

RISE Grammar 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 Grammar's charter.

About the School

RISE Grammar submitted a renewal petition per FCS policy deadlines. RISE Grammar School 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 College Grammar; however, the name was later changed to Reaching Innovative Solutions in Education (RISE) Grammar School. The school proposes to continue operations in its current location (2626 Hogan Road, Atlanta, GA 30344).

The mission of RISE Grammar 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 Grammar School uses its flexibility to expose scholars to more instructional time, develop instructional staff and provide curricular choices like a performing arts academy and honors cohort. While all curricula are aligned to the Georgia Standards of Excellence (GSE), delivery of the standards is unique to RISE Grammar and its sister school, RISE Prep.

RISE Grammar's first charter term was from 2015-2020. RISE Grammar 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 Grammar has now applied for renewal for another charter term.

General Demographic Data

The geographic reach of RISE Grammar is wide, as students zoned for six elementary schools account for 71% of student enrollment. The other 29% of the RISE Grammar School scholars are zoned for the remaining FCS schools in the south Fulton region. RISE Grammar serves approximately 66% of scholars who qualify for free or reduced lunch. In addition to the low socio-economic population, RISE Grammar School has an increasing English Language Learner population.

Academic Performance

A Look Back

In its initial charter term, RISE Grammar (highlighted in blue) did not perform better than the district or the state in the grade bands that it served. However, it is important to note that the data represents the school's first year of testing and thus does not include progress or closing the gap points, both of which are partially derived from year-to-year comparisons. This lack of data is due to the school's design, which added a grade each year of its operation, and, thus, did not reach a testing year until late in its initial charter term.

2017-2018 (Baseline)*			2018-2019		
State	District	Actual	State	District	Actual
77.8	80.6	56.2	77.1	82.8	67.2

*2017-2018 is the first year that RISE Grammar administered state-mandated tests as the third grade was added.

Current Charter Term - Year 1 – 2020-2021

In the fall of 2020 in year 1 of the probationary renewal term, 100% of RISE Grammar scholars attended school from their homes via remote learning. In the spring of 2021, RISE Grammar administered the Georgia Milestones Assessments in grades 3-5, though test attendance was low due to continued health concerns relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. The **First, Second** and **Third Look** criteria do not apply to year one of the RISE Grammar current charter term. 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 the Georgia Milestones were administered.

RISE Grammar relies on interim assessment data for year one to measure grade-level performance in grades K-5. The iReady assessment provides diagnostic data to measure growth in reading, English language arts, and math.

Figure 1 below shows scholar performance for Reading by tiered support level. RISE Grammar has a lower level of students performing at Tier 1 (On-grade level) vs FCS. The school also has a higher level of students performing at Tier 2 and Tier 3 levels (Performing Below Grade Level) than FCS.

Figure 1: iReady READING –	RISE Grammar 2020-2021 Data – By Intervention Tier LEVEL/TIER	FCS 2020-2021 Data – By Intervention Tier LEVEL/TIER
At RISK for TIER 3 (2 or more Grade Levels Below)	34% to 28%	13%
TIER 2 (1 Grade Level Below)	32% to 27%	23%
TIER 1 (On or Above Grade Level)	34% to 45%	64%

Figure 2 below shows iReady assessment data for reading skills by grade level. In kindergarten, 87% of scholars are at or above grade level compared to fifth grade, with only 29% at or above. The kindergarten group in 2020-2021, though they experienced remote learning as well, did not experience the impact of the school shutting down in the fourth quarter of 2020. However, the trend is that scholars come into the RISE community on grade level, and each year fewer and fewer students perform on grade level. 71% of fifth-grade students are below one or more grade levels vs. in the traditional schools, less than half are below.

