



June 3, 2019

**BY EMAIL**

Dear Hani Abo Awad,

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 Arabic Language 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 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:** Nicole Cole – Specialist, School Quality and Accountability

**SUBJECT:** Charter Application – Arabic Language –\_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 Arabic Language charter application.

### **Background**

The Arabic Language founding group is proposing to open an Arabic language immersion school with a commitment to early literacy in both English and Arabic. Through a dual-language curriculum, Arabic Language will create an immersion environment, giving students an understanding of both Arabic language and cultures. The school's founder, Dr. Hani Abo Awad, currently teaches Arabic for grades 9 – 12 at the Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School, a private school in Rockville, Maryland. Dr. Awad has experience teaching middle and high school Arabic in the United States and abroad. He is supported by the school's proposed Board Chair, Daniel Callis, who brings extensive financial experience to the team, and by Grace McMillan, who has expertise in social work and special education. Ms. McMillan was involved in drafting the application and

education program but is currently not expected to assume an official role with the school. The school has also identified Jayme Shores Gubartalla as the founding Director of Special Education. Ms. Shores Gubartalla has experience supporting students with disabilities and English Language Learners in DC public charter schools.

<b>Name of Applicant Group</b>	<a href="#">Arabic Language<sup>1</sup></a>
<b>Mission and Program</b>	The school's mission is "to educate children of diverse abilities, from all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds in a safe, welcoming, supportive, joyful, rigorous educational environment."
<b>Grade Span</b>	Prekindergarten-3 (PK3) through 5
<b>Proposed Enrollment</b>	Arabic Language plans to open in school year (SY) 2020-21 with 110 – 120 students in grades PK3 – Kindergarten. Arabic Language will add one grade per year until it reaches capacity in SY 2029–30 with 504 – 552 students. Due to its language immersion program, Arabic Language will not accept new students beyond 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade.
<b>Target Population</b>	The applicant group projects having a student population that is 48% African-American/Black, 30% white, 9% Hispanic, 3% Asian, and 13% multi-racial. Additionally, the target student population is anticipated to include 16% of students with learning disabilities, 15% English learners, and 50% - 70% low – income students.
<b>Desired Location</b>	While the school has not identified a facility, it wants to open in Ward 6. During the capacity interview, members of the founding team shared that they have also visited sites in Wards 1 and 4, and have considered co-locating with Sela Public Charter School (PCS), DC's only Hebrew language public school. The team would be open to initially operating the school in either Ward before later relocating to Ward 6.
<b>Unique Elements of the Education Program</b>	Arabic Language plans to blend its Arabic language immersion program with a focus on social-emotional skills and global citizenship. The school will offer a 100% Arabic immersion program for PK3 and PK4 students and a 50%/50% Arabic - English

<sup>1</sup> The redacted Arabic Language application can be found here: <https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/lxmEiWJ70V>.

	<p>one-way immersion model in grades K-5. The school will translate all curricular materials in PK3 and PK4 to Arabic, and all teachers will collaborate to create differentiated lessons in both languages. The applicant plans to use Responsive Classroom<sup>2</sup> to help students develop academic and social-emotional competencies. The school will serve Special Education (SPED) students in an inclusive environment with a SPED Teacher in each classroom that includes a student with disabilities. The executive summary, which provides an overview of the program, can be found here: <a href="https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/pF7KjSIN9l">https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/pF7KjSIN9l</a>.</p>
<b>Community Support</b>	<p>Arabic Language states that it has received 53 signed indicators of “provisional interest,” which is 43% of the students needed to fill the first five classes at the school. The school’s founders have met with parents, local faith leaders, and community groups and organizations. DC PCSB has received four letters of support from other DC public charter schools including DC Bilingual PCS, Washington Yu Ying PCS, Sela PCS, and Maya Angelou PCS/See Forever. DC PCSB also received two public comments in support of the school at the public hearing. Public comment received regarding the application can be found here: <a href="https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/fl/Rkw6Q3wQtx">https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/fl/Rkw6Q3wQtx</a>.</p>

**The applicant’s strengths include:**

- Innovative Model: According to the applicant team, Arabic Language would be the first public Arabic Language immersion elementary school in Washington, DC and only the second in the nation.<sup>3</sup>
- Diverse Founding Group: The founding group members represent a wide range of races, religions, and national origins. The founding group includes one native Spanish speaker and several native Arabic speakers. The diversity of the group will help to combat potential challenges due to misconceptions that Arabic is a language associated with a particular religion. In addition to hiring Dr. Awad as the founding Head of School, the

<sup>2</sup> Responsive Classroom is an approach to building a learning environment that focuses on helping students develop social-emotional competencies that are essential for success in life  
<https://responsiveclassroom.org/about/principles-practices/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.houstonisd.org/AIMS>

school has identified Jayme Shores Gubartalla as the founding Director of Special Education. Ms. Shores Gubartalla has SPED and English Learner (EL) experience teaching in DC public charter schools.

- Strength of the School's RTI Model: The founding group presented a comprehensive plan for how the school intends to support struggling students through the Response to Intervention (RTI)<sup>4</sup> model. As described in the application, the school will provide four tiers of support. The model will include the use of research-based interventions, small group push-ins, and pullout services.
- Demonstrated Need: The founding group underscored the benefits of learning Arabic to compete for jobs in the global economy. The team cited positions in federal agencies, financial institutions, embassies, non-profits, and tourism to support the need for the school. When asked in the capacity interview, the team stated that early language acquisition leads to increased fluency among young children and provided examples of how early language acquisition supports children in later grades.

