

Summary of Recommended BESE Action

The Department recommends that BESE approve the plan submitted by Greater Grace Charter Academy. An approval authorizes the applicant to launch one Type 2 charter school serving grades K-8 in St. James Parish no earlier than fall 2016.

Applicant's Proposal

Greater Grace proposes to launch as a blended learning K-8 charter school in St. James Parish to serve students who are struggling or attend low-performing schools. Greater Grace will use a combination of online learning with in-person support and differentiated group instruction. The blended learning model will be supported by an extended school day that allows time for remediation through virtual learning. Student instruction will be supported by on-site teachers for all core subjects.

Applicant History

Experience Level	New Operator	Previous BESE Applications	Yes (Denied)	Previous District Decision	Denied by St. James Parish

Department Recommendation Rationale

- **Department Recommendation: Approve – Authorizing Greater Grace: a) provides students in St. James and the surrounding River Parishes with a quality educational alternative; and, b) outweighs any potential adverse impact on St. James Parish, including on the enrollment of Fifth Ward Elementary, a school in St. James Parish's west bank with historically low-enrollment.**
- When determining the Department's recommendation, the Department considered SchoolWorks' review of Greater Grace's application, engaged both St. James Parish school officials and stakeholders to identify and consider additional local factors pertaining to Greater Grace's application, and reviewed the district's independent evaluator's review of Greater Grace's application.
- In consideration of the above factors, the Department recommends that BESE approve Greater Grace's charter application.
 - Authorizing Greater Grace provides students in St. James and the River Parishes with additional quality educational opportunities. Providing these opportunities outweighs the slight potential enrollment impact on any one particular school in St. James Parish, particularly Fifth Ward Elementary. In evaluating the enrollment decline of St. James Parish and specifically Fifth Ward Elementary, the consistent pattern of enrollment decline for Fifth Ward Elementary both predates and exists irrespective of whether BESE authorizes Greater Grace. Furthermore, Greater Grace seeks to serve students regionally from across the River Parishes rather than one specific neighborhood, mitigating any school-specific impact. Based off the Department's conservative assumptions, only ~10% of Greater Grace's students at launch (~15-20 students) would come potentially from Fifth Ward Elementary. For comparison, Fifth Ward Elementary's enrollment declined by ~30 students between the 2013-14 and 2014-15 school years.
 - The Department agrees with SchoolWorks' review of the quality of Greater Grace's academic model. Furthermore, Greater Grace's blended-learning academic model differentiates itself from the St. James Parish Virtual Academy by specifically focusing on providing individualized, in-person support for core classes for historically underserved students. In addition, Greater Grace, as a Type 2 charter school, would be able to serve students from across the River Parishes, not just St. James.
 - As part of the Department's approval recommendation, prior to launching, Greater Grace must still obtain the appropriate approval to open from the Federal Eastern District Court of Louisiana due to St. James Parish's desegregation status.

APPENDIX: SchoolWorks Recommendation – Overview

- SchoolWorks' Recommendation: Approve
- Key highlights from SchoolWorks' review:
 - Greater Grace proposes an effective plan to measure student performance goals using baseline data, and an individualized tracking system to evaluate each student's progress towards meeting academic achievement.
 - The applicant allocates time daily and throughout the year in a way that will allow them to implement the educational model and achieve all target outcomes by proposing to have an extended day. This extended day will eliminate the need for afterschool programs, and will afford students more time to develop the skills necessary to reach academic success.
 - Greater Grace will partner with an organization that will provide comprehensive instructional, assessment, and curricular support for virtual education. Additionally, the partnering organization will provide instructional materials for on-site teachers to use in the classroom that will complement the virtual education.
 - The applicant has a budget that accounts for adequate funding to implement the school's plan. In addition, Greater Grace provides a sound financial reporting structure that includes a monthly finance meeting with a budget review process, and provides an effective contingency plan that will ensure that the school remains fiscally solvent.
- Attached: SchoolWorks' Application Review Executive Summary for Greater Grace

APPENDIX: Local School District's Independent Evaluator's Recommendation – Overview and Analysis

Recommendation Overview:

