



## **2015 Charter School Applications**

LEA Impact Statement

Oct. 31, 2014

### *Introduction:*

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) has received 10 applications for charter schools within Mecklenburg County. We welcome the opportunity to respond through this impact statement. As educators, we want the children of this county to have access to quality educational services. We support the Charter Schools Act of 1996 and believe that effective charter schools should be part of the educational landscape.

It is also important to share with you our concerns about the current charter climate in North Carolina. Maximizing school choices for our families is certainly a top priority but it is critical to maximize the number of quality public schools, not just the number of public schools. This priority can best be supported when we remember the purpose for which charters were brought to North Carolina in the 1990s – to serve as beacons of educational innovation in North Carolina so that the successes experienced in charter schools could then be translated to, and shared with, public schools across our state. Charter flexibilities such as establishing when schools will start and end the school year can have considerable impact on student achievement. There are also transparency and accountability issues that linger throughout the network of charters in North Carolina, including charter board members making money from the charter schools that they govern but not being held responsible for failures or other problems. There is also the issue of charter schools not serving all students, especially high-needs students and students with disabilities. Even the process by which charters are created and project their enrollment figures is lacking. This has caused a number of charter schools to close their doors and shut out hundreds of families simply because they overestimated enrollment figures in the first place – figures that went unchecked.

In essence, we support increased accountability and transparency for all public schools, charters included, so that North Carolina families have quality school choices, not just a large quantity of mediocre options. If we are successful in balancing and sharing real transparency and accountability with successes and flexibilities across all public schools, the beneficiaries will be North Carolina students, their families and taxpayers.

A team of CMS educators has reviewed the applications for 10 proposed charter schools: Heritage Charter School, Extraordinary Leaders Academy, Mallard Creek STEM Academy, Young Inspiration Charter School, Francis Classical School, Charlotte Classical School, Unity Classical Charter School, Queen’s Grant High School, Legacy Academy of Charlotte, and Matthews-Mint Hill Charter Academy. We have prepared a detailed review and impact statement for each school as requested by Joel E. Medley, director, office of charter schools. Our reviews are attached.

## **Heritage Charter School**

### **School Characteristics (from application):**

Number of students: 600

Number of administrators: 4

Number of traditional teachers: 42

Number of specialist teachers: 4

Grade span: K-5

Student selection: Application and lottery

Entrance requirements: Students will be admitted on a first-come, first-served basis. A wait list will be maintained when grade levels are at capacity.

Board structure: Board of directors with full authority to govern

Expansion plans: n/a

Identified site: 400 South Summit Ave., Charlotte, NC 28208

### **Summary of Planned Program (from application):**

Students of Heritage will receive a hands-on, inquiry-based education in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM). The charter asserts that students will receive a more personalized learning approach as each student will be paired with a teacher who will serve as a long-term mentor throughout the student's time spent at Heritage. Students will have the opportunity to graduate 12th grade with an associate's degree.

### **Areas of Support (from LEA):**

The Heritage Charter School has provided a detailed plan for supporting at-risk students through Response to Intervention (RTI) and the SIOP protocol for English Language Learners. The idea of thematic units around project-based learning units is desirable. The charter asserts that it will provide a student-centered curriculum with emphasis on project-based learning.

### **Areas of Concern (from LEA):**

Heritage Charter School application describes a K-5 enrollment but later in the application (p. 8) states a K-12 education with a possible associate degree. The application does not provide a detailed curriculum and instruction design unit. No Appendix B was listed. The school provides only \$27,000 for curricular/textbook supplies. This number seems very low to provide 600 students with access to digital materials and hard-copy materials for a 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning experience. No details were provided on how the school would move across or plan for the development of the thematic units. The application did not specify if the real-world application teachers were to be formed or developed from the original teacher allotment. Successful implementation of many of the philosophical teaching practices listed (e.g., Marzano, Gradual Release Model, CRA) require extensive professional development. The school plans to use STAR reading and math assessments but does not provide details on these programs. Extensive community-partner collaboration is planned but no specific partners are named.

