

RISE Prep Charter Renewal Recommendation

FCS Recommendation: In light of the historic and ongoing concerns with the school's academic, operational, and governance performance, we recommend the non-renewal of RISE Prep's charter.

About the School

RISE Prep submitted a renewal petition per FCS policy deadlines. RISE Prep has been in operation under the control and management of the Fulton County Board of Education. The start date for the original charter was July 1, 2015 under the name of Latin Prep School; however, the name was later changed to Reaching Innovative Solutions in Education (RISE) Prep. The name of the Georgia nonprofit corporation that holds the charter is RISE Preparatory Charter School, Inc. The school proposes to continue operations in its current location (2626 Hogan Road, Atlanta, GA 30344).

The mission of RISE Prep is to provide a rigorous holistic educational model that develops the minds and character of its students by focusing on six pillars (restorative pillars, entrepreneurship, ethics of care, experiential learning, culturally responsive teaching, and social-emotional wellness). RISE has the flexibility to implement a model that integrates academics, social-emotional growth, a sense of community, and respect for the environment. Scholars are to be educated using culturally responsive methods to achieve a holistic approach.

RISE Prep School uses its flexibility to expose scholars to more instructional time and strategically develop instructional staff and unique curricular choices like the performing arts academy and the honors cohort. While all curricula will be aligned to the Georgia Standards of Excellence (GSE), the method of delivering the standards are unique to RISE Prep and its sister school RISE Grammar.

RISE Prep's first charter term was from 2015-2020. RISE Prep applied for renewal in 2019, and due to its academic and operational performance, it received a probationary charter renewal term for three years, from 2020-2023. RISE Prep has now applied for renewal for another charter term.

Academic Performance

A Look Back

In its initial charter term, RISE Prep (highlighted below in blue) did not perform better than the district and the state in the grade bands that it served. The school started with 6th grade in the 2015-2016 school year and increased by one grade level each year. Grades 6 through 8 were fully implemented by the 2017-2018 school year.

Year 1 2015-2016 (Baseline)			Year 2 2016-2017			Year 3 2017-2018		
State	District	Prep	State	District	Prep	State	District	Prep
71.5	70.4	84.9	73	72.2	67.2	76.2	80	61.4

RISE Prep had a strong start with a CCRPI score of 84.9, higher than the district and the state. This initial CCRPI score can be attributed to the school's ability to focus only on 6th-grade instruction in year one with a relatively small group of scholars (116 scholars in year one). As the program scaled up in years two and three, the number of scholars doubled. However, since then the school has had a decline in its CCRPI score as compared to the district and the State. Several factors contributed to the decline in CCRPI: 1) incoming 6th graders in years two and three demonstrated significant academic deficits, 2) The school had an increased mobility rate, 3) the benchmark assessment system FastBridge was not implemented due to technical difficulties, 4) teacher and leader attrition between years one and three, and 5) lack of full implementation of the Teacher Keys evaluation system, which resulted in a lack of instructional monitoring in year 2.

To show RISE Prep's performance compared to similar FCS schools, comparator schools' scores are provided below. The comparator scores when highlighted in grey indicate that particular comparator school's performance was lower than RISE Prep for the same metric.

School Name	2018 CCRPI Score	2019 CCRPI Score	total +/-
FCS	80.0	83.4	3.4
STATE	76.2	72.1	-4.1
Main Street Charter Academy	69.9	60.7	-9.2
RISE Prep	61.4	61.5	0.1
Bear Creek Middle School	66.0	65.7	-0.3
Camp Creek Middle School	67.5	78.7	11.2
McNair Middle School	54.2	63.8	9.6
Paul D. West Middle School	55.4	63.8	8.4
Renaissance Middle School	64.1	62.7	-1.4
Sandtown Middle School	68.7	81	12.3
Woodland Middle School	53.4	74.6	21.2

The geographic reach of RISE Prep during the 2018-2019 school year shows 67% of the RISE Prep School scholars zoned for Paul D. West, McNair, and Woodland Middle Schools, which RISE Prep did not outperform.

