



June 4, 2018

Meaghan Shanahan  
Executive Director  
BOLT Academy

**BY EMAIL**

Dear Ms. 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 2018 Application Review process and, at its public meeting held on May 21, 2018, 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. Your application review team included a special education expert, a financial expert, an English language learner expert, and members of DC PCSB staff with experience teaching and leading public high schools. While there were some strong aspects of the application, the following findings were the basis for denial:<sup>1</sup>

- Study Abroad Program – The study abroad program is generally underdeveloped and the applicant team did not provide sufficient detail about its study abroad programming. For example, the application fails to disclose specifically where, when, and how long students will study abroad. There are no plans for supporting students' foreign language acquisition prior to going and while abroad nor explanations of how credits will be awarded to ensure students can graduate within four years. There are no plans for providing services to students with disabilities (SWD) and English learners (EL) while abroad, nor have you identified responsible adults for all students or plans for emergency situations. While you plan to offer shorter domestic trips to prepare students and their families for a longer period abroad, you identified neither the instruction nor the curriculum that would build the life skills BOLT Academy students would need. You shared letters of support from private study abroad entities that seem willing to create a study abroad program for BOLT Academy; however, the letters did not indicate a formal relationship with detailed responsibilities. Another area of concern is financing the study abroad program using

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<sup>1</sup> A more detailed assessment of the application, along with all application materials, can be found in the Board proposal at <https://www.livebinders.com/play/play/2371589?tabid=54541c50-8588-3ccd-7f75-aecfa03e2a62>.

local DC funding, which is detailed below.

- Residential Program – The residential program is also underdeveloped. Some of the missing elements include the curriculum, a behavior management system to address out-of-school hour behaviors, wrap around services, and a thorough process to determine which students would have preference for the program if the school received more applications than space. The application referenced choosing students for the residential program based on need, but you did not provide clear benchmarks on how need would be objectively determined. Conversely, during the public hearing, your team said it would use an internal weighted lottery to determine which students are placed in the residential program. Ultimately, your team did not present a firm plan for ensuring all students would be able to access all parts of your program.
- Founding Group – The founding group lacks the experience and expertise needed to meet the objectives outlined in the application. The founding team has limited school leadership experience, and none of the founding group members have finance experience. Furthermore, none of the founding group members have deep special education or EL expertise, or have been in a leadership role in a residential program.
- Education Plan - The application does not describe a complete and comprehensive curriculum. Furthermore, the team mentioned adopting a competency-based educational approach yet offered few details. In addition, some aspects of BOLT Academy’s academic proposal appear to deviate from the school’s mission and philosophy. For example, per the proposed promotion requirements, students can fail multiple courses and move to the next grade but they must earn all necessary credits to graduate, resulting in students in 12<sup>th</sup> grade unable to graduate. Also, remediation and tutoring occur during the boarding component, which is not open to all students. The plan for offering support to families that choose not to participate in the boarding component is underdeveloped.
- Demand - The founding group has not sufficiently demonstrated demand for its model. While citing two surveys as evidence of demand, one of the surveys was administered by DC Public Schools to parents across the city, and 72% of respondents reside outside your target Wards.
- Inclusion and Access - DC PCSB staff is concerned SWD with high levels of need may not be provided access to all components of the BOLT Academy program. The founding team proposes offering more “intense and/or frequent support” in English and math at the expense of study abroad and/or art and music classes. As previously noted, it is unclear how supports and specialized services would be provided to ELs and SWD while studying abroad. Additionally, BOLT Academy’s residential program is designed to provide students with additional academic and social-emotional supports; however, only about a third of all students would be able to participate in the residential program. As a result, DC PCSB staff anticipates disparities in the support services BOLT Academy students receive based on who can participate.
- Finances – The application assumes the school would receive residential funding for students studying abroad for half- or full-year terms without evidence that D.C. agrees that this is an acceptable use of funds. The applicant mentioned summer and short-term study abroad opportunities provided to DCPS students as evidence, but it is unclear how DCPS pays for these programs and whether these are indeed paid for by the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula. Additionally, these programs supplement not supplant a school’s academic schedule, relieving the school of

mandatory services for SWD and ELs, mandatory testing, and credit earning courses. The question of funding can only be resolved based on consideration of a plan far more specific than the one presented in the application. Moreover, your team has not planned appropriately for renovating and maintaining a residential facility and covering occupational expenses.

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 and would like to acknowledge the many positive aspects of the application that are not mentioned in this letter. Thank you for your interest in public charter schools and your commitment to improving public education in Washington, DC.

Best,



Scott Pearson  
Executive Director  
DC Public Charter School Board