



2021 NEW SCHOOL APPLICATION RECOMMENDATION REPORT FOR: ROOTED SCHOOL-VANCOUVER

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Report Submitted By

Joshua Halsey, Executive Director, Washington State Charter School Commission

Evaluation Team

Team Lead: Adam Aberman, CA

Evaluators: Gayle Burnett, GA
Andra Maughan, WA
Dr. Gil Mendoza, WA
Heather Wendling, NY

Washington State Charter School Commission

P.O. Box 40996 1068 Washington St. SE
Olympia, WA 98504-0996 Olympia, WA 98501

charterschoolinfo@k12.wa.us

Visit our website at: <http://charterschool.wa.gov>

For more information about the contents of this document, please contact:

Amanda Martinez, Executive Assistant
Email: amanda.martinez@k12.wa.us
Phone: (360) 725-5511

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*Washington State Charter School Commission
Attn: Executive Director
PO Box 40996
Olympia, WA 98504-0996
charterschoolinfo@k12.wa.us
(360) 725-5511*

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INTRODUCTION

The Washington State Charter School Commission (Commission) was created in 2013, after the approval of Initiative 1240 and subsequent passage of Engrossed Second Substitute Senate Bill 6194, to serve as a statewide charter school authorizer. The eleven-member Commission is tasked with running a process to approve new charter schools, and effectively monitoring the schools it authorizes through ongoing oversight.

Mission

To authorize high quality public charter schools and provide effective oversight and transparent accountability to improve educational outcomes for at-risk students.

Values

Student-Centered
Cultural and Community Responsiveness
Excellence and Continuous Learning
Accountability/Responsibility
Transparency
Innovation

Vision

Foster innovation and ensure excellence so that every student has access to and thrives in a high-quality public school.

The Commission is committed to being culturally responsive. To that end, the Commission has adopted cultural competence definitions to support this commitment.

Cultural Inclusion

Inclusion is widely thought of as a practice of ensuring that people in organizations feel they belong, are engaged and are connected through their work to the goals and objectives of the organization. Miller and Katz (2002) present a common definition: "Inclusion is a sense of belonging: feeling respected, valued for who you are; feeling a level of supportive energy and commitment from others so that you can do your best work." Inclusion is a shift in organization culture. The process of inclusion engages each individual and makes each feel valued and essential to the success of the organization.

Individuals function at full capacity, feel more valued and are included in the organization's mission. This culture shift creates higher-performing organizations where motivation and morale soar. ¹

Cultural Responsive Education Systems

Culturally responsive educational systems are grounded in the beliefs that all culturally and linguistically diverse students can excel in academic endeavors when their culture, language, heritage, and experiences are valued and used to facilitate their learning and development, and they are provided access to high quality teachers, programs, and resources. ²

Cultural Competency

Cultural competence provides a set of skills that professionals need in order to improve practice to serve all students and communicate effectively with their families. These skills enable the educator to build on the cultural and language qualities that young people bring to the classroom rather than viewing those qualities as deficits.

Cultural competence allows educators to ask questions about their practice in order to successfully teach students who come from different cultural backgrounds. Developing skills in cultural competence is like learning a language, a sport or an instrument.

The learner must learn, relearn, continuously practice, and develop in an environment of constant change. Cultures and individuals are dynamic – they constantly adapt and evolve.

Cultural competence is:

- Knowing the community where the school is located
- Understanding all people have a unique world view
- Using curriculum and implementing an educational program that is respectful of and relevant to the cultures represented in its student body
- Being alert to the ways that culture affects who we are
- Places the focus of responsibility on the professional and the institution

¹ Puget Sound Educational Service District. (2014). Racial Equity Policy. (p. 7) Seattle, WA: Blanford, S.

² Leadscape, National Institute for Urban School Improvement. (2010) Culturally Responsive Coaching for Inclusive Schools. (p. 4) Tempe, AZ: Mulligan, E. M., Kozleski, E. M.

- The examination of systems, structures, policies and practices for their impact on all students and families viewing those systems as deficits.³

Focus on Quality

The New School Application solicitation and the resulting evaluation process are rigorous and demanding. The process is designed to ensure that charter school operators possess the capacity to implement sound strategies, practices, and methodologies. Successful applicants will clearly demonstrate high levels of expertise and capacity in the areas of education, charter school finance, administration, and management, as well as high expectations for excellence in professional standards and student achievement.

Autonomy and Accountability

Charter schools have broad autonomy, but not without strong accountability. Charter schools will be accountable to the Commission for meeting academic, financial, and organizational performance standards. The three areas of performance covered by the evaluation policy correspond directly with the three components of a strong charter school application and the three key areas of responsibility outlined in charter contracts.

Accountability

Evaluation of charter school performance is guided by three fundamental questions:

- Is the educational program a success?
- Is the school financially viable?
- Is the organization effective and well-run?

The answers to each of these three questions are essential to a comprehensive evaluation of charter school performance.

Charter schools are evaluated annually against standards in the following categories:

Academic Performance – Charter schools are required to make demonstrable improvements in student performance over the term of the charter. Schools are required to administer all state standardized tests and to adhere to academic standards.

Financial Performance – Schools must demonstrate the proper use of public funds, as evidenced by annual balanced budgets, sound audit reports, and conforming to generally accepted accounting practices.

Organizational Performance – A nonprofit corporation holds the charter school contract and is responsible for complying with both the terms in the contract and all applicable laws. This charter school board of directors is a public body and is required to adhere to public meeting and public records laws.

Approved charter schools will be granted a five-year charter contract. Schools unable to demonstrate academic progress or unable to comply with legal/ contractual or financial requirements may face sanctions, non-renewal, or charter revocation.

Autonomy

In exchange for rigorous accountability, charter school operators experience substantially greater authority to make decisions related to the following:

- Personnel
- School management and operations
- Finances
- Curriculum
- School day and calendar
- Education Service Provider (ESP) agreements

Evaluation Process

Commission staff manage the application evaluation process and evaluation teams that include national and local experience and expertise on the operation of successful charter schools. The Commission staff leads these teams throughout the evaluation process to produce a merit-based recommendation regarding whether to approve or deny each proposal. This report from the evaluation team is the culmination of three stages of review:

Proposal Evaluation

The evaluation team conducted individual and group assessments of the merits of the proposal based on the complete submission. In the case of experienced operators, the Commission and NACSA supplemented the evaluation team’s work with due diligence to verify claims made in the proposals.