**The applicant's weaknesses include:**

- Underdeveloped Plan for Students Enrolling after PK: The application references a three-week summer orientation for students entering the program in grades K-2. This program is not well defined, and outside of an informal "buddy system" and optional after school program, the team was not able to adequately describe how the school will acclimate new students in later years.
- Head of School Lacks Experience in the Grade Levels the School Plans to Serve: While Dr. Awad has experience managing school operations, building community, budgeting, strategic planning, eliciting donations and teaching in middle and high school, he has not taught in or led an elementary program.
- Underdeveloped Planning Year: The Curriculum Director has a busy planning year, preparing and translating much of the curriculum alongside professional translators. However, the staffing plan does not support these positions until year one. During the capacity interview, the team said it anticipates receiving private funds to support these positions earlier than proposed in the application. However, the team said that if it does not secure private funding, the Head of School will support this work. Given the demands of being a founding school leader, staff is concerned

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.rtinetwork.org/learn/what/whatisrti>

that Dr. Awad would not have the capacity to complete critical work, such as translations, while securing a facility and recruiting staff and students, and the program may suffer as a result.

- Underdeveloped Early Childhood Program: The applicants describe the early childhood program as “play-based” but have selected a curriculum that focuses heavily on foundational Math and Literacy skills. During the capacity interview, the founders said that they chose the Frog Street curriculum after seeing it used at an Arabic school in Houston and cited the ease of translating the curriculum to Arabic.

### **Analysis**

Using the standard for approval laid out in [DC PCSB's 2019 Charter Application Guidelines](#),<sup>5</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>6</sup></b>	<b>Notes</b>
<b>Demonstrated Need for the School</b>	Substantially Met	<p>The applicant submitted substantial evidence to support the importance of learning a foreign language to compete in the global economy. The founding team demonstrated the need for the school in Ward 6 by asserting that the Ward lacks high-achieving elementary schools and pointed to waitlist data at language immersion schools within the city to underscore parent and community interest.</p> <p>However, while the applicant demonstrated a demand for language immersion programs, it did not sufficiently demonstrate a demand for an Arabic-immersion program among DC families.</p>

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<sup>5</sup> 2019 Charter Application Guidelines, pages 14-15:  
<https://www.dcpccb.org/sites/default/files/report/2019%20Charter%20Application%20Guidelines%2010-07-2018.pdf>

<sup>6</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>6</sup>	Notes
<b>Sufficient Progress in Developing the Plan</b>	Not Met	<p>The applicant group was able to point to a number of Arab speaking communities within the region, including Arabic speaking teachers who are currently underutilized. However, the applicant lacks a solid plan to recruit Arabic speaking teachers in all disciplines who are also subject matter experts. Outside of proposed partnerships with area universities and using online networking platforms, the applicant group was not able describe a solid plan for recruiting key personnel who are also Arabic speaking. As it relates to students entering grades K-2, the applicant group was not able to describe in detail how this will look. There is no clearly defined structure for the orientation program or official onboarding process for new students. Dr. Awad stated in the capacity interview that he would absorb the work of translating all curriculum materials if the school did not have the financial means to do so. DC PCSB does not see this as a viable plan given his anticipated workload. The success of the PK3 and PK4 program relies heavily on curriculum materials being translated to Arabic. The founding group was also unclear on how the school will cover the cost of translators long term.</p>
<b>Alignment with the Mission and Philosophy</b>	Met	<p>The school describes its culture as a safe, joyful, diverse, and collaborative environment for all students. Throughout the application the school described its focus on social-emotional learning through</p>



Criteria	Met/Not Met <sup>6</sup>	Notes
		Responsive Classroom to support students in developing social-emotional and academic competencies.
<b>Inclusiveness</b>	Substantially Met	The applicant focused much of its research and community engagement efforts in Ward 6. The applicant group was unable to describe how it would recruit a “racially, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse” student body. While the school explained that it will serve students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment, it was unable to provide details on how a full continuum of services would function within the school’s language immersion model for students requiring services outside of the general education setting for the majority or entirety of their school day. To this end, there was also no clear plan to recruit Arabic speaking teachers who are also SPED certified. The applicant also did not detail in its plan how it will adhere to special education compliance and reporting requirements with the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) and its process for addressing any identified areas of noncompliance.
<b>Founding Group Ability</b>	Not Met	The school’s founding team includes a diverse group of professionals from within the education sector and beyond. However, many of the tasks outlined in the planning year will require a significant amount of time, effort, and financial resources from members of the founding team. The

Criteria	Met/Not Met <sup>6</sup>	Notes
		prospective Head of School does not have experience teaching in or leading an elementary school and does not have experience as a head of school at any grade level. Further, during the capacity interview, many of the questions were answered by Ms. McMillan, who is not slated to be part of the founding team if the application is approved. Therefore, DC PCSB staff remains concerned that the team transitioning to lead the school does not have the relevant experience and expertise needed to be successful.

### Resources

Arabic Language Spring 2019 Charter Application, found here:  
<https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/lxmEiWJ70V>.

Arabic Language Spring 2019 Charter Application Public Hearing Transcript, found here: <https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/KryvO4WXYW>

Arabic Language Spring 2019 Charter Application Public Comment, found here: <https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/fl/Rkw6Q3wQtx>


Arabic Language Spring 2019 Charter Application Capacity Interview Transcript, found here: <https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/fOwypGJDHi>

Arabic Language Spring 2019 Charter Application Executive Summary, found here: <https://dcpcsb.egnyte.com/dl/ABprwTVMV4>

Date: 5/20/19

PCSB Action: ☐ Approved ☐ Approved with Changes ☒ Rejected

Changes to the Original Proposal:

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