## **Extraordinary Leaders Academy**

### **School Characteristics (from application):**

Number of students: K-8, 900 (first year); K-12, 1,200 (fifth year)  
Number of administrators: 6  
Number of traditional teachers: 50  
Number of specialist teachers: 2 (EC), 18 teacher assistants  
Grade span: K-8 first year, K-12 fifth year  
Student selection: Application and lottery  
Entrance requirements: Open, lottery if necessary April 2016  
Board Structure: Board of directors with full authority to govern  
Expansion plans: Growth to K-12  
Identified site: Perpetual Hope of Charlotte (church)

### **Summary of Planned Program (from application):**

The Extraordinary Leaders Academy (ELA) will implement a rigorous core academic curriculum with an integrated STEAM approach in all grade levels. ELA instructional design is focused on brain-based research and the Teach Like A Champion series. The instructional design is to identify the needs based on brain-based research by Eric Jensen and Marcia Tate. This research-based instructional design focuses on how students can be successful using instructional strategies that match how each student learns. Lessons will also include technology integration and 21<sup>st</sup>-century technology. Teachers will be required to incorporate purposeful movement into their lessons daily to allow students to maintain their focus on the lesson(s)/content being discussed during whole-group and individual instruction. Planned strategies include (but are not limited to) mnemonic devices to assist with memory and movement that will increase students' ability to retain information covered during an instructional period.

### **Areas of Support (from LEA):**

The charter proposal plans to prepare global leaders by combining the arts and sciences for all students using state and essential standards with an emphasis on leadership; Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM), and extracurricular involvement in a year-round setting. The instructional design is based on the brain research of Eric Jensen and Marcia Tate and the Teach Like a Champion series. The school will use small class size and small groups along with blended learning. Primary grades will use centers for differentiation. The upper grades will use more project-based learning. There will be accommodations for EC, ESL, and AIG students who have been identified. The RtI process will be used.

### **Areas of Concern (from LEA):**

This charter school proposal does not appear to differ much from many CMS schools. CMS has schools with low student-to-teacher ratios, uses WIDA ACCESS for ELL placement, uses Dreambox in math and uses mClass. The proposal states there will be data collected by benchmark assessments, as well as formative and summative assessments, but more specifics are needed. How will these assessments show a year's growth? The plan is to provide quality points based on courses taken in high school. Do these comply with NCDPI's guidelines? Plans for transportation state the school will explore bus chartering but what happens if this does

not occur? The proposal states the charter “hopes” to have their own fleet of buses but no information is provided about plans should this not occur. Thus, it appears that transportation could be an issue. The application does not provide a basis for measurement of the “scholar objective” goals. The application focuses on all teachers becoming teachers of reading and specifically cites the Teach Like a Champion strategy. But this strategy does not provide a basis for reading authentic science and math texts to provide disciplinary literacy in STEM subjects. There is no reference to the application of claim, evidence and reason to authentic texts that are common in math and science that use language and symbols associated with that particular discipline. A focus of the school is rigor, but there are no examples of what that rigor would look like in the classroom other than a reference to Revised Bloom’s create level. There is no mention of how this create level would be assessed; it not possible to assess it using multiple choice questions.

## **Mallard Creek STEM Academy**

### **School Characteristics (from application):**

Number of students: 554 students, K-6 projected enrollment for 2016

Number of administrators: 1 principal, 1 assistant principal

Number of traditional teachers: 24 elementary/3 middle

Number of specialist teachers: 8

Grade span: K-6 year one/grow one grade level per year until capacity enrollment is reached

Student selection: Application and lottery

Entrance requirements: none

Board Structure: Seven to nine members

Expansion plans: One grade level added each year, adding about 88 students per year

Identified site: only mailing address provided

### **Summary of Planned Program (from application):**

Mallard Creek STEM proposes a curriculum that will provide the resources and support students need to build STEM skills as well as mastery of English Language Arts and Social Sciences. The school plans to partner with the Teacher's College where students will read content-rich materials, work in response journals throughout the day and increase their level of engagement with learning by participating in academic conversations, hands-on activities and thoughtful responses. Mallard Creek STEM will also partner with Discovery Place where the school will conduct longitudinal studies of student growth and help teachers refine instructional pedagogy to improve student performance. Students will master progressive STEM skills by completing projects in each domain with the support of integrated technology, hands-on activities and onsite/offsite learning modules aligned with state standards.