Capacity Interview

After reviewing the application and discussing the findings of their individual reviews, the evaluation team conducted an in-person assessment of the applicant team’s capacity.

<http://www.k12.wa.us/CISL/EliminatingtheGaps/CulturalCompetence/default.aspx>

³ Center for Improvement of Student Learning, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Evaluation Team Ratings

The evaluation team members each produced independent, ratings and comments regarding whether to recommend the proposal for approval or denial.

Commission staff collated the team ratings into an overall recommendation report to approve or deny each application based on its merits as outlined in the rubric. The authority and responsibility to decide whether to approve or deny each application rests with the members of the Commission.

Recommendation Report Contents

This recommendation report includes the following:

Proposal Overview

Basic information about the proposed school as presented in the application.

Recommendation

An overall rating regarding whether the proposal meets the criteria for approval.

Evaluation

Analysis of the proposal based on four primary areas of plan development and the capacity of the applicant team to execute the plan as presented:

Educational Program Plan and Capacity

- School Overview
- Family and Community Engagement
- School Culture and Climate
- Student Recruitment and Enrollment
- Program Overview
- Curriculum and Instructional Design
- Student Performance Standards
- High School Graduation Requirements (if applicable)
- Supplemental Programming
- School Calendar and Schedule
- Special populations and at-risk students
- Student Discipline Policy and Plan
- Educational Program Capacity.

Organizational Plan and Capacity

- Legal Status and Governing Documents
- Board Members and Governance
- Organization Structure
- Advisory bodies
- Grievance/Complaint Process
- District Partnerships
- Education Service Providers (ESP) and Other partnerships
- Staffing plans, Hiring, Management, and Evaluation
- Professional Development
- Performance Framework

- Facilities
- Transportation, Safety, and Food Service
- Operations Plan and Capacity

Financial Plan and Capacity

- Financial Plan
- Financial Management Capacity

Existing Operators (if applicable)

- Track record of academic success
- Organizational soundness
- Plans for network growth

Rating Characteristics

Evaluation teams assess each application against the published evaluation rubric. In general, the following definitions guide evaluator ratings:

Exceeds

Clear and complete responses to all prompts. Consistently detailed, comprehensive explanations provided, including specific evidence that shows robust preparation. Presents a clear, explicit picture of how the school expects to operate. When applicable, responses connect cohesively to other sections of the program. When applicable, the information/evidence demonstrates a high degree of capacity to implement the proposed program.

Meets

Clear and complete responses to all prompts. Sufficient explanations provided, including evidence that shows preparation. Presents a clear picture of how the school expects to operate. When applicable, responses connect to other sections of the program. When applicable, the information/evidence provided demonstrates capacity to implement the proposed program.

Partially Meets

Clear and complete response to some but not all prompts. The response provides partial explanations and lacks meaningful detail or requires additional information in one or more key areas. When applicable, responses provide limited connections to other sections. When applicable, the information/evidence provided demonstrates some/limited capacity to implement the proposed program.

Does Not Meet

Unclear and/or incomplete responses to most prompts. The response provides insufficient details to most prompts. Responses lack connections to related sections. Responses demonstrate lack of preparation and/or raises substantial concerns about the applicant's understanding of, or ability to, implement an effective plan.

APPLICATION OVERVIEW

Applicant Name

Jonathan Johnson

Proposed School Name

Rooted School-Vancouver

Proposed Location

Vancouver, WA

Board Members

Kathy Chandra

Paul Culp

Jonathan Johnson

Toby Martin

Nathan Webster

Proposed School Leader

Not Identified at the Time of Application

Enrollment Projections

Academic Year	Planned Enrollment	Maximum Enrollment	Grades Served
2022/2023	35	35	9
2023/2024	65	65	9-10
2024/2025	95	95	9-11
2025/2026	125	125	9-12
2026/2027	125	125	9-12

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rooted School - Vancouver

Mission, Vision, Values

Mission: Rooted exists to provide students personal pathways to financial freedom. We aim to serve students who are high-potential and traditionally underrepresented in the regional tech sector. However, we are also an open-enrollment school and will accept any student who is inspired by our mission, vision, values, and school model. We anchor this mission through our Four-Year Promise.

Vision

Four-Year Promise:

- We exist to see our students academically prepared and financially free.
- Some students will arrive at financial freedom with a college degree, others without.
- Our job is not to decide how they will get there but to provide them the options to get there.
- We teach students how to learn in an ever-changing world, develop their skills in the most in-demand job sectors, and create technology that is transformational.
- Our school offers opportunities for students across the digital sector.
- Many students will graduate with highly sought-after jobs in technology, paying well above the local median wage.
- Many students will go on to college with a sense of purpose and a relevant context for being there.
- All will have the chance to leave Rooted School Vancouver (RS-V) with a job offer in one hand and a college acceptance letter in the other.

Long Term Goals

- At least 50% of graduates qualify for the Green Balloon Fellowship;
 - More than 90% of students are on track to graduate in four years;
 - On average, students outperform district averages for ELA and math;
 - Average ACT Score for Rooted seniors is 21; average SAT score is 1040 (combined);
 - Retain the top 90% of our teachers year-over-year who consistently uphold our values and standards of performance; and
 - RS-V achieves non-reliance on philanthropy for financial sustainability.
-

Education Program Terms

Program Term 1: Self-Directed Learning

Program Term 2: Industry-Based Credentials (IBCs) and Internships

Program Term 3: Project-Based Learning

Educational Model/Instructional Design

RS-V’s states that its education program “is uniquely positioned to cultivate a local talent pipeline of high-potential, underrepresented youth because of its commitment to three beliefs:

- The integration of knowledge, skills, and techno-literacy into all subjects will engage and motivate students to explore high-demand careers.
- We intentionally design our courses to embed the principles of Universal Design for Learning, incorporating multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement to meet all students’ individual needs.
- Our education program is specially designed for deeper learning, to develop students who will thrive in fields where skilled individuals create the new ideas, products, and industries of the future.