- Recommendation from St. James Parish's Independent Evaluator: Deny
- Attached: St. James Parish's Independent Evaluator's Recommendation Overview

Recommendation Analysis:

- The Department requested the independent review of Greater Grace's Type 1 evaluation from St. James parish to: a) better understand the rationale for St. James' denial decision; and, b) to ascertain if Greater Grace addressed the St. James' independent evaluator's concerns through the Type 2 charter application process.
- The Department cross-referenced the key recommendation reasons for denial from St. James' independent evaluator with specific evidence cited within SchoolWorks' full review to determine if Greater Grace adequately addressed the St. James' independent evaluator's concerns.
- The Department identified evidence from SchoolWorks' full review indicating that Greater Grace adequately addressed all concerns raised in St. James' independent evaluation through the Type 2 charter application process.

Local District Independent Evaluator's Application Review

The applicant fails to provide a clear description of the programs and structures that will ensure student achievement. It is not clear how the school will ensure the success of its students in a blended learning model.

It is not clear how the board will ensure that the mission will be achieved. It is not clear from the application how the performance metrics listed will be measured. The applicant did give information on the metrics that will be used but means for measurements are not clear. It is still not clear what changes will be made if student achievement goals are not being met.

It is not apparent from the application what checks and balances will be in place between the board, the director, the principal,

SchoolWorks' Application Review

There are clear programs and structures in Greater Grace's proposal, including small-group instruction, self-pacing, and a rigorous online curriculum. Student progress data is reviewed daily, and virtual and on-site teachers collaborate to design lessons based on student progress.

The board plans to hold the school leader accountable using clearly defined tools and metrics, including Compass, the 360° VAL-ED assessment, and a third-party evaluation. The board has tasked its Executive and Education Committees with evaluating information collected using these tools and for recommending interventions or termination if necessary.

Accountability is built into the K12 and 4th Sector contracts. 4th Sector will support the board in overseeing the financial viability

<p>K12 and 4th Sector Solutions. It is not clear is how the board of directors will ensure that each of these individuals / organizations are working together towards student success and what are the contingency plans in case any of those identified fail. How does the board plan to oversee the financial viability of the organization and if the enrollment is not met what are the plans for overcoming any deficit that exists in year 1.</p>	<p>of the organization by enabling the board to review a monthly financial reporting packet, with a narrative and dashboard of key indicators. Greater Grace will enter into a contract that requires K12 to meet performance expectations.</p> <p>Greater Grace has also established a contract with 4th Sector Solutions that describes the financial deliverables. The board also collects academic and financial information monthly and evaluates the director and principal in three ways on a semi-annual basis.</p>
---	--

APPENDIX: Consideration of Additional Local School District Factors

Academic Performance Indicators

St. James 2015 District Letter Grade	B	Students attending "C" – "F" rated Schools in St. James Parish	1,285 ¹	Students attending "C" – "F" rated Schools in Ascension, St. James, and St. John the Baptist Parishes ²	9,451 ¹
--	---	--	--------------------	---	--------------------

Additional Local District Factors

- St. James Parish school officials expressed concern that a new charter school opening on St. James Parish's west bank would detrimentally impact enrollment for St. James Parish's west bank elementary schools, particularly Firth Ward Elementary. From 2010-11 through 2014-15, St. James Parish's west bank elementary schools experienced a 13% enrollment decline, with Fifth Ward Elementary specifically declining in K-6 enrollment by 26% over that span. From 2013-14 to 2014-15 alone, Fifth Ward Elementary's K-6 enrollment declined by ~30 students to ~135 students. No K-6 grade at Fifth Ward Elementary enrolled at least 25 students in 2014-15, with four grades enrolling fewer than 20 students.
- St. James Parish established a Virtual Academy in 2012. This Virtual Academy program provides online course offerings to St. James students while still providing students opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities at their home-based school.
- St. James Parish also expressed concern over Greater Grace's potential to adversely impact St. James Parish's current desegregation efforts.

¹ Based on publicly available February 2015 enrollment counts and 2015 school letter grades

² Parishes Great Grace has indicated from which they would seek to enroll students