When looking at RISE Prep compared to similar south Fulton County schools, during the initial charter term, RISE Prep outperformed schools on certain components of CCRPI. The following charts show CCRPI as well as all 2018 and 2019 CCRPI components for Fulton County Schools, the

State, RISE Prep, and seven (7) FCS South Fulton middle schools.

School Name	Content Mastery	Progress	Closing Gaps	Readiness	CCRPI Score	School Name	Content Mastery	Progress	Closing Gaps	Readiness	CCRPI Score	total +/-
2018 FCS, State, RISE Prep, Comparison Schools						2019 FCS, State, RISE Prep, Comparison Schools						
FCS	72.3	80.4	86.8	85.6	80.0	FCS	76.3	89	100	86.7	83.4	3.4
STATE	65.1	81.0	78.8	82.4	76.2	STATE	66.3	80.3	50.0	82.9	72.1	-4.1
RISE Prep	45.8	65.6	56.3	81.2	61.4	RISE Prep	45.9	72.5	35.7	84.8	61.5	0.1
Bear Creek Middle School	44.3	78.3	64.6	77.9	66.0	Bear Creek Middle School	45.3	76.3	64.6	78.4	65.7	-0.3
Camp Creek Middle School	42.6	77.1	88.9	72.2	67.5	Camp Creek Middle School	53.0	93.0	100.0	76.2	78.7	11.2
McNair Middle School	30.2	73.9	38.9	67.4	54.2	McNair Middle School	38.1	85.3	100.0	71.0	70.5	16.3
Paul D. West Middle School	29.6	63.2	70.8	68.7	55.4	Paul D. West Middle School	34.9	78.0	83.3	67.9	63.8	8.4
Renaissance Middle School	42.3	72.8	66.7	79.8	64.1	Renaissance Middle School	45.4	68.9	61.4	78.9	62.7	-1.4
Sandtown Middle School	50.5	66.1	93.8	81.9	68.7	Sandtown Middle School	61.1	93.6	86.1	84.9	81	12.3
Woodland Middle School	30.5	72.7	34.1	68.2	53.4	Woodland Middle School	41.3	92.5	100.0	74.3	74.6	21.2

When the comparison group is broken down further to review comparable components of the CCRPI formula, RISE Prep outperformed comparative schools in the Content Mastery and Readiness components. Content Mastery looks at whether scholars are achieving at an appropriate level to be prepared for the next grade level. Readiness measures whether students are engaged in opportunities that prepare them for the next level, college, or career. The indicators for middle school include literacy, student attendance, and beyond the core. In terms of *Readiness* at the middle school level, RISE Prep earned an 84.8 and the state (82.9).

At the last renewal it was stated that to improve student academic performance, RISE needed to engage in intensive school improvement efforts, along with the monitoring of standards alignment and targeted professional development, must be used to ensure future progress and ultimately exceed FCS in terms of academic proficiency.

Current Term -Year 1 – 2020-2021

Due to the pandemic, no CCRPI score was calculated in year one of the current charter term. In 2020-2021 the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) received a waiver on CCRPI, although Georgia Milestones were administered. In the fall of 2020, 100% of RISE Prep scholars attended school from their homes via remote learning. In the spring of 2021, RISE Prep administered the Georgia Milestones Assessments in grades 6-8, though test attendance was low due to continued health concerns relating to the pandemic.

RISE Prep did not have interim assessment data for year one. No data was presented in the application where the school measured grade-level performance in grades 6-8.

Current Term -Year 1 – Year 2 – 2021 – 2022

In year two of RISE Prep's current charter term, the school did not outperform the district or State on any of the Georgia Milestones Assessments. While RISE Prep's reading performance did not meet or exceed the district and the state in year two, the margin between RISE Prep's performance and that of the State is narrowing, particularly in grades six and eight, but is still significant.