We channel our first belief by working directly with companies to identify available entry-level jobs, distilling the skills and competencies needed to be competitive for those roles and backward designing our local curriculum with those skills in mind. We channel our second and third beliefs through a hybrid learning model that focuses on three Educational Program Terms that function as the essential design elements that allow us to reach our mission and vision: Self-Directed Learning, Industry-Based Credentials (IBC) and Internships, and Project-Based Learning: (pg. 9).

Anticipated Student Population

The applicant states that though the Black/African-American population in Vancouver is small (2.2%), Rooted School-Vancouver will target serving these students to achieve its mission of closing the most pervasive racial wealth gaps. In service of this mission, the school also seeks to serve low-income students. The school anticipates serving slightly above the number of students with disabilities served by the local district.

Students Who Qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL)	Students with Disabilities (SWD)	Black/African American Students	Latinx
65%	15%	20%	60%

RECOMMENDATION

Rooted School-Vancouver

APPROVE

Application Strengths Summary

- The applicant articulates a compelling need for the proposed school.
- The Vancouver-based board and the Rooted Foundation are committed to supporting Rooted's "Four Year Promise" that all students will graduate with a diploma in one hand and a job offer in the other (pg. 58).
- The board members are clearly mission-aligned and serve in professional roles that will support the school's overall vision for student success.
- The professional development plan is robust, offering staff approximately 40 days of whole team professional learning each year.
- Letters of support from each of the major funders are provided and only those grants from Washington State are included in the budget as highly likely.
- Rooted School-New Orleans has consistently performed above district averages in reading and math.
- Family satisfaction rates are high at Rooted School-New Orleans.
- Rooted School-New Orleans school has had three years of clean financial audits without any material weaknesses.

Application Weaknesses Summary

- While the applicant demonstrates significant support from industry partners located in Portland, evidence of similar partnerships with Vancouver based industry partners is lacking.
- There is a lack of specificity regarding the contract for services provided by the Rooted Foundation to Rooted School-Vancouver. As a result, it is difficult to project the Foundation's capacity to adequately support Rooted School-Vancouver while simultaneously supporting two operational Rooted schools (New Orleans and Indianapolis).
- Aside from the board chair (who will ultimately resign his board role), there is little to no K-12 experience among the current proposed board members.
- The applicant provided no information regarding the financial health of the foundation, only the schools themselves.
- Rooted School-New Orleans' performance on the New Orleans school report card decreased from a "B" to a "C" during the two years for which data is available (statewide data for 2019-20 was unavailable due to COVID-19 school closures).
- The replicated program has no long-term academic results, given that the first school has not graduated a cohort and its first replication is only in its first year of operation.

Summary of Category Ratings

Opening and maintaining a successful, high-performing charter school depends on having a complete, coherent plan and identifying highly capable individuals to execute that plan. It is not an endeavor for which strengths in some areas can compensate for material weaknesses in others.

Therefore, in order to receive a recommendation for approval, the application must maintain a “Meets” rating in all areas.

Educational Plan and Capacity

MEETS

Organizational Plan and Capacity

MEETS

Financial Plan and Capacity

MEETS

Existing Operators and Planned Growth

MEETS

EDUCATIONAL PLAN AND CAPACITY

Rooted School-Vancouver

MEETS

Summary

Rooted School-Vancouver (RS-V), at capacity, is designed to serve 125 students in Grades 9-12 in Vancouver. The applicant team plans to open in Vancouver, WA, a city, that according to the applicant, is a growing tech hub with approximately 1,600 projected job openings over the next five years (p.15). The location was chosen early in 2020 due to its “burgeoning technology sector and proximity to Portland, another growing technology sector, and gaps in students’ educational experiences and access to STEM careers (pg. 84). Leaders will cultivate a local talent pipeline of “high potential, under-represented youth” through career exploration, techno-literacy, UDL courses, and “deeper learning” (pg. 13).

The applicant team articulates a clear mission for the school, which is maintained and reinforced throughout the proposal. The proposal articulates a specific educational need and compelling case for the proposed school by citing the credential attainment gap for at-risk students in Washington’s southwest region that hinders students from accessing high-demand tech sector jobs in the area. The proposal argues that existing public schools are not providing these opportunities for certain student groups which inhibit their future economic mobility.

The attachments include numerous letters of support from local businesses and business associations regarding the need for the school, helping demonstrate the local need for the school, though most come from Portland, OR. The applicant provides details of multiple meetings and conversations, across varied groups and individuals, using different mediums for meeting and gathering information. However, the evidence provided lacks any enrollment commitments from families or students.

The applicant documents a comprehensive description of the school culture. The applicant desires to create a school culture that is proactive (building attachment), restorative (restorative practice and art therapy), engaging (self-directed learning), and culturally responsive (curriculum and anti-racist PD). The school aims to ensure that students are valued and see themselves and their worth in all aspects of school activity. The applicant suggests that the resulting positive learning environment will nurture and reinforce student agency (pgs. 22-23).

RS-V provides a thorough description of recruitment and enrollment. RS-V documents strategies for reaching the communities comprised predominantly of at-risk students, and specify culturally responsive strategies for informing and engaging them. The concept of individual worth - regardless of role or station in life - underlies the applicant’s engagement strategies (pgs. 30 - 32, Attachment 4).

The Educational Program Terms align to the mission and vision by allowing students self-directed learning time that is based on their interests and passions, while concurrently meeting both state learning standards and local industry expressed standards. The academic model is based on both research and evidenced-based models.

Rather than rely on direct instruction as the sole mode of delivery, the applicant articulates an academic model that “mirrors the 21st century collegiate instructional model” by blending learning, lecture, and small groups (pg. 33). Through flexible blended learning, students will work through “playlists” at their individual pace with teacher support. Teachers and school leaders build playlists from standards-aligned curriculum in each subject area and input content into Google classroom (pg. 34). Every student will be expected to earn an Industry-Based Credential (IBC) each year of high school, with 95% of graduates leaving with four or more IBC’s (pg. 35). IBC’s are earned through completing elective courses designed around regional employers’ priorities and hiring needs (pg. 35).

