



Innovative Education Partnership, Inc. Board of Trustees, the sponsoring entity and founding team of HOPE Academy, is honored to present our appeal to the Tennessee State Board of Education.

Highlights from our presentation:

The Community Needs HOPE Academy

- We already have over 300 children whose parents have registered on our interest list and many of them have attended events and meetings and they've written emails to us and to the Blount County School Board.
- We have signatures of over 500 county residents who support HOPE Academy.
- We have letters of support from the leaders of some of Blount County's top employers, which were included as part of our application.
- We have the support of Mayor Tom Bickers of Louisville, the largest municipality in the Blount County School district.
- Business leaders want a STEM academy.
- Parents want a non-tuition public school of choice in Blount County, a small, community school with equal emphasis on strong academics and strong character.
- Community leaders want the strong accountability of a charter school and the bar it sets for surrounding schools.

But most of all, the community is urging us to do better for our kids.

US Census data show that Blount County's population, and Blount County's school-age population, grew at faster rates between 2000 and 2010 than Tennessee's statewide totals.

- Blount County's population grew by over 16%, while Tennessee's population grew by about 11.5%. Blount County's school-age population—those between 5 and 19—grew by over 13% while Tennessee's grew by less than 7%.
- Within Blount County are three school districts:
 - Maryville City Schools enrollment grew by almost 17% and Alcoa City Schools enrollment grew by over 24% during this time as revealed on Tennessee Department of Education Report Cards.
 - Blount County Schools enrollment grew by only 2.7%.

- Comparing population estimates to public school enrollment data reveals that there are more than 2,600 children in Blount County between the ages of 5 and 17 who are not enrolled in any of the County's three public school systems. These include home-schooled students, private school students, and those who have transferred to other public school systems.
- There are more than 2,000 additional school-aged children in Blount County in 2010 than in 2000, but most of them have apparently opted out of the Blount County School system, either by locating within Maryville or Alcoa, or by transferring to other public, private, or home-schooling options.
- Those who don't have the resources don't have the same choices.

HOPE Academy, as a non-tuition public school of choice for Blount County, provides that needed option.

At no point in this process has Blount County Schools proven that HOPE Academy would be harmful to the community.

Indeed, they have never even made a case that HOPE Academy was contrary to the best interests of the community.

Blount County's Students Need HOPE Academy

- The mission of Blount County Schools is in part to "graduate students who are college and career ready and prepared to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century workplace." The data reveal that Blount County Schools are struggling to serve at least part of this mission.
- ACT scores as recently reported in the local media have been well below college-ready levels.

LEA	Average ACT Composite Score	Percent Achieving College Readiness in all 4 subject areas
Maryville	24.4	48%
Alcoa	22.4	36%
Blount County	19.1	11% (Below the Tennessee state average of 15% readiness)

- HOPE Academy will be a K5 school upon opening, but these statistics are still relevant. College readiness preparation starts well before high school.
- We also now know from the letter from Mr. Britt following our second denial that 6 of the 13 elementary schools in the Blount County School system are on the NCLB target list for 2011-2012.
- Those schools represent over 46% of our elementary school children. The parents of these children deserve to have an option.

- System-wide TCAP results, also from Mr. Britt's letter, reveal that our district's elementary students are testing below state standards in math and reading and language arts.

2010-2011 TCAP Results: Percent Proficient or Advanced, Grades 3-8

	Math	Reading/Language Arts
State Standard	40%	49%
BCS Grade 3	47%	40%
BCS Grade 4	30%	39%
BCS Grade 5	32%	52%
BCS Grade 6	37%	53%
BCS Grade 7	33%	39%
BCS Grade 8	33%	34%

- We have set higher standards than these for the students of HOPE Academy, and we look forward to working with Blount County Schools to improve district-wide student performance.

At no point in this process has Blount County Schools proven that HOPE Academy would be harmful to all of the students in the district.

Indeed, we think the data reveal that a continuation of the status quo would be contrary to the best interests of many of the students in the district.