Figure 1: 2022 Georgia Milestones Performance, Charter/District/State Comparison – Reading

	# Tested	% Below Grade Level (Lexile < 520L)	% Grade Level or Above (Lexile ≥ 520L)
Reading – Grade 6			
RISE Prep	117	53.0	47.0
Fulton County	6,518	35.2	64.8
State	127,246	44.9	55.1
Reading – Grade 7			
RISE Prep	112	44.6	55.4
Fulton County	6,772	25.4	74.6
State	131,694	33.3	66.7
Reading – Grade 8			
RISE Prep	88	34.1	65.9
Fulton County	6,972	19.5	80.5
State	135,107	29.8	70.2

Data Source: Spring_2022_EOC-School_Level-All Grades, Spring_2022_EOC-System_Level All Grades, Spring_2022_EOC_State Level All Grades

RISE Prep’s performance on the English Language Arts (ELA) GMAS assessment did not meet or exceed that of the district and the state. The petitioner asserts that RISE Prep scholars were impacted by the prolonged period of remote learning between 2020-2021, however, that is true for students across the state and the district, as well.

Figure 2: 2022 Georgia Milestones Performance, Charter/District/State Comparison – ELA

ELA – Grade 6					
	# Tested	% Beginning Learner	%Developing Learner	%Proficient Learner	%Distinguished Learner
RISE Prep	117	39.3	32.5	24.8	3.4
Fulton County	6,518	26.4	24.7	36.0	12.9
State	127,246	32.8	28.1	31.2	7.9
ELA – Grade 7					
RISE Prep	112	38.4	35.7	24.1	1.8
Fulton County	6,772	23.4	29.7	35.2	11.8
State	131,694	30.2	34.2	29.1	6.4
ELA – Grade 8					
RISE Prep	88	26.1	47.7	23.9	2.3
Fulton County	6,972	15.3	30.8	39.1	14.8
State	135,107	22.9	36.6	32.0	8.5

Data Source: Spring_2022_EOC-School_Level-All Grades, Spring_2022_EOC-System_Level All Grades, Spring_2022_EOC_State Level All Grades

Performance on the Math GMAS shows that RISE Prep RISE Preps still has a significant performance gap between the charter school, the district, and the state.

Figure 3: 2021 Georgia Milestones Performance, Charter/District/State Comparison – Math

MATH – Grade 6					
	# Tested	% Beginning Learner	%Developing Learner	%Proficient Learner	%Distinguished Learner
RISE Prep	116	60.3	34.5	4.3	0.9
Fulton County	6,503	30.3	31.7	22.9	15.1
State	127,117	32.9	36.1	21.4	9.7
MATH – Grade 7					
RISE Prep	111	43.2	41.4	12.6	2.7
Fulton County	6,757	24.7	34.1	23.7	17.4
State	131,584	26.0	39.1	23.2	11.7
MATH – Grade 8					
RISE Prep	88	56.8	28.4	14.8	0
Fulton County	6,954	27.0	29.4	26.0	17.6
State	134,799	30.0	33.7	24.6	11.6

Data Source: Spring_2022_EOC-School_Level-All Grades, Spring_2022_EOC-System_Level All Grades, Spring_2022_EOC_State Level All Grades

Eighth grade performance at RISE Prep in Science and Social Studies did not meet or exceed that of the district or the State.

Figure 4: 2021 Georgia Milestones Performance, Charter/District/State Comparison – 8th Science

Science – Grade 8					
RISE Prep	88	60.2	26.1	12.5	1.1
Fulton County	5,816	36.2	25.7	27.0	11.1
State	96,141	43.0	28.0	22.9	6.0

Data Source: Spring_2022_EOC-School_Level-All Grades, Spring_2022_EOC-System_Level All Grades, Spring_2022_EOC_State Level All Grades

Figure 5: 2021 Georgia Milestones Performance, Charter/District/State Comparison – 8th Social Studies

Social Studies – Grade 8					
RISE Prep	88	58.0	36.4	5.7	0
Fulton County	6,935	25.2	33.5	27.6	13.6
State	134,035	27.3	35.3	25.7	11.7

Data Source: Spring_2022_EOC-School_Level-All Grades, Spring_2022_EOC-System_Level All Grades, Spring_2022_EOC_State Level All Grades

The following tables compare the performance between RISE Prep and the zoned schools RISE scholars would otherwise attend. These schools are Paul D. West, Woodland Middle School, and McNair Middle School where 67% of RISE Prep scholars would attend those schools.