Activities connected to meeting standards, including industry-based credentialing, project-exhibitions, and internships, are integrated across the curricula and culminate in comprehensive applications of learning (pgs. 39-43). Academic and cultural badges will drive much of the student-directed learning. The rubric presented for project-based learning is documented in detail (Attachment 7). Promotion and graduation exit standards are described with a clear, reasonable explanation of parent involvement and communication.

The applicant documents a thorough processes for instituting support services for diverse learners and at-risk students. RS-V details requirements for identifying, enrolling and engaging students with varied risk factors, including highly capable students, and appropriately engaging parents along the way. RS-V’s understanding of the law is evident throughout the text, however it will be critical that the Director of Student Services be well versed in the implementation of all laws to support diverse learners, particularly in regards to appropriate post-secondary planning for students receiving special education services. RS-V’s description of services includes integrated services of multiple resources and programs existing within the school educational program and along the normal continuum of operations, anchored by a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) system. The program is designed to meet the needs of the learner who has been underserved, arriving in high school with significant gaps in standards mastery. The MTSS system, project-based learning, small group remediation and instruction, the consistent use of data as an instructional planning input, and the SEL and other social-emotional supports will create an environment that supports the learner (pgs. 62 & 63).

Restorative discipline practices are well conceived. The applicant presents a compelling position that its discipline plan and accompanying comprehensive draft policy (Attachment 10) are supported by their core values. The plan is imbued within their learning program by being an integral part of the badge system. As stated in the application: “changing from a punitive to a restorative mindset represents a paradigm shift that McCold and others believe is critical” (pg. 78). This model keeps students in the classroom and, through the professional development program, strengthens confidence in teachers to lead relationship management in their learning environments.

Though RS-V school leaders have yet to be identified, the proposal names three experienced educators that would support the proposed school, both during start up and ongoing through operation (p. 82). These individuals each have experience in school leadership, curriculum and instruction, cultural competence and equity, at-risk students, and family engagement; both at charter schools, traditional public schools, and most recently the Rooted flagship school in New Orleans (pg.83).

In conversations, conducted as part of the due diligence process, with the authorizers of other Rooted schools, it was evident that the need for a highly-qualified school leader, with ties to the local community, was imperative for a successful launch of each school. While a proposed school leader candidate, who is originally from the Vancouver area, did partake in the capacity interview and the public forum, information regarding his specific qualifications were not provided in the application and therefore were unable to be formally evaluated.

Overall, the applicant provides a plan for a strong educational program. The educational plan offers detailed information for planning and implementing a quality operating charter school. The applicant offers focuses attention to its overarching mission and vision, and accompanying long term goals - all related to high tech, primarily computer software related career connected learning.

Educational Plan and Capacity: Analysis and Evaluator Comments

Strengths

- Enrollment Projections are modest with 125 student maximum enrollment grades 9-12 (pg. 5).
- The applicant articulates a compelling case for the need for the proposed school by citing the credential attainment gap for at-risk students in Washington's southwest region that hinders students from accessing high-demand tech sector jobs in the area (pg. 11). The existing public schools are not providing these opportunities for marginalized student groups (pg. 13) which inhibits their future economic mobility.
- The lead applicant (founder of Rooted School-New Orleans) has "met with over 50 Portland/Vancouver stakeholders, including local educators, politicians, business owners, faith-based organizations, and CBO leaders" (pg. 17 and Attachment 3).
- The applicant describes a multifaceted approach to marketing and recruitment that includes social media, leveraging district middle school leaders, partnering with community organizations and attending community events (pg. 31). Marketing and informational materials will be provided in multiple languages and the applicant's stated focus will be on at-risk, low income, students with disabilities, and transitional bilingual students (pg. 31). To retain students the applicant will administer surveys, host town halls, and provide a culturally relevant curriculum (pg. 32).
- RS-New Orleans has retained more than 90% of its founding class, suggesting parent and student satisfaction with the model (pg. 31).
- Applicant details a comprehensive overview of the learning environment, including the experiences for a student across a day, term, year and career at RS-V. It ties learning experiences, and the research behind methodology, to the mission, vision and EPTs (P. 39-43).
- In Attachment 6, RS-V presents a description of the curriculum development plan with details of components or content to be determined, such as credentials and contracts, with scope and sequence. These will be relevant to local technology industry needs and skill sets in local jobs.
- The application includes a comprehensive array of diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments across core content areas (pg. 52). The school will subscribe to additional performance and non-cognitive skills standards: Hewlett Foundation deeper learning competencies to assess IBC projects; MHA Lab Skills Building Blocks; Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards; and IBC standards (pgs. 53-54).
- RS-V will "provide credit opportunities for students that will exceed Washington's 24 credit graduation requirements in math, science, social studies, and electives" by five credits (pg. 57).
- Transcripts will translate credits earned into courses taken, grades, badges, IBCs, SBA and WCAS scores, and accompany each student's individual portfolio (pg. 57).
- The school and the foundation supporting it are committed to Rooted's "Four Year Promise" that all students will graduate with a diploma in one hand and a job offer in the other (pg. 58).
- A 360-degree student support team, comprised of the school leader, Director of Student Services, and a relevant teacher will strategize and monitor interventions for individual students (pg. 62).

- There are weekly data dive meetings in which the school leader, director of CTE, and teaching staff come together to review course completion, badge assessment, and adaptive intervention program data, along with culture and climate data (pg. 62).
- Hiring the school leader by May 2021 will provide sufficient time (15 months) for the school leader to prepare for the school opening, including establishing relationships with local industry, in the Fall of 2022 to meet the needs just 35 students in Year 1 (82).

