

EMERALD ACADEMY

A LAUNCH OF EMERALD CHARTER SCHOOLS

Charter School Application Executive Summary

April 1, 2014

Emerald Academy Charter School Application

Executive Summary

Mission: Emerald Academy will provide Knoxville’s urban students with the academic foundation, skills, habits, and character traits that they need to succeed in high school, college, and in life. Through our rigorous educational program and our relational culture, we will create a transformative experience for our scholars that prepares them to become self-sufficient, reflective, and resilient leaders in their communities.

Vision: Our vision is to dramatically increase the number of Knoxville students who graduate eighth grade well-prepared for high school and the college of their choice. To achieve this goal, we will create a replicable, model kindergarten through eighth grade school that closes the achievement gap and alters the trajectory for our urban youth. Emerald Academy will prepare our scholars for success through our four pillars: academic excellence, effective teaching, a highly relational culture grounded in high expectations, and robust parent and community engagement.

Goals: Emerald Academy is committed to closing the achievement gap and ensuring that all scholars, including all subgroups, achieve at the highest levels possible. Accordingly, we have set an ambitious long-term academic goal that will drive our efforts over the course of the 10-year charter contract:

By the end of the first charter period (10-year charter contract), Emerald Academy will be a reward school, as measured by Tennessee’s revised accountability system. As a reward school, Emerald Academy’s achievement will be in the top five percent for state assessments with no significant gaps in achievement. See the *Academic Performance* section for detailed academic and operational goals and metrics.

Targeted student population and the demographics of the community to be served

Knox County’s urban elementary and middle schools are struggling to meet the needs of our students. In 2013, the percentage of Knoxville’s urban elementary and middle school students scoring proficient or advanced on the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) ranged from a high of approximately 44 percent in third grade mathematics to a low of 18 percent in eighth grade mathematics. In reading/ language arts, the range is a high of approximately 38 percent in sixth grade to a low of 29 percent in eighth grade. We believe that a change is needed to accelerate the pace of student readiness for secondary and post-secondary education.

As a result, we aim to serve scholars and families who reside in Knoxville’s urban neighborhoods. We anticipate that our scholar population will mirror those of the urban Knoxville schools included in the above charts, which have the following demographic characteristics:

- 87% qualify for free or reduced-price (FRP) lunch
- 16% special education
- 10% English language learner (ELL) scholars
- 59% minorities

Specific barriers that may impact student achievement, and how Emerald Academy will help students overcome them

In his 2013 report, *Overcoming the Poverty Challenge to Enable College and Career Readiness for All*, Robert Balfanz identifies significant challenges related to poverty that negatively impact academic achievement, including:

- Lack of basic human needs, such as housing and food
- Lack of access to healthcare
- Exposure to violence
- Living under constant stress
- Single-parent households

In addition, Balfanz states, “Students living in poverty, on average, start their educational experience significantly behind their peers in terms of the precursor reading and mathematics skills and knowledge they bring to school.” (p. 10)¹

At Emerald Academy, we address these obstacles in a comprehensive and targeted manner. Our proposed school provides a much-needed solution in a number of critical areas:

- **Creating a highly relational environment.** Scholars at Emerald Academy will be cared for and nurtured in a kindergarten through eighth grade school environment that includes a low scholar-teacher ratio, small grade levels, additional staff members in classrooms, and life coaches who will follow scholars throughout their entire academic career (kindergarten through college). Emerald Academy will be a place where every child is known by name and where every child has deep and personal relationships with adults in the building. The relationships formed at Emerald Academy will last for years after scholars leave our school. As described in the *School Culture* section, research indicates that a positive and supportive relationship with an adult can protect against the negative outcomes often associated with low-income students (Murray & Malmgren, 2005). This is further confirmed by a study conducted by Public/Private Ventures for Big Brothers Big Sisters regarding the positive impact of adult-to-scholar mentoring.
- **Employing a school social worker.** Emerald Academy will employ a social worker who will be directly responsible for meeting the non-academic needs of scholars in at-risk situations. In addition to providing direct support to scholars, the social worker will develop and manage relationships with local nonprofit, health care, and social service agencies to coordinate external services for scholars and their families.
- **Providing extended time on learning.** All scholars will participate in an extended school day and an extended school year. Additionally, we will create efficiencies within the school day through our systems and structures that will provide more time on task for scholars.

¹ <http://new.every1graduates.org/overcoming-poverty-challenge/>

- **Offering dedicated intervention and enrichment for every scholar.** The Emerald Academy daily schedule includes a 90-minute intervention/enrichment period four days per week, in which scholars will receive small group, targeted instruction in mathematics and English language arts (ELA). This dedicated time will provide scholars with the individualized supports they need to close the achievement gap.

Our Board has a strong track record of success working with at-risk students during the school day and through after-school programs. Emerald Academy will build upon their experience to provide an outstanding educational experience to Knoxville’s urban youth.

Clear guiding purposes and priorities and how the school will know it is achieving them

Emerald Academy’s guiding purpose is to prepare our scholars for success in high school, college, and in life. To this end, Emerald Academy has four pillars for success:

- **Academic excellence.** Our academic program: implements a standards-based academic curriculum; provides differentiated instruction to personalize education for every scholar; utilizes data to drive all decisions; and provides extended time on learning.
- **Effective teaching.** Our success and that of our scholars depends on high quality and effective instruction. To this end, we will: hire committed and driven teachers; provide extensive and embedded professional development; establish professional learning communities; and conduct frequent informal observations and provide immediate feedback.
- **A highly relational culture grounded in high expectations.** At Emerald Academy, we will establish a culture that is grounded in high expectations – one that demands and expects the best from all stakeholders. We will do this by: holding high expectations for all; creating a highly structured school environment; and creating a highly relational environment.
- **Robust parent and community engagement.** At Emerald Academy, we believe that parent and community engagement is a key factor in the success of our scholars and our school. To this end, we will partner with families and develop strong community partnerships.

We have set measurable academic and organizational goals that will help us know we are meeting the mission of our school. For specific ways by which we will measure success, see the *Academic Performance* section.

Enrollment summary

Emerald Academy will open with 60 scholars each in kindergarten and first grade, for a total Year One enrollment of 120. In our second year, we will add a second and fifth grade. We will then add two grades per year for each of the next two years and one grade in FY20. At capacity, we will serve 540 scholars in grades kindergarten through eighth grade. We have elected to operate a kindergarten through eighth grade school to enable us to realize our vision and to dramatically increase the number of Knoxville students who graduate eighth grade well-prepared for high school and the college of their choice.

Grade Level	Number of Scholars					
	Year 1 2015-2016	Year 2 2016-2017	Year 3 2017-2018	Year 4 2018-2019	Year 5 2019-2020	At Capacity 2019-2020
K	60	60	60	60	60	60
1	60	60	60	60	60	60
2		60	60	60	60	60
3			60	60	60	60
4				60	60	60
5		60	60	60	60	60
6			60	60	60	60
7				60	60	60
8					60	60
Total	120	240	360	480	540	540