### **Areas of Support (from LEA):**

The literacy platform is intended to be one of balanced literacy. The school intends to promote a classroom environment that supports balanced literacy including classroom libraries, mentors and leveled texts. The partnership with Discovery Place is intended to support professional development of the teachers, offer curriculum and resources to support student learning and provide internal benchmark assessments, all while supporting STEM. The application identifies several strong STEM curricula programs, including Engineering is Elementary and STC Science Series. The class size is very reasonable and can help teachers with classroom management and instructional support. The idea of supporting a summer school for learners who are struggling is impressive but the application doesn't indicate staffing and proposed budget for this.

### **Areas of Concern (from LEA):**

The charter application claims that there are no Columbia Teacher's College Homegrown Institutes offered to any school by the LEA. This is incorrect: For the last three years, CMS has offered a Teacher's College Homegrown Institute in the area of Reader's Workshop to each CMS K-8 school.

The application also identifies Teacher's College and Discovery Place Education Studio as the two main sources of professional development. Both of these are excellent but costly

programs and sufficient funds have not been allocated in the budget. Specifics about how the mathematics program will be taught are lacking and there seemed to be some confusion about assessments, particularly NWEA and MAP. Educational technology for math instruction was mentioned but no particular programs were named. The application also mentioned support from local high schools and respected education centers, as well as local and national resources for STEM not being used by any school in CMS – but none were named in the application.

## **Young Inspiration Charter School**

### **School Characteristics (from application):**

Number of students: 752 projected by 2021

Number of administrators: 2

Number of traditional teachers: 1

Number of specialist teachers: 0

Grade span: K-12

Student selection: Application and lottery

Entrance requirements: None

Board Structure: Chair, vice chair

Expansion plans: K-12 (fifth year)

Identified site: Existing facility located at 13925 Erwin Road, Charlotte, NC 28273

### **Summary of Planned Program (from application):**

Young Inspiration Charter (YIC) will improve student learning by providing a learning environment that promotes growth through the Core Knowledge sequence and a focus on STEM courses. Critical thinking, logic, and developing student morals will be a vital part of the curriculum. Students at risk have to be challenged to listen and respond when presented with information in a classroom setting. The application asserts that, as students see the value of learning, they will become independent learners. Goals for independent learners will include accepting responsibility for individual behavior, learning how to prioritize tasks to meet academic requirements, balancing family and social demands, developing critical thinking skills and solving problems. YIC will follow the North Carolina Standard Course of Study and Common Core curriculum and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's ABC Accountability Model. Required federal programs will also be implemented. All state-mandated testing will be administered. Teachers will maintain records of assessing students through observation, student work samples and student self-evaluations. Teachers, students, and parents will work closely together to maintain progress records to ensure that each student is maximizing his or her learning potential.

### **Areas of Support (from LEA):**

Core Knowledge Sequence has been around since 1989 and has potential, if implemented with fidelity, to positively impact teacher practice and increase student achievement. YIC will need additional support of professional development in literacy; the budget does not provide enough professional development opportunities.

### **Areas of Concern (from LEA):**

The application states that teachers will be trained by consultants for curriculum programs such as Open Court, Lucy Calkins and Saxon Math but the budget does not identify a sufficient amount of funding to cover costs. Open Court was implemented district-wide in CMS and did not work due to many factors, including lack of creativity afforded teachers (Open Court was very scripted). Saxon Math is also a program that relies heavily on worksheets, which is counter-productive to the school's stated mission to engage students in hands-on activities

and real-world application of classroom content. Writers Workshop (Calkins) is a very constructivist approach to learning, a sharp contrast to Open Court and Saxon.

It should also be noted that this application contains multiple spelling and grammatical errors. In some cases, it was difficult to discern the intended meaning because of grammatical errors and typos.

The application also raises questions about Exceptional Children (ELL, AIG, EC). How will ELL students be identified? It is true that MAP measures academic progress; however, using this assessment to identify AIG and EC students is questionable. The application states that they plan to use the inclusion model but also adds, "It is understood that this may not always meet the needs of the students in each class." What will be done to meet students' needs? The application does not say.



## **Francis Classical School**

### **School Characteristics (from application):**

Number of students: 486 in year one, growing to 702 in year five

Number of administrators: 5 paid by Elon Homes and Schools for Children, Inc.; 7 paid by school budget

Number of traditional teachers: 18

Number of specialist teachers: 11

Grade span: K-8, plans to expand to K-12

Student selection: Application and lottery

Entrance requirements: None

Board Structure: The board will be comprised of members of the board of governors of Elon Homes and Schools for Children, Inc.