Weaknesses

- Most letters of support from potential internship/industry partners come from entities located in Portland, Oregon. Of those entities, many are current board members. While this is evidence of strong board commitment, and Portland and Vancouver are geographically close, it is unclear how much community support is based specifically in the Vancouver area (Attachment 3).
- The applicants demonstrate significant support from Portland industry partners but could only discuss potential support and partners from Vancouver in an anecdotal manner during the capacity interview.
- Though the founder (Mr. Johnson) conducted focus groups with Vancouver public school students, these focus groups were with only eight students and no evidence was provided regarding enrollment commitments from families. (p. 18).
- The mechanisms, through which Rooted’s teachers will co-plan industry-based project-based learning with local industry partners in technology, are not fully explained (pg. 37).
- In the capacity interview, the applicant team appeared unfamiliar with Washington State's Career and Technical Education program standards and was unable to articulate how its industry-focused self-directed learning electives were aligned with those standards.
- Confirmed in the capacity interview, RS-V would use the DuoLingo as the foundation for language study, but would build in supplemental learning experiences to develop fluency, cultural experiences. It remains unclear how students would earn the requisite credits in world language study towards graduation accordingly.
- The applicants do not plan to offer extra-curricular opportunities at first, unless students propose ideas and plans through an established process (pg. 59) and funding is available at the school leader's discretion. The lack of activities and sports may dissuade some students from attending or staying at the school.
- Staffing plans, enrollment projections, and the ELL program description of supports in the application and in the capacity interview may be insufficient to effectively meet the needs of diverse learners and at-risk students. At full capacity there is only 1 Director of Student Services, a .5 FTE interventionist and 1 ELL teacher to serve the estimated 15% students with disabilities and 15% ELLs (pg. 61 & Attachment 21).
- Given that the first school has not graduated a cohort and the second school is only in its first year of operation, the long-term efficacy of the educational program remains unknown.

ORGANIZATIONAL PLAN AND CAPACITY

Rooted School-Vancouver

MEETS

Summary

RS-V will be the first school in Washington State to use a foundation/school support model. This is different than schools established by traditional Charter Management Organizations (CMOs) or schools that have contracted with Educational Service Providers to date. While the school will receive support during its launch and operation, services such as back-office supports will not be provided. One positive of this type of relationship is that local control appears to be maintained, however, the local board will need to further define the relationship through a contractual agreement and monitor the agreement closely in order to ensure that the school is receiving appropriate support from the foundation.

The current board chair, Jonathan Johnson, will transition off of the board once a replacement chair is identified. Mr. Johnson will also ensure that “the RS-V board and chair have the skills, capacity, and knowledge to operate a high-functioning charter school board and hold the school leader accountable within the Rooted model” (pg. 88). The selection of the appropriate board chair as well as the recruitment of board members with specific K-12 public education experience will be critical as this is an area of weakness for board as it is currently composed. However, as mentioned in the Educational Plan and Capacity section of this report, Mr. Johnson, as well as two other foundation staff, all of whom possess K-12 experience, will assist with the launch and ongoing support of the school.

The board will contract with BoardOnTrack for professional development in the school’s planning year and Year 1 to help ensure best practices in governance (pg. 88). The appropriate code of ethics and conflict of interest policies are included in the application and there are no real or perceived conflicts of interest within the founding board (Attachment 16).

The applicant provides an organizational reporting structure for the proposed school and has clear lines of authority identified below the school leader for Years 1 and 5 of the sought charter term (Attachment 17). The narrative also identifies members of the proposed school’s administrative and instructional teams (pg. 95).

As mentioned above, the support structure between the Rooted Foundation and the individual Rooted schools is underdeveloped. The foundation staff responded to questions about their supports for the schools in ways that described close, ongoing and frequent contact to address with whatever issues arise - whether those be leadership coaching, hiring, development, etc. But this level of service is not aligned with what appears in the draft agreement provided for in Attachment 13.

An Industry Advisory Council will provide needed data regarding the industry landscape and workforce projections and needs. The composition of the Industry Advisory Council will include a board member of the proposed school as the chair of the council (pg. 96).

The applicant provides a clear description of the services to be provided by several organizations, including sample contracts or terms for those relationship that are aligned with the proposed school’s mission.

Partners include:

- Whole Village Art Therapy – Art therapy free to students as part of the proposed school’s behavior plan. A signed Memorandum of Understanding is included in the application (Attachment 20).
- True Measure Collaborative – Special education professional development and support for staff and program development. A sample list of services and the associated fee levels are provided (Attachment 20).
- Washington State Charter Schools Association – Technical assistance, professional development, parent organizing, and advocacy support. A list of supports provided with membership cost is included (Attachment 20).
- Joule Growth Partners – Financial management and operations support for proposed school and the board finance committee. A detailed draft statement of work is provided (Attachment 20)
- BoardOnTrack – Professional development for the governing board. A list of services at each membership cost level is included (Attachment 20).

RS-V provides a comprehensive overview of staffing from recruitment, to hiring, to evaluation. Leaders seek successful experience in working with at-risk youth and a commitment to full transparency in sharing strengths and weaknesses. The teacher recruiting and interviewing process includes online and in-person contact and indicates that candidates will be expected to visit a “partner school” to conduct a sample lesson and the expense is noted in the budget (Start Up Budget line 176). The student teacher ratio is low and commendable.

The applicant presents a thorough professional development plan (pgs. 115-117). It is defined by and aligned to the school’s mission, vision and EPT’s, with focused underpinnings of equity, inclusion and agency for both staff and students. Staff members will be self-directed in most of their ongoing professional development during summer induction and ongoing throughout the school year, after receiving acculturation to the tenets of the Rooted school model.

RS-V details a performance framework tied to everyday formative assessments as well as interim and summative assessments aligned to the state standards. Local curriculum driven summative assessments align to the SBAC. Results will be shared in real-time with students and staff, regularly with parents and board members (pgs. 119-121). Performance standards results inform professional development for staff individually and collectively. The school will use data from assessments to track progress to meeting the mission, vision and school goals (Attachment 24).

The applicant has a well-conceived plan for securing a facility and is cognizant of securing one local to its target student population. RS-V has identified two properties, both of which will meet the school’s short- and long-term goals.

The applicant identifies the high-level tasks that need to be accomplished to open the proposed school. Tasks are identified within the capacity areas of governance and management, staffing, curriculum and planning, students and families, operations, facilities, furnishings and equipment, and finance (Attachment 27). The plan as detailed aligns with the start-up budget (Attachment 28).