Figure 6: RISE Prep School % of Scholars Zoned for Comparison Group Schools

FCS School	% of RISE Prep School scholars Zone for Corresponding FCS School
Paul D. West	30%
Woodland	20%
McNair	17%
Bear Creek	9%
Renaissance	9%
Sandtown	9%
Camp Creek	9%

On the GMAS Reading assessment, at the sixth-grade level, RISE Prep outperformed all three of the subgroup of comparison schools noted above.

Seventh-grade RISE Prep scholars outperformed Paul D. West, Woodland, and McNair. Eighth-grade scholars performed better than three comparison schools. They exceeded McNair by the widest margin, with 65.9% of RISE scholars reading on or above grade level as opposed to 51.2% of scholars at McNair performing at or above grade level.

Figure 7: RISE Prep School and Comparison Group Schools- GMAS Reading

Reading – Grade 6			
	# Tested	% Below Grade Level (Lexile < 520L)	% Grade Level or Above (Lexile ≥ 520L)
RISE Prep	117	53.0	47.0
Paul D. West	238	62.6	37.4
Woodland	271	65.3	34.7
McNair	268	65.3	34.7
Reading – Grade 7			
RISE Prep	112	44.6	55.4
Paul D. West	248	48.0	52.0
Woodland	270	56.7	43.3
McNair	270	48.5	51.5
Reading – Grade 8			
RISE Prep	88	34.1	65.9
Paul D. West	259	39.0	61.0
Woodland	259	45.6	54.4
McNair	254	48.8	51.2

Data Source: Spring_2022_EOC-School_Level-All Grades

In terms of ELA performance at RISE Prep, when combining the percentage of *Proficient* and *Distinguished* learners, RISE outperforms Paul D. West, Woodland, and McNair; however, if you consider just the percentage of *Distinguished* learners, eighth graders at McNair and seventh

graders at Paul D. West performed slightly higher than RISE Prep. That said, RISE has made gains in terms of scholar learning loss that resulted from the pandemic to surpass all comparison schools, thereby increasing scholar proficiency.

Figure 8: RISE Prep School and Comparison Group Schools- GMAS ELA

	# Tested	% Beginning Learner	% Developing Learner	% Proficient Learner	% Distinguished Learner
ELA – Grade 6					
RISE Prep	117	39.3	32.5	24.8	3.4
Paul D. West	238	55.5	26.1	17.6	0.8
Woodland	271	55.4	26.6	17.0	1.1
McNair	268	54.5	28.7	14.6	2.2
ELA – Grade 7					
RISE Prep	112	38.4	35.7	24.1	1.8
Paul D. West	248	48.4	36.3	13.3	2.0
Woodland	270	53.3	34.4	11.9	0.4
McNair	270	47.8	37.0	14.4	0.7
ELA – Grade 8					
RISE Prep	88	26.1	47.7	23.9	2.3
Paul D. West	259	36.3	45.2	17.8	0.8
Woodland	259	39.0	44.8	15.8	0.4
McNair	254	40.6	39.8	16.9	2.8

Data Source: Spring_2022_EOC-School_Level-All Grades

Although RISE Prep met and exceeded seventh-grade math performance, overall, RISE Prep scholars struggled with math performance in year two of the current charter term. Recent NWEA research on unfinished learning due to the pandemic shows that it may take years to overcome the impact of prolonged remote learning, increased absenteeism, and loss of scholar stamina in the classroom.¹ The petitioner asserts this statement is consistent with the (year two) comparative data for RISE Prep.