Expansion plans: add a grade level each year until K-12

Identified site: NoDa/Plaza Midwood or West Charlotte or along with the Kennedy Charter Public School on the Johnson C. Smith University (JCSU) campus, also governed by same non-profit.

### **Summary of Planned Program (from application):**

FCS will be a classical school with a strong emphasis on civics, American government, history, literature and the arts that builds the capacity to follow one's own conscience and self-govern. The philosophical approach is that all students, regardless of educational experience and goals, benefit from a content-rich educational program that develops academic potential and personal character. FCS's education plan adheres to the unique classical model.

### **Impact on LEA (from LEA):**

The cost of LLA is estimated at \$2,189,527.20 in state funding and \$1,126,742.40 in local funding based on its projected enrollment of 486 students in the first year of operation. The operation of a new charter school of this size in Mecklenburg County could affect the CMS enrollment trend that is the basis for the Ten-Year Capital Improvement Plan.

### **Areas of Support (from LEA):**

Singapore Math has proved effective in other countries. Socratic method uses direct intentional questions to guide students' understanding of problems and solutions. This encourages logical and independent thinking (it is to be used at the high school level). All students will have to earn three credits in a foreign language, plus one credit (two semesters) of Latin. Advanced middle school students will have access to high school level math

### **Areas of Concern (from LEA):**

The curriculum is partnered with Hillsdale College's Barney Classical Charter School Initiative. Learning is accomplished through written and spoken words rather than through images, with explicit phonics and grammar instruction. Content-rich curriculum that builds *critical cultural literacy* in all grades (Core Knowledge in K-8 and curriculum *built on the Western tradition* in 9-12). It is not clear how this builds a global understanding of cultural literacy. The application

says that “cultural literacy” is intended for students to build a base of the “USA cultural understandings” that used to be an issue on traditional basic skills tests. The cited research is from 1990 and 2003. After recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance, students will sing a traditional or patriotic American song, followed by a student's recitation from memory of a poem or notable speech, student recognition by teacher, announcements and uniform checks. **The day ends in an organized manner.** Teachers review homework assignments, students line up with possessions and walk outside in line to meet parents/carpool or go to the bus. Students will earn 0.5 credit in moral philosophy (one semester).

Although modern foreign language teachers and Latin teachers are listed, and it is mentioned that students will have Latin and foreign language, no information is provided about the alignment of curriculum or proficiency expectations with the NCSCOS for World Languages. Teaching language roots as part of English literacy is not the same as studying Latin. The application (page 17) states: “Technology is a tool, not an end, and its use is minimized.” This is a concern, as technology plays a significant role in students becoming college- and career-ready.

Page 17 also states the job of the teacher to be a direct instructor, not a facilitator of learning “Teachers will be front and center, equipped to effectively transfer knowledge, skills and concepts to students.” Teachers will impart lessons from the front of the class. Generally there will be no quad/pod seating. This is a concern because students need opportunities to think through problems and to reason.

The application says of teacher recruitment: “Hillsdale has a highly-selective, classical teacher training program.” Hillsdale is no longer affiliated with NCATE and the teacher education program does not meet NCATE standards. [http://www.carolinajournal.com/articles/display\\_story.html?id=9459](http://www.carolinajournal.com/articles/display_story.html?id=9459). The application also lists three organizations of Latin teachers to recruit teachers but does not list any other avenues outside of Hillsdale or these Latin teacher organizations.

The president of Elon Homes and Schools for Children (EHSC) will serve as superintendent of Francis Classical School. This salary is paid through the Elon Homes and Schools for Children budget. Four positions within the parent company that will be available to assist within the school but are not in the school budget include the chief operating officer, the VP for Institutional Advancement (largely fund development), the chief financial officer and the technology specialist. These positions are paid through the EHSC budget.

## **Charlotte Classical School**

### **School Characteristics (from application):**

Number of students: First year, 318 (K-3); fifth year, 626 (K-8)

Number of administrators: Did not project numbers

Number of traditional teachers: Did not project numbers

Number of specialist teachers: Did not project numbers

Grade span: K-3 first year; K-8 fifth year

Student selection: Application and lottery

Entrance requirements: Open enrollment, lottery.