Overall, the applicant has provided the needed documentation of legal status, has a clear organization

structure for the proposed school, created an extensive professional development plan, and clearly possesses knowledge of school start-up and operations. However, the majority of this knowledge is held at the foundation level. The current founding board members, aside from the current board chair, have no school management experience or knowledge of school finance, law, or operations. The industry-based experience of the board is important; but the board as it is currently comprised, will be highly reliant on the Rooted Foundation until additional capacity is built internally.

Organizational Plan and Capacity: Analysis and Evaluator Comments

Strengths

- The board reporting structure is clearly identified in the application. The board will be responsible for oversight of the academic, financial, and operational affairs of the proposed school. The board will hire and evaluate the school leader. The school leader will be responsible for the hiring, management, compensation, and support of all other school staff. The board will develop and approve the school's budget and all school policies (pg. 89).
- There will be a parent representative on the board of directors (pg. 90).
- RS-V will have an Industry Advisory Council (IAC), composed of technology representatives supporting the school. This industry-connected advisory group will weigh in on partnerships, workforce development issues, IBC offerings, internship and career opportunities (pg. 96). This is a "critical stakeholder connection for the school, given its industry-connected model and mission, is with industry partners." (pg. 96)
- The proposal provides well-detailed descriptions of how parents and employees can raise concerns and grievances at the school (pgs.97-99).
- The proposed board and the Rooted Foundation members possess significant operational experience. Members of the board are experienced in business startup and operations and have local industry connections that would help secure critical partners (Attachment 15).
- The response outlines robust sources for diverse teacher candidates (pg. 106).
- Teachers' pedagogical skills would be assessed via SMART goals and the Danielson Framework (pg. 107).
- The leadership evaluation tools selected are the Leadership Practice Inventory and a Rooted Foundation scorecard. The scorecard is designed to monitor the progress during the plan year and beyond. It will include collaboratively developed annual goals set by the board with the school leader. The process of monitoring is identified by the applicant (pgs. 112-113). The inventory tool is based upon established research and focuses on the attributes of exemplar leaders (Leadership Practices Inventory).
- A comprehensive professional development plan is provided and includes 20 days of staff professional development prior to the opening of school each year. Professional development will also occur during 13 early dismissal days and nine full days during the course of the year. Professional development will include data analysis, lesson plan adjustments and individualized coaching. The instructional leadership team will also have separate professional development through which school-level data will be analyzed and trends will be identified (pgs. 115-117).
- Professional learning in the summer for new and founding staff is designed to provide a deep understanding of the desired school culture, orient staff to effective strategies for the population of students to be served, and provide time for connection to one another and reflection on their practice (Attachment 23).
- The response includes an array of diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment tools to gauge student progress and identify ongoing academic needs (pgs. 119-120).
- Students will take industry certification assessments aligned to their respective courses of study (pg.

120).

- The Rooted team has previous experience acquiring facilities in two cities (pg. 130).
- The applicant provides a description of the general practices that will be included in the health and safety plan of the proposed school. The plan includes protocols for COVID-19 precautions, security monitoring, background checks, immunization and health check requirements, faculty as mandatory reporters, and emergency training in CPR, AEDs, and first aid. The school commits to adhere to all Washington State health and safety laws (pgs. 126 & 127).

Weaknesses

- While the named team members and board members possess experience and connections that would prove useful in getting students college and career ready for the regional tech sector in Vancouver, other than the founder, who will vacate the board when a school leader is identified, there is little to no K-12 experience among the proposed board members. This is concerning because they may lack the capacity to provide rigorous oversight over the school's academic programming and hold the foundation accountable for high quality curriculum and instructional supports (Section 15).
- The included sample agreement, between the foundation and the proposed school, (Attachment 13) provides no clear set of responsibilities or services provided to the school by the foundation. It does, however, outline the school's responsibilities to the foundation, creating a one-way flow of commitment. Given all of the educational and operations expertise that will be provided by the foundation while developing and launching the proposed school, the sample agreement is not sufficient. During the capacity interview, the foundation CEO and current board chair noted that services can change from year to year, that the foundation will not operate as a typical CMO, and that the foundation team offers advice, not management or governance.
- During the interview, the founder demonstrated limited knowledge of district schools, including a career and skills center high school that provides some similar programming.
- The applicant states that the Rooted Foundation may become an Educational Service Provider (ESP) for the proposed school in Year 3 but gives no indication of what would trigger that designation aside from the payment of annual fees for service (Attachment 20).
- During the capacity interview, the team acknowledged that its teacher salaries are benchmarked lower than surrounding districts and schools for a significantly longer school year (11 months), but is confident that the "small school, progressive atmosphere, interesting model and robust teacher coaching" will still draw qualified candidates based on ability to staff its other two schools. The group did not mention how disparities of cost of living and/or established talent pools and pipelines for charter schools in Washington would impact using the same strategy they employed in Louisiana or Indiana, nor how this approach might impede securing a diverse teacher cohort.
- During the performance task at the capacity interview, all board members participated and asked targeted questions about the student experience, requested relevant data, and proposed/assigned action items that reflected robust academic oversight. However, Mr. Johnson and Ms. Karpinski and Rooted School-New Orleans school leader responded to almost all questions about the school's academic model and approach.

FINANCIAL PLAN AND CAPACITY

Rooted School-Vancouver

MEETS

Summary

The applicant identifies the governing board and school leader as responsible for the financial policies and procedures of the proposed school. Support will be provided by the Rooted Foundation and Joule Growth Partners (JGP), a financial services firm with substantial charter school experience. JGP will provide accounting and financial consulting services. Board oversight will include budget approval, monthly financial report review and quarterly reviews of financial data by the board’s Finance Committee. School leader responsibilities include development and presentation to the board for approval of the school’s annual budget and 5-year forecasts (pg. 131).

Numerous team members have experience in both non-profit and for-profit financial management, fundraising and overseeing internal controls with schools or operations. In order to help focus its capacities on the educational program in the school’s startup years, RS-V will contract with a well-known back office provider for payroll, budgeting, accounting, and various other financial supports.

Overall, the financial plan and proposed budget are reasonably sound.