Figure 9: RISE Prep School and Comparison Group Schools- GMAS MATH

MATH – Grade 6					
	# Tested	% Beginning Learner	% Developing Learner	% Proficient Learner	% Distinguished Learner
RISE Prep	116	60.3	34.5	4.3	0.9
Paul D. West	237	63.3	30.0	6.8	0
Woodland	268	64.6	28.4	6.7	0.4
McNair	269	66.5	23.4	6.7	3.3
MATH – Grade 7					
RISE Prep	111	43.2	41.4	12.6	2.7

¹ “Students making progress, but overcoming pandemic interruptions may take years for some, new research shows.” Miller, Elizabeth. July 19, 2022. Opb.org

Paul D. West	248	50.8	41.1	7.7	0.4
Woodland	270	51.5	38.5	9.6	0.4
McNair	269	51.7	37.5	9.3	1.5
MATH – Grade 8					
RISE Prep	88	56.8	28.4	14.8	0
Paul D. West	258	66.3	30.6	3.1	0
Woodland	259	62.9	32.0	4.6	0.4
McNair	251	68.1	26.7	4.8	0.4

Data Source: Spring_2022_EOC-School_Level-All Grades

RISE Prep scholars exceeded the performance of the comparison subgroup in Science with a considerably higher proficiency rate than Paul D. West, Woodland, and McNair. The combined rate of Proficient and Distinguished scholars was 13.6%, as compared to Paul D. West 6.6%, Woodland 3.3%, and McNair with 6.4%. Although RISE Prep met and exceeded this metric with the comparison subgroup. It is still significantly lower than the district and state averages.

Figure 10: RISE Prep School and Comparison Group Schools- GMAS Science & Social Studies

Science – Grade 8					
	# Tested	% Beginning Learner	%Developing Learner	%Proficient Learner	%Distinguished Learner
RISE Prep	88	60.2	26.1	12.5	1.1
Paul D. West	257	67.3	26.1	5.8	0.8
Woodland	240	74.6	22.1	3.3	0
McNair	250	68.8	24.8	6.4	0
Social Studies – Grade 8					
RISE Prep	88	58.0	36.4	5.7	0
Paul D. West	255	51.0	37.3	10.6	1.2
Woodland	258	58.5	34.1	7.4	0
McNair	250	63.6	29.2	6.8	0.4

Data Source: Spring_2022_EOC-School_Level-All Grades

RISE Prep eighth-grade scholars did not fare as well on the GMAS Social Studies assessment with low levels of proficiency and a high percentage of scholars scoring at the *Beginning Learner* level.

CCRPI (Content Mastery and Readiness) in 2022

Looking at 2022 when looking at content mastery, RISE Prep outperforms three of the seven comparison schools.

2022 FCS, State, RISE Prep, Comparison Schools	
School Name	Content Mastery
FCS	69.1
STATE	60.0
RISE Prep	35.1
Paul D. West	32.5
Woodland	28.5
McNair	30.3
Bear Creek	39.8
Renaissance	40.9
Sandtown	49.1
Camp Creek	51.4

At the last contract renewal, RISE Prep indicated in their application that intensive school improvement efforts, along with the monitoring of standards alignment and targeted professional development, must be used to ensure future progress and ultimately exceed FCS in terms of academic proficiency. These efforts were not sufficient in raising the school's performance meaningfully.

In 2022, given the impact of pandemic-related data limitations on states' accountability systems, the U.S. Department of Education approved Georgia's one-year modifications to CCRPI which include **no Summative Ratings** (no overall 0-100 scores reported) and for **Readiness**, no Student Attendance at elementary, middle, and high school reported, and no College and Career Readiness at high school reported. When looking at Readiness data, the only available indicators are literacy and beyond the core. The beyond the core indicator continues to measure the percentage of students (K – 8) earning a passing score in specified enrichment courses beyond the traditional academic core that expose students to a well-rounded curriculum. In these measures, RISE Prep outperformed Paul D. West, Woodland, and McNair in Literacy and overall Readiness but failed to outperform the district, and it did not outperform any of the comparison schools in Beyond the Core.