The Blount County School District Needs HOPE Academy

- Mr. Britt and the Blount County Schools Board of Education claimed that HOPE Academy would be harmful to the school district, and this was based primarily on perceived substantial negative fiscal impact. Tennessee Treasurer David Lillard has already denied this claim, noting clearly that the Blount County School system did not make a compelling case.
- Another component of the denial of our charter application was that HOPE Academy was not *needed* in the district.
- Quotes from the recently-released five-year strategic plan for Blount County Schools:
 - All Blount County Schools will adopt a comprehensive reading program
 - All Blount County Schools will adopt a comprehensive mathematics program
 - All Blount County Schools will adopt a comprehensive science program featuring:

- Problem solving skills
 - Inquiry-based practices
 - Coordination of science and math programs
 - Supports Tennessee's growth in STEM education
- All Blount County Schools will adopt a school-wide Positive Support Program to inform and focus students on life skills and citizenship
- BCS will partner with parents and the community to create a culture of service and support to ensure all students learn and accomplish their educational goals
- BCS will develop partnerships with business and community leaders for the purpose of identifying needs and resources to enhance school success
- Blount County Schools will develop and integrate STEM components throughout the K-12 curriculum
- Students in grades 6-12 will have access to an interactive smart pad (iPad) with electronic textbooks, individualized assignments, and educational apps to enhance the educational experience
- A STEM academy will be developed to focus on students' skills in these curricular areas

Blount County Schools has never made a convincing case that HOPE Academy would harm the district, or that they do not need HOPE Academy.

All they have done is convince us that they don't want HOPE Academy.

Examples of this:

- In June, shortly after submitting our application, our attorney Mr. Tab Burkhalter was contacted by the Acting Chairman of the Blount County Schools Board of Education [Rob Webb] and asked if the district could "punt" to the state and not review our application or vote at all.
- Blount County Director of Schools Mr. Rob Britt told several of us in August that some of the BCS Board members did not even intend to read our revised application to evaluate our responses to their initial round of comments.
- In that same conversation, Mr. Britt asked us why we hadn't applied to take over an existing failing school, but we had to point out that we did not have such authority under existing charter school law.
- Several efforts to engage in dialogue with Board members went unanswered.
- Many of the reasons for denial went well beyond the official rubric for evaluation.

- New criticisms were raised following our revised application that were not raised on the original application (although they could have been); they had to come up with new items upon which to base a denial.
- The fact is that we worked long, hard hours in good faith to respond to each and every comment in great detail, including those that went beyond the official rubric, yet they denied us in a special meeting that lasted for only three minutes, without a single question or opportunity to speak.

All of these things along with the incredibly low scoring of both of our applications just reveal that *the district never intended to give us a chance.*

HOPE Academy fits into the Blount County Schools' strategic plan academically. But the 15-page strategic plan does not establish how Blount County Schools will do these things. It is a listing of goals. The district does not yet have a clear plan to create a STEM academy.

Heritage High School Junior Peyton Brackett was recently quoted on the topic of the new STEM curriculum in the Maryville Daily Times as follows:

"If I had my mind opened up to these opportunities in middle school, I would know what academic path I wanted to take in college."

Mr. Brackett is telling us that high school is too late.

- We have a solid plan for a STEM Academy, and ours will expose students to STEM ideas from the first day they walk in the door.
- Our board, with the sage guidance of a proven performer in Tennessee's public schools, Pat Bradley, has put together a very clear and solid plan to achieve a somewhat similar yet arguably more ambitious set of goals.
- Our plan is well over 500 pages long and represents the work of her 31 years of experience as a proven leader for student achievement as well as the cumulative effort of successful business leaders, professionals and dedicated community volunteers.
- Our plan comes at a *considerably* lower cost to the district and also carries the high academic expectations of a charter school in the state of Tennessee.

We applaud the goals laid out in the district's strategic plan, and we look forward to helping Blount County Schools achieve and exceed them.

At no point in this process has Blount County Schools successfully proven that HOPE Academy would be harmful to the district.

Indeed, as so clearly laid out in the district's new strategic plan, they have proven that HOPE Academy is essential to the achievement of their worthy yet ambitious goals.