class size is met, expenses for an SSO or Guardian, transportation expenses, food services expenses and the facility loan commitment letter to validate proposed revenues.
- The application does not provide a realistic assessment of projected sources of revenue and expenses to ensure financial viability of the school due to the Education Service Provider (ESP) retaining 95% of the school's FEFP payments, the lack of accounting for the district's administrative fee, lack of budgeting for the external audit, no ESOL students accounted for in projections and the additional expenses for regional and national support despite 95% of the budget already designated to the ESP.
- The plan to adjust the budget should non-guaranteed revenues not materialize as planned is minimally addressed in the application and not a sound plan.

The application does not comply with F.S. 1002.33(6)(a)5, 1002.33(7)(a)9 and 1002.33(7)(a)1 because:

- The application states that the Board will review operating results presented by a contracted accounting firm monthly, however, due the 95% of the FEFP being paid to the ESP, the board will retain little authority to exercise oversight over the financial operations of the school.
- The application does not provide a fiscal management system with clear roles and responsibilities for day-to-day operations and board oversight.
- The application does not provide clear provisions for an annual financial audit as this expense is not evident in the budget.
- The application does not clearly articulate public transparency of school financial health, especially given the majority of public funding will be given to the ESP.
- Insurance coverage requirements are not addressed in the application, only that the school will hire an insurance broker to ensure coverage. The insurance broker is not included in the budget.

The application does not comply with F.S. 1002.33(6)(a) because:

- The Board has selected Acceleration Academies, LLC, a for profit management company, as their ESP. The application did not include Addendum B to address the required criteria regarding the ESP.
- A draft management agreement is provided in the application and includes language throughout that provides the ESP authority over the charter school to include 95% of all FEFP funding paid to the ESP.
- During the capacity interview, concern arose that one of the founders of the ESP is also acting as legal representation for the governing board, disabling an arm's length relationship between the board and the ESP.

If you desire to appeal the District's decision, Florida Statute 1002.33(6)(c) states, 'An applicant may appeal any denial...to the State Board of Education no later than 30 calendar days after receipt of the sponsor's decision...and shall notify the sponsor of its appeal.'

If you have any questions regarding the School Board's decision, please contact me at 813-272-4049.

Sincerely,



Cinzia DeLange, Ed.D
Supervisor, Charter Schools

cc: Addison G. Davis, Superintendent of Schools
Van Ayers, Chief of Innovation
Jeff Gibson, Esq., School Board Attorney
Dr. Dakeyan Graham, Executive Director, Office of Independent & Parental Choice, Florida Department of Education
Adam Emerson, Director of Charter Schools, Florida Department of Education