2022 CCRPI Component	FCS	RISE Prep	Paul D. West	Woodland	McNair
Readiness	82.1	70.6	67.6	65.4	64.9
Literacy	64.90	43.99	36.31	32.61	30.89
Beyond the Core	99.26	98.11	98.97	98.28	98.91

Targeted Support and Improvement Schools (TSI)

According to the GaDOE, schools meeting the following criteria are included on the list of TSI schools:

- All schools that have at least one subgroup that is performing in the lowest 5% of all schools in at least 50% of CCRPI components, or,
- Among all schools identified for Consistently Underperforming Subgroup, have at least one subgroup that is performing in the lowest 5% of all schools in all CCRPI components

RISE Prep was added as a 2021-2022 TSI school for students with disabilities. During the same time period, seven FCS district schools demonstrated significant improvement and earned their exit from the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) needs improvement lists.

Organizational Goals

A Look back

After RISE Prep was approved (formerly the Latin Grammar School) by Fulton County Schools and the Georgia Department of Education, there was fraudulent activity that occurred before the school opened on July 1, 2015. The founder of the Latin Schools, Christopher Clemons, fraudulently embezzled school funds during this period. By the time the school opened; Clemons was removed from the school and taken into custody. He was later charged and is currently serving a sentence for this activity. Many employees and board members associated with the founder were removed from the school.

At the time the activity occurred, a representative from Fulton County Schools recommended a highly experienced CFO, who assumed oversight of the accounting operations for both RISE schools. Internal control issues were immediately corrected, and while there were few findings on that initial audit, it was deemed unqualified. Since that the first audit, all audits have been unqualified, and there have been no additional internal control issues.

In the last charter contract, the board voted to remove the founding principal of RISE Grammar and placed the RISE Prep Executive Director in charge of the Grammar School. The school has struggled to maintain an Executive Director during the last couple of years.

The school never launched the required surveys to evaluate the parent and teacher satisfaction metrics included in their last charter contract until year four of the contract. The survey instrument chosen was part of the AdvancedED accreditation review and only had a 61% response rate amount parents. The response rate for the teacher survey was much better, with 29 out of 34 faculty members responding to the survey. Still, the survey needed to contain the proper descriptors, and due to the questions asked, teachers could only indicate that the learning environment was engaging for scholars. In the last application, there was a commitment that a satisfaction survey would be distributed for the “purpose of collecting feedback” and being

transparent.

The school climate rating went from three stars in 2018 to four stars in 2019 (out of 5). This data is not available for this contract term.

Financial Goals and Performance

A look back

In this first charter term, all three audits yielded unqualified opinions, indicating that the RISE Prep board employed reasonable and effective accounting, internal controls, and budgeting practices. To ensure proper resource allocation, new fiscal controls were put in place as an experienced charter school CFO was hired. RISE Prep maintained strong organizational viability, practices sound decision-making, and fiscal management, thus ensuring the responsible stewardship of public monies.

- Each year, of the first term RISE Prep operated in accordance with all board-approved policies.
- At the end of the first charter term, the school had 82.20 days of cash on hand.
- RISE Prep met all Generally Accepted Accounting Practices (GAAP) on its external annual audit reports. Only the FY2016 audit report included internal control findings related to the fraudulent use of school funds as well as a lack of proper board oversight.

Current Term

RISE's experienced CFO has retired, and the replacement the school hired was not a good fit and was not up to the demands of the role. Additionally, one of the previous Executive Directors was not a fiscally conservative leader and operated the school with narrow margins. Accordingly, the number of days cash on hand has decreased each year of the charter term.

Total debt level recorded at the fiscal year end of June 30, 2022 was \$14,915,000, which is a significant debt level increase vs. the \$ 2,343,469 debt level recorded at the fiscal year end of June 30, 2021. When FCS learned of RISE's plans to enter into a new debt agreement, FCS staff expressed concern that the RISE schools did not notify FCS of its intent to enter into significant long-term debt with the notice required by the FCS Annual Letter of Assurances and FCS staff expressed concern about adding more debt in light of RISE's probationary status. Ultimately, the RISE schools chose to move forward.