Financial Plan and Capacity: Analysis and Evaluator Comments

Strengths

- The school commits to using the appropriate federal accounting principles and reporting guidelines (GAAP and GASB) as required by Washington State. The general ledger will be set-up with the appropriate accounts and sub-accounts (pg. 131).
- “The board receives monthly financial reports delivered by the treasurer, with support from the standing finance committee, who will complete detailed quarterly reviews in addition to the board’s monthly review” (pg. 131).
- The board will be required to approve all contracts or goods and services to be purchased that are valued over \$25,000. Expenditures over this threshold will require competitive bids and the board will select the vendor. Purchasing requisition processes will be established and followed for all purchases. The proposed school will issue purchasing cards to the school leader and the director of school operations (pg. 132).
- Internal controls include the monthly reconciliation of all bank accounts held by the proposed school, and review of the reconciliation by the director of school operations (DSO), who does not approve expenditures. All checks are received and deposited by the DSO within three days. Cash is received and counted by two employees (pg. 133).
- The applicant has provided a completed budget workbook and budget narrative that align with the services and instructional model presented in the application. The budget narrative includes assumptions made in the development of the budget for all major revenue and expense lines and their anticipated percentage increase, over the five years. A contingency plan is provided and its assumptions are detailed (Attachments 28 & 29).
- Letters of support from each of the major funders are provided and only those grants from Washington State are included in the budget as highly likely (Attachments 29 and 31). Rooted’s founder claims to have raised over \$4,500,000 for Rooted since its founding in 2014, and has provided a comprehensive fundraising plan to support RS-V.
- Until the school leader is hired and the educational partnership agreement (see sample in Attachment 13) is executed, the founder and CEO of Rooted School Foundation and the Rooted School—Vancouver board will lead all fundraising efforts (pg. 137).

Weaknesses

- In Year 1 of serving students, the school’s net operating income is \$571,000, which represents 23% of total income. Rather than spending 80-90% of operating revenues on staff and infrastructure, the school is keeping a large percentage on reserve in Year 1.
- The group’s decision to set the proposed school’s teacher salary schedule below that of local districts, for an extended school year, may impact its recruitment and retention of qualified staff.
- The founder did not offer a compelling rationale for how the 1% Foundation fee (beginning in Year 3) was determined, how staff determined a fair market value for services to be rendered (fundraising, human resources, leadership coaching, curriculum support, etc.), how the 1% fee was in sync with the supports being provided to current schools as opposed to the draft agreement submitted with the

application, or how the Foundation would be financially sustainable over the life of the charter term.

- The primary weakness in the application for this category is the newness of each of the current schools. The applicant was only able to provide limited information regarding the financial health of Rooted School-Indianapolis school because it is only in Year 1 of operation. In addition, no information regarding the financial health of the foundation was provided. It is unknown if the foundation has sufficient commitments to sustain its operation through the life of the proposed school's charter.

EXISTING OPERATORS

Rooted School-Vancouver

MEETS

Summary

The Rooted School Foundation is the referenced existing operator. The application presents the academic readiness, team readiness, family satisfaction, and operational and financial readiness at Rooted School-New Orleans, the flagship school of Rooted School Foundation. The applicants also present a summary of the planning year of Rooted School-Indianapolis, the second school affiliated with Rooted School Foundation, which began serving students in the 2020-21 school year.

Given that Rooted School-Vancouver would essentially replicate the Rooted School-New Orleans model, the academic performance of the school was provided. Results indicate that Rooted School-New Orleans earned a performance score of “B” in its first year, dropping to a “C” in year 2 (comparatively, the school system in Orleans Parish is rated as a “C” overall). While student assessment scores were low in 2018-19 (rated as a “D”) the student growth scores were rated as “B” (more information and context can be found on pgs. 140-141). The applicant suggested that relatively high student and staff retention rate indicates satisfaction among students, parents, and teachers.

Though there are some early promising results of Rooted School-New Orleans, the long-term efficacy of the model and the overall capacity of the foundation to support such rapid growth have yet to be determined.

Existing Operators: Analysis and Evaluator Comments

Strengths

- Rooted School—New Orleans has consistently performed above district averages in reading and math (pg. 139).
- Improvements in students' academic performance at Rooted School-New Orleans are generally positive; 88% of teachers returned from 2019 to 2020, and family satisfaction rates are strong among survey respondents (which do not represent a majority of parents) (p.139).
- Rooted School—New Orleans has had three years of clean financial audits without any material weaknesses (pg. 140).
- Attachment 36 presents an adequate portfolio summary for Rooted Schools, with strong media endorsement for Rooted School New Orleans.

Weaknesses

- In year 1, Rooted School—New Orleans received a School Performance Score of "B." In year 2, the school received a School Performance Score of "C" (pg. 139). There was a drop in English I results on the Louisiana LEAP assessment from 41% proficiency in Year 1 to 35% in Year 2 and a drop in Algebra I results from 33% in Year 1 to 23% in Year 2 (pg. 140). There was a decrease in student retention from 93% in Year 1 one to 83% in Year 2 (pg. 140). The teacher retention rate decreased from 100% in Year 1 to 71% in Year 2 (pg. 141).
- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there are only two years of year-end student performance results. This makes it difficult to identify consistent trends.
- The second school only opened in September of 2020 so there is no academic data to review.
- The Foundation's model of support has not been firmly established. In the capacity interview, the Foundation staff's responses to questions about its relationship with the Rooted schools demonstrated a marked tension between their current way of functioning, which was described as on-call direct coaching as necessary with no clearly defined levels or hourly commitments to each school, and a more hands-off model as a vendor providing services to schools across the country. This was most apparent (and not resolved through subsequent questions) when they were asked about planning for their own capacity and what logistical challenges they expected having schools thousands of miles and several time zones apart.
- This lack of clarity also raised concerns about the sustainability of staff roles, specifically the Rooted School-New Orleans school leader. Responses and discussion around her role as school leader in New Orleans and the percentage of time she will pledge to Vancouver (approximate 0.3 FTE) will challenge her capacity in both positions.