Board Structure: Many of the current Charlotte Classical School board members also served on the board of Bastiat Classical School, a school that applied for a 2015 opening.

Expansion plans: Expand to K-8

Identified site: No site selected

### **Summary of Planned Program (from application):**

The Charlotte Classical School (CCS) learning environment will be traditional, in keeping with its classical design. Students in K-5 will be taught in self-contained classrooms with one teacher. Kindergarten classrooms will have 20 students while grades one through five will have 26 students per classroom. In middle school, students will be grouped by subject and in some cases by ability. Students will generally learn in one classroom with one teacher. The average class size in grades 6-8 will be 26, however, class size may vary depending on student interest, placement and course offerings. Students in the middle school will change classes and therefore have multiple teachers over the course of the day.

### **Areas of Support (from LEA):**

The charter-school proposal emphasizes partnering with parents in a traditional education that emphasizes literacy, critical thinking and problem solving. The literacy curriculum is based on Core Knowledge and Shurley English for grammar. The school plans to have a curriculum coordinator.

### **Areas of Concern (from LEA):**

The school's makeup is to reflect the student make-up of CMS, however, the demographics seem to be off. There will not be individualized learning. This proposal is rigid and all students will study the same content and topic as their peers. Topics are covered multiple times with no consideration for a student who has mastered the content. The curriculum is based upon Core Knowledge Language Arts program and they will use NWEA assessments. How well do the two correlate? The Core Knowledge program emphasizes phonics and listening comprehension but does not address reading comprehension. The use of Shurley English for grammar does not state how the reading and grammar work together. There is no mention of writing instruction. This proposal is said to emphasize literacy, critical thinking and problem-solving. The traditional methods they are using for reading and grammar are not conducive to critical thinking or problem-solving. The document states they will use immersion to meet the needs of ELL students and the first year the curriculum coordinator will serve as the ELL coordinator. What

requirements for this position ensure ELL student needs will be met this first year?

Saxon Math may not provide for the individual processing and a variety of teaching techniques as expressed in the charter document:

“Each student is a unique individual and may process information in different ways. Using a variety of teaching techniques will help reach each student in the way he or she learns best” Teaching methods that CCS teachers may use include but are not limited to direct instruction, experiential learning, collaborative learning, and directed independent study.” - page 13. Page 17 states “Charlotte Classical School's instructional program is inherently challenging and carefully designed.” However, Saxon Math does not offer opportunities for rigorous mathematics, especially in communication and reasoning skills.

The application states that high-achieving math students will move to the next grade level but this does not account for a deeper level of thinking (just larger numbers and more operations). “The spiraling nature of the Saxon Math program makes it well suited for acceleration. Starting in 3rd grade, high achieving students will have the opportunity to accelerate their math and advance to the next grade level. This opportunity will ensure that the most gifted math students are challenged, without sacrificing a firm foundation of math skills” - page 17

The application states the school will administer the MAP assessment two or three times per year. In order to use the data to change instruction to meet students’ needs, MAP should be administered at least three times.

## **Unity Classical Charter School**

### **School Characteristics (from application):**

Number of students: 207 first year, expanding to 483 in year five

Number of administrators: 2

Number of traditional teachers: 9

Number of specialist teachers: 3.5

Grade span: K-2, expanding to grades K-6 in year five

Student selection: Application and lottery

Entrance requirements: None

Board Structure: Six directors

Expansion plans: add a grade level each year - some language around expanding to high school

Identified site: Charlotte Presbyterian Church on Scaleybark Road (currently leased by another charter school)

### **Summary of Planned Program (from application):**

Unity's board desires to demonstrate the universal value of classical education's structured approach of moving students through developmentally appropriate stages of learning known as the grammar, logic and rhetoric of each subject, starting with K-2 and expanding to K-6.

Unity intentionally seeks to create a school of diversity by building a board diverse in professional skills and ethnic background.

### **Areas of Support (from LEA):**

Unity offers an academic program that caters to "classical" curriculum in that it seeks to use historical philosophies for learning alongside academic resources that make use of the classics. The belief is that students gain an authentic understanding of themselves and the world around them through the study of major works and practices of the past. To support mathematics, the charter plans to use approaches outlined in Singapore Mathematics. This program promotes a sound mastery of basic skills before reasoning and application.