The sustainability ratio is measured as unrestricted net assets divided by average monthly expenses. The sustainability ratio should indicate more than a two-month reserve. The RISE schools has been significantly positively impacted due to \$14M in loan proceeds sitting in the school's bank accounts.

Amana	CHCS	FAST	Hapeville	KSFA	RISE**	Skyview	TMSA
3.07	0.06	2.94	4.32	<u>-1.43</u> 4.09-Metro	9.62	6.23	1.94

Liquidity ratio is measured as (current assets less current liabilities) divided by total expenses. The liquidity ratio should be greater than zero (0) and less than one (1). The RISE schools has an acceptable liquidity ratio and one of the strongest ones in the charter school sector.

Amana	CHCS	FAST	Hapeville	KSFA	RISE**	Skyview	TMSA
0.17	0.06	0.23	0.38	<u>-0.11</u> .36-Metro	0.89	0.50	0.21

Occupancy costs are defined in two ways: (1) as rent, taxes and insurance on building, depreciation, and amortization expense: (2) additionally, utilities, repairs and maintenance, and interest on the mortgage.

Occupancy expense is measured by rent, taxes, and insurance on building, depreciation, and amortization expense (total occupancy costs) divided by total revenue. The RISE schools are at an acceptable expense level.

Amana	CHCS	FAST	Hapeville	KSFA	RISE**	Skyview	TMSA
3.35%	8.38%	13.43%	4.68%	<u>15.23%</u> 4.60%-Metro	8.63%	9.79%	3.81%

Occupancy expense is measured by utilities, repairs and maintenance and interest on mortgage (total occupancy costs) divided by total revenue. The RISE schools are is an acceptable expense level.

Amana	CHCS	FAST	Hapeville	KSFA	RISE**	Skyview	TMSA
12.72%	20.62%	16.13%	9.17%	<u>20.26%</u> 7.37%-Metro	12.54%	13.39%	6.50%

Debt to Asset Ratio is measured as total liabilities (excluding net pension liability) divided by total assets. The debt-to-asset ratio should be less than 0.90. The RISE schools are slightly higher than the recommended level.

Amana	CHCS	FAST	Hapeville	KSFA	RISE**	Skyview	TMSA
0.83	0.11	0.14	0.46	<u>0.37</u> <u>.22-Metro</u>	0.94	0.07	0.12

In addition to the facility expenses, the school also increased teacher salaries in order to remain competitive in the local education job market. An increase in the Teacher Retirement System (TRS) contribution also occurred during the last charter term. The size of the RISE school's faculty and staff grew from 34 to 46 staff members in FY '20. School leadership needs to learn to be more strategic in terms of resource allocation decisions. Despite ongoing poor academic performance in the current charter term, the RISE schools chose to expand debt for facility use vs. making strong resource allocation decisions.

Governance

A Look Back

In the first charter term, at the suggestion of FCS, the two schools were divided into one board for RISE Grammar and a separate board for RISE Prep. Later, RISE Grammar requested that a new, combined governing board with RISE Prep be approved. This transition involved transferring RISE Grammar's non-profit designation to roll up under the RISE Prep non-profit corporation. At the time of the last charter renewal submission, the RISE Grammar board consisted of eight members. The merged board of 11 members represented a combination of existing RISE Grammar and RISE Prep Board members. The merger of the boards was to add to the stability of the governing board, yet the current combined board has decreased to only five (5) members.

Each year of the charter term, RISE governing board members are required to receive training pursuant to O.C.G.A. 20-2-2072. New board members are required to complete 15 hours in their first year and 9 annually thereafter. In the first three years of operations, not all board members met the training requirements. In years one through three, there was significant turnover and issues with board engagement overall.