EVALUATION TEAM BIOGRAPHIES

Adam Aberman, Team Lead

Adam Aberman is the CEO and Founder of The Learning Collective. Adam has profound content expertise in technology-based innovation and a 20-year track record educating young people in numerous venues from traditional public schools to school district administration trainings. Over the past 17 years, Adam has assessed over 250 current, and 100 proposed, charter schools nationally (California, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New York and Washington), including lead writer for charter renewal inspection visits, charged with evaluating the school and writing the report that is submitted to authorizers. Adam has led teams of reviewers of charter school applications, submitting the finalized application reviews to boards of education.

Recently, Adam worked with the Tennessee State Board of Education to lead its strategic planning and goal-setting process and is currently helping lead the Orleans Parish School Board's new charter petition evaluation process. Adam has also worked with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) and other organizations on evaluation and strategic planning projects regarding Florida, Idaho, Minnesota, New York, Oklahoma and Ohio authorizers. Other TLC clients have included Alliance College-Ready Public Schools, Chicago Public Schools, College Board, Inglewood Unified School District, KIPP, Tiger Woods Foundation and UCLA. Adam is also the founder, former board member and current board member emeritus of www.icouldbe.org, the non-profit Internet-based career mentoring program that has served over 25,000 nationally since 2000.

Adam began his career in education as a Spanish bilingual public school teacher in Los Angeles. Adam received a B.A. from Vassar College and Master in Public Policy, with an emphasis on Education, from Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.

Gayle Burnett, Evaluator

Gayle Burnett has been leading and facilitating courageous conversations regarding diversity, race, and equity for much of her lifetime. She is the co-author of *Peace in Everyday Relationships* (Hunter House Publishers, 2003), a fellow alum of Harvard's Strategic Data Project, and a certified Gallup Strengths Coach. Gayle's career choices have been diverse. She was as an assistant vice president and analyst for a Wall Street clearinghouse bank in the international markets of Singapore, Australia and London, a past partner and principal of Inter-Change Consultants, from 1990 to the 2004, she worked with a wide array of diversity and leadership clients, including Ernst & Young, Lucent Technologies, AT&T and the NCAA. More recently, Gayle served the Atlanta Public Schools by developing leadership programming, providing research and analysis to senior leaders, and supporting and facilitating the development of innovative learning environments in several capacities, including the Executive Director of the Office of Innovation. Finally, she worked with The Rensselaerville Institute as the Special Projects Guru & Interim President, supporting that organization's transition of leadership while maintaining excellence in performance. Gayle holds an MA in Economics from the City University of New York.

Andra Maughan, Evaluator

Andra Maughan has expertise as a school leader both in the public charter school sector and in the public district sector. She is currently an Assistant Director for Inclusive Education in the Kent School District (KSD). Prior to joining KSD, she was the Head of School at Rainier Valley Leadership Academy, the Principal of Excel Public Charter School, a Principal in Seattle Public Schools for 3 years and an Assistant Principal at Chief Sealth International High School for 3 years.

As a school leader, she has experience leading schools designated as Title 1, Dual Language, and International in addition to her work as a school leader in the charter sector. She co-led the transition for Rainier Valley Leadership Academy in their amendment to their charter and separation from Green Dot Public Schools and partnered with community-based organizations to improve and increase access to programming and services for scholars and families. She is passionate about serving all students and has worked to ensure equitable access to opportunities for students.

Prior to becoming a school administrator, she was a special education consultant, a special education teacher, and taught in South Korea for a year. She holds her Principal's Certificate from the University of Washington's Danforth Educational Leadership Program, her Masters in Special Education from the University of Washington, her Bachelor's Degree from Central Washington University, and holds a Certificate of Education Finance from Georgetown University.

She is from Eastern Washington (Richland) via Helena, MT, but has spent her entire professional career in the Seattle area with a focus on schools in South Seattle.

Dr. Gil Mendoza, Evaluator

Dr. Gil Mendoza is a partner in a leadership consulting firm, Transform Through Team Trust (T4). He retired in 2019 from Washington state service with the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), where he served in several Assistant Superintendent Roles and up to state Deputy Superintendent. He served on the Washington State Charter School Commission as the state Superintendent of Public Instruction's designee.

Prior to OSPI he spent his public-school career as a teacher, counselor, principal and central office administrator, up to the district superintendent level. He has held senior leadership roles in both small and large districts, and within the 2-year college system, serving on the transition team for a newly created technical college.

Dr. Mendoza has held numerous elected and appointed leadership positions in state professional organizations and service, including several other individually, governor appointed assignments to the Council on Vocational Education, the Professional Educator Standards Board, and the Washington Student Achievement Council.

His undergraduate degree with teaching credentials in both basic and special education is from Gonzaga University. His Master's degree is from the University of Washington, in Vocational and Special Education, and his Doctorate in Educational Leadership from Seattle University.

Dr. Mendoza served as a commissioned officer and captain in the United States Army, worked in the computer software services industry, and with the Washington State Department of Corrections prior to beginning his career in public education.

Heather Wendling, Evaluator

Heather Wendling is the Director of Learning at the National Association for Charter School Authorizers (NACSA). This position allows her to leverage her perspectives as an educator, attorney, parent, and advocate for quality schools for all kids. Heather previously served as a Senior School Evaluator and the Director for New Charters at the SUNY Charter Schools Institute. At SUNY, Heather contributed to the oversight of all 147 SUNY authorized charter schools, evaluated their qualitative and quantitative data, and ultimately made determinations about the strength of their academic programs to inform their respective renewal recommendations. She also produced the annual request for proposals, provided guidance and technical support for potential applicants, served as the lead academic reviewer for all new charter proposals through multiple levels of evaluative analysis, and ultimately produced comprehensive summaries of findings to support recommendations for charter approval to the SUNY Charter School Committee trustees. After charter approval, Heather also designed systems and strategies to support the 32 schools approved during her tenure through planning, launch, and their first year of operation to facilitate the strongest possible start and the most optimal outcomes for students.

Outside of her full-time position, Heather provides a variety of consulting services for select clients. Recently, Heather helped establish the Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge's initiative to authorize the first charter schools in the Middle East by designing a comprehensive performance framework to infuse clarity and accountability in an emerging sector.

Heather earned her BA in Political Science from SUNY Stony Brook, her MST degree from Pace University Graduate School of Education, and her JD from the University of Connecticut School of Law.