Gifted students will have the opportunity to transition to more advanced classes.

Latin, Mandarin and Spanish language study will be introduced in grammar school (not until years two, three or later).

Unity Classical Charter School will endeavor to communicate to Spanish-speaking parents in their native language through use of a phone tree and bilingual notices placed in book bags.

### **Areas of Concern (from LEA):**

Partnered with Hillsdale College's Barney Classical Charter School Initiative. The curriculum choice is founded on the work of Orton-Gillingham, which has been in use since the 1930s. Instructional methods will include direct instruction, explicit phonics instruction and memorization. Classical education is a language-focused approach accomplished through words, writing and speech, rather than through the softer images of pictures, videos and

television. Teachers employ lectures, chants, repetition, memorization and explicit instruction as students absorb the facts. (This is at odds with brain research showing student engagement and language acquisition.)

The charter application suggests that students will follow a learning trajectory that begins with the “grammar” phase, during which they engage with direct instruction around how, when and specifically what to do in each of the content areas. The charter suggests that middle school would be the period of a student’s academic career when reasoning would be appropriate. With this, the application suggests that only students who show readiness will be moved into a reasoning phase. Waiting for students to reach middle school before providing exercises in reasoning and thinking abstractly is an area of concern. The subtle suggestion that all children are not ready to think logically and reason upon entering kindergarten is contrary to the school’s vision of “developing intellectually, morally and physically excellent citizens who embrace learning and the desire to serve.”

Latin, Spanish, and Chinese instruction are mentioned but nothing is outlined about proficiency outcomes or alignment to NCSCOS for World Languages.

## **Queen's Grant High School**

### **School Characteristics (from application):**

Number of students: First year 525 (9-12); fifth year 650

Number of administrators: 2

Number of traditional teachers: 29.5 FTE

Number of specialist teachers: 4 EC; 2 EC aides

Grade span: 9-12

Student selection: Application and lottery

Entrance requirements: Open enrollment with wait list

Board Structure: Separate board from K-8 school

Expansion plans: None, grades 9-12 at opening

Identified site: Can use current site, looking at additional space options

### **Summary of Planned Program (from application):**

Students entering Queen's Grant (QGHS) should expect a heavy workload that requires study, reflection and written homework for each class each night. In addition, students are expected to complete various assignments outside class, including but not limited to research papers, test preparation, group and individual presentations, and reading assignments with journaling. QGHS goal is to become one of the finest high schools in the state of North Carolina. The application cites an unwavering commitment to improving student learning and ensuring that all students are given the opportunity to be successfully prepared for college, career and life.

### **Areas of Support (from LEA):**

The school has been in operation as part of a larger K-12 school. The course of study closely matches the local LEA, including Honors and AP courses offered by the state. Differentiated instruction is included in the plan, with various learning opportunities presented to support all students. Teachers are provided opportunities to acquire CEU credits in Literacy each year.

There are some great structures in place at the school. The focus on Advanced Placement and math rigor will allow students to be both competitive and ready for post-secondary experiences. Creating a new governing board for the high school will increase student opportunities.

### **Areas of Concern (from LEA):**

Graduation rate (79.2%) is lower than the local LEAs and the state, despite having college readiness as a main goal of the school. The reason cited was data-reporting issues.

The school is not partnered with a school management company and will rely on the school board for governance.

Provision for meals relies on parent volunteers, who supplement what students bring with string cheese, fruit, and other snack items. Students may purchase lunch from vendors such as fast-food restaurants.

The school may want to provide more opportunities to partner with CPCC. This could increase their course offerings and provide students a two-year college pathway, if the four-year college pathway is

not an option.