Current Contract Term

A governing board are the fiduciaries who steer the organization towards a sustainable future by adopting sound, ethical and legal governance and financial management practices and policies. A governing board has a significant role to play in providing guidance relating to the school's culture, strategic focus, effectiveness and financial sustainability.



RISE governing board has struggled to provide good governance since the beginning of the school in July, 2015. The initial board did not provide the proper oversight, accountability, and transparent leadership need by a local charter school and many of those initial board members left the board quickly. Today the RISE board is small again, and once again, there is high turnover similar to the levels experienced in the first three years of the school. These board members with important institutional knowledge have left the board, and thus the board has not been able to sustain itself as a highly productive board.

Meeting Minutes

Pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 50-14-1, the board is responsible for posting brief summaries of actions taken at the board meetings within two days of the board meetings. During the current term, the board failed to post any board summaries on the website for any board meeting. To enable a transparent environment, minutes are to be posted on the school website. In examining the website, less than one year of historical minutes were posted. There were months with no minutes posted or minutes that were not finalized. Notations regarding executive sessions were inconsistent.

As has been the case in the past (i.e., when a new leader is hired, during charter renewal), commitments are made that RISE will now has a strong and committed leadership team in place. While sincere, the RISE governing board has been unable to reach and sustain those commitments.

Facility

The school's financial obligations did increase during the initial charter term as the facility was initially provided by Fulton County Schools with a rent-free lease. RISE Prep decided to purchase the building in March 2018, however, RISE Grammar School leases the space at a rate of \$.65 per square foot. This is compared to an average market rate of \$1.35 per square foot.

The RISE Grammar and RISE Prep board purchased real estate adjacent to the existing school property. The purchase included a house that ultimately was used as the administrative office.

During the current probationary term, RISE's Executive Director approached FCS several times regarding acquiring new debt. At each junction, the school was made aware that FCS did not support the schools getting financing for expansion or additional renovations, given the RISE Schools' current probationary status due to performance concerns. The school failed to provide the 30-day notification to FCS as required by the Letter of Assurances.

RISE determined to proceed, however, and obtained a loan from Reinvestment Fund, Inc. and Low Income Investment Fund, Inc. The loan was scheduled for around April 2, 2021. Under the note, the remaining balance of \$1,555,000 on the FCBOE Loan was paid off. RISE then obtained additional financing to construct an addition and to perform other renovations. Total debt level recorded at fiscal year end June 30, 2022 was \$14,915,000, which is a significant debt level increase vs. the \$ 2,343,469 debt level recorded at the fiscal year end of June 30, 2021.

Additional and Continuing Obligations:

RISE has struggled with accepting FCS directives to comply with legal, statutory, regulatory, and contractual requirements during both the initial and current contract terms. The school has also struggled with its obligations as it relates to special education compliance, scheduling, and turning in required documents to FCS.

Special education continues to be an area where the school's leadership has been noncooperative and noncollaborative. Despite norms being put into place and reminders provided by FCS staff, RISE special education staff have not turned on cameras for virtual meetings and not answered when called on. When the RISE staff member does answer, their tone and responses have been perceived as noncollaborative and on the verge of inappropriate and unprofessional. While senior RISE leaders are described as attentive, professional, and engaged when they attend district meetings/training, they do not appear to be concerned when they observe RISE staff members with counterproductive and noncollaborative attitudes towards FCS staff.

FCS has significant concerns regarding the special education program at the RISE schools, which have been captured in a recent audit. During the course of the audit, FCS staff observed issues

with basic special education procedures, requirements, meeting protocols, record-keeping, and other compliance concerns. FCS has provided special education support and training to the RISE schools over both charter terms, but the problems with the special education program persist and potentially expose the school and district to liability.

Recommendation:

In light of the historic and ongoing concerns with the school's academic, operational, and governance performance, we recommend the non-renewal of RISE Prep's charter. The school has not achieved or sustained academic performance that meets or exceeds that of Fulton County Schools during any of its contract terms, has ongoing leadership challenges both in terms of governance and consistent administration leadership, and has failed to correct compliance concerns in key academic and operational areas.