



June 4, 2018

LaChaundra Graham
Head of School
M.E.C.C.A. Business Learning Institute D.C.

BY EMAIL

Dear Ms. Graham,

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. As you know, at its public meeting held on May 21, 2018, DC PCSB did not approve your application to establish M.E.C.C.A. Business Learning Institute D.C. (MBLI) 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:¹

- Lack of Demonstrated Demand and Unrealistic Enrollment Plans - The application lacked details about previous or planned engagement with Ward 7 community members concerning interest in a middle or high school with a financial literacy focus. Nor did the founding group provide contextual knowledge about demand for middle/high school programs in Ward 7 and 8, demonstrated by its plan to open with an unprecedented cohort size of 450 6th grade students in the first year. No public charter school, to staff's knowledge, has successfully recruited such a large number of students upon opening – much less in one grade.
- Insufficient Supports for Students with Disabilities and English Learners - The application lacked detail about how the school would provide supports for students with disabilities (SWD) and English learners (ELs). The founding group projected that 17% of its student body will be SWD, and all will be Level 1, which resulted in an academic program that neither budgets nor plans for students requiring more than 8 hours per week of special education services. The school would be understaffed for the projected enrollment of SWD, identifying just two teachers to serve nearly 80 SWD. Aside from financial planning, the applicant's plans to support the academic development of SWD and ELs were underdeveloped and lacked perspective about the

¹ 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=96d63433-e400-d846-572c-3789ddeaec55>.

challenges of serving SWD and ELs. For example, when asked about supporting special populations, the school cited the use of an interpreter as a strategy to support students learning English or sign language.

- Finance/Operations Plan - The applicant's financial and operational planning were unrealistic. The founding group said that it would secure a \$3.5 million loan to account for \$2.8 million in planning year costs with limited details on where the start-up loan will come from and therefore no assurance that it will, indeed, be secured. The group said that most of the planning year costs would be associated with personnel. The budget included annual revenues of over \$1,000,000 from a student café, school store, and before and after care services, despite projecting that 65% of the school's students would be at-risk, meaning eligible for TANF or SNAP, homeless, or in the foster system, or over-aged and under-credited, and therefore eligible for free school lunches. The founding group also planned to generate revenue from a summer bridge program and a summer camp program. The application did not include a clear operational plan for any of these summer programs.
- Education Plan - The education plan, generally, did not meet the standard for approval. Curricular offerings and methods of instruction were not designed to meet the needs of all learners. For example, the course offerings were not aligned with grade level content. Specifically, the description of the Reading/English Language Arts program only focused on reading, spelling, grammar, and phonics instruction. The founding group acknowledged that this content would be the foundational program for students who were below grade level. However, the school did not elaborate on offerings for students on or above grade level (e.g., Advanced Placement courses). The applicant also planned to offer single-gendered classrooms but did not address the legal requirements needed to implement this classroom structure, or provide a sound educational rationale for this classroom structure.
- Founding Group Ability - The founding group has experience working as teachers, assistant principals and central office staff in Washington, DC, Baltimore, MD, and Prince George's County. However, none of the founding group members have experience as the academic leader of a school or experience operating a credit union.

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 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