## **Legacy Academy of Charlotte**

### **School Characteristics (from application):**

Number of students: First year, 600 (K-6); Fifth year, 900 (K-8)

Number of administrators: 3

Number of traditional teachers: 29

Number of specialist teachers: 7; 6 EC teachers

Grade span: K-6 first year

Student selection: Application and lottery

Entrance requirements: Open lottery and wait list

Board Structure: Five-member board

Expansion plans: Expand to K-8

Identified site: No site confirmed

### **Summary of Planned Program (from application):**

Legacy Academy of Charlotte will offer students a rigorous education grounded in the classical liberal arts tradition and focused on literacy. The academy's educational program is built upon the success of many classical schools that have implemented a similar educational approach and have demonstrated strong student achievement year after year. Schools that have embraced a classical program draw from research-proven curricula, supplement these with internally developed materials, and work strategically to ensure that all curriculum and assessments are thoroughly aligned with state standards. The classical approach to education focuses on providing children with the lifelong educational tools to learn and think for themselves. The school's foundation will be the implementation of carefully selected curriculum, specialized instructional strategies and core beliefs, all of which are supported by the practice of high-performing classical schools that inspired the design of Legacy Academy.

### **Areas of Support (from LEA):**

The proposal includes building a leadership culture for all students using Covey's Seven Habits principles in a schoolwide effort. Curriculum plans include using individual, small-group and large-group learning environments. Accommodations for EC, ESL, and gifted students have been identified and the RtI process will be used.

### **Areas of Concern (from LEA):**

Teachers will use the Core Knowledge curriculum and it is stated that this curriculum is "teacher tested." How closely does this integrate with the Common Core State Standards for each grade level? How will this curriculum program work with NWEA's MAP testing? Can teachers effectively learn to use this curriculum with only the training days for professional learning at the start of the school year? Additionally, the application mentions the use of "special instructors for helping children learn to read." Will the school require certified reading teachers? At what grade levels will teachers with reading certification be employed? Additionally, plans to provide transportation and food seem sparse. What will happen when students come to school without lunch? What if students do not bring healthy lunches as expected?

Concerns about the ethnic breakdown of the student body, it is not reflective of the LEA.

White - 86.64%      Hispanic - 1.9%      Other - 0.9%

Black - 8.72%      Asian - 2.65%

## **Matthews-Mint Hill Charter Academy**

### **School Characteristics (from application):**

Number of students: First year 601 (K-6); fifth year 937 (K-8)  
Number of administrators: 5  
Number of traditional teachers: 39  
Number of specialist teachers: 13  
Grade span: K-6, growing to K-8  
Student selection: Application and lottery  
Entrance requirements: Open enrollment with lottery  
Board Structure: Five-member board, has management partner  
Expansion plans: Growing to K-8  
Identified site: No site identified

### **Summary of Planned Program (from application):**

Matthews-Mint Hill Charter Academy (MMH) Charter Academy will be a K-8 school, with no high school graduation requirements for students. Students at MMH will be expected to progress academically through one grade level each year. The MMH program is designed to ensure that graduating eighth-grade students have the opportunity to attend and succeed in a challenging high school program. The MMH principal will have the final decision regarding the promotion, acceleration and retention of students; the practice of promoting students who have failed to master grade-level curriculum is incompatible with MMH mission. A variety of structures and procedures are incorporated into the MMH model to ensure that students do indeed receive the content, instruction and interventions necessary to progress academically as expected. Deans will serve as the direct managers for teachers in specific grade-level cohorts and ensure that instructional plans are aligned and scaffold appropriately across all grade levels to ensure smooth upward transitions for students.

### **Areas of Support (from LEA):**

Proposed school is a replication of Greensboro Academy, a very successful charter school that has been in existence since 1999. Education approach for K-8 is identical to that used at Queens Grant Community School, a successful charter school with a wait list of 1,200 students. Team writing proposal did homework and visited similar schools to learn more about which best practices had significant impacts on school climate and student learning. Distributed leadership model of four deans, one each for K-1,2-3,4-6, and 7-8, should provide the structure for an instructional leadership model that will support classroom teachers in implementing curriculum. School would be only K-8 school on east side of Charlotte.

### **Areas of Concern (from LEA):**

School intends to serve 600 students in first year and would be an area of concern except for the fact that the model for the school is identical to other successful charter schools with similar demographics of students. Application acknowledges that launching a new school with 600 students is a challenge, but offers evidence that includes lessons learned from other schools such as Summerfield Charter Academy and Wake Forest Charter Academy which opened with 500+ students. Class size of 25 for kindergarten and 28 for grades one through eight are larger than average class sizes in CMS schools. Depending on needs of students who enroll in the program, class sizes may need to be adjusted.