iReady RISE Grammar 2020-2021 Data – by Achievement Category – Reading

Figure 2: iReady – RISE Grammar 2020-2021 Data – by Achievement Category - READING Grade Level	# of Scholars Assessed	% Students with Improved Placement	% Mid or Above Grade Level	% Early or At Grade Level	% One Grade Level Below	% Two Grade Levels Below	% Three Grade Levels Below	One or more Grade levels Below
K	46	56	60	27	13	0	0	13
1 st	76	47	42	17	38	3	0	41
2 nd	74	39	43	15	35	7	0	42
3 rd	92	32	23	25	22	19	11	52
4 th	93	39	16	13	45	9	17	68
5 th	94	37	15	14	45	11	15	71

iReady – FCS 2020-2021 Data – by Achievement Category – **Reading**

Figure 3: iReady – FCS 2020-2021 Data – by Achievement Category - READING Grade Level	# of Scholars Assessed	% Students with Improved Performance	% Mid of Above Grade Level	%Early or At Grade Level	% One Grade Level Below	% Two Grade Levels Below	% Three Grade Levels Below	One or more Grade Levels Below
K	4511	61	63	22	15	0	0	15
1 st	5198	53	53	13	32	2	0	34
2 nd	5418	56	48	14	27	10	0	37
3 rd	5437	58	47	21	14	12	6	32
4 th	5521	52	40	15	27	7	11	45
5 th	5405	53	31	20	22	14	12	48

Similar to the reading assessment, in terms of **math** skills, RISE Grammar has a lower level of students performing at Tier 1 (On-grade level) vs FCS. The school also has a higher level of students performing at Tier 2 and Tier 3 levels (Performing Below Grade Level) than FCS.

Figure 4:	iReady MATH – RISE Grammar 2020-2021 Data – By Intervention Tier LEVEL/TIER	iReady MATH – FCS 2020-2021 Data – By Intervention Tier LEVEL/TIER
At RISK for TIER 3 (2 or more Grade Levels Below)	37% to 31%	11%
TIER 2 (1 Grade Level Below)	46% to 37%	29%
TIER 1 (On or Above Grade Level)	17% to 32%	60%

Similar to the reading assessment, the **math** results show significantly stronger performance at the kindergarten level with 81% of scholars performing at or above grade level in terms of their math skills. Based on the figure below, third and fourth grades were particularly impacted with large numbers of scholars one or more years behind in math performance. In both reading and math, in kindergarten and first grades, there are zero scholars in the “three grade levels below” category. However, as was the case with reading the longer students stay in the school, the further the students fall behind; for example, by the end of 5th grade, 81% of the fifth-grade students are one or more grades below in math.

Figure 5: iReady – RISE Grammar 2020-2021 Data – by Achievement Category -MATH Grade Level

Figure 5: iReady – RISE Grammar 2020-2021 Data – by Achievement Category - MATH Grade Level	# of Scholars Assessed	% Student s with Improved Placeme nt	% Mid or Above Grade Level	% Early or At Grade Level	% One Grade Level Below	% Two Grade Levels Below	% Three Grade Levels Below	% One or more Grade Levels Below
K	46	70	71	10	19	0	0	19
1 st	76	45	42	9	46	3	0	49
2 nd	74	33	22	19	42	14	4	60
3 rd	92	45	9	14	48	20	10	78
4 th	93	36	6	12	46	16	20	82
5 th	94	38	9	9	43	17	23	83

iReady – FCS 2020-2021 Data – by Achievement Category – MATH



Figure 5: iReady – FCS 2020-2021 Data – by Achievement Category - MATH Grade Level	# of Scholars Assessed	% Students with Improved Performance	% Mid of Above Grade Level	%Early or At Grade Level	% One Grade Level Below	% Two Grade Levels Below	% Three Grade Levels Below	% One or more Grade Levels Below
K	4479	51	65	12	23	0	0	23
1 st	5183	49	48	14	35	3	0	38
2 nd	5410	49	39	18	33	11	0	44
3 rd	5419	62	38	17	30	9	5	44
4 th	5578	63	37	19	27	9	7	43
5 th	5364	62	36	18	26	9	11	46

Current Charter Term - Year 2 – 2021 – 2022

In year two of RISE Grammar’s current charter term, RISE Grammar administered the Georgia Milestones Assessments in grades three through five per statewide accountability requirements. The table below shows overall reading scores for the elementary grade band compared to those

for Fulton County and the State. RISE Grammar scored approximately ten percentage points below the state in the “Grade Level or Above” category and twenty points or more below the district in the same categories.

Figure 6: 2022 Georgia Milestones Performance, Charter/District/State Comparison			
# Tested		% Below Grade Level (Lexile < 520L)	% Grade Level or Above (Lexile $\geq$ 520L)
Reading – Grade 3			
RISE Grammar	76	48.7	51.3
Fulton County	6,191	27.9	72.1
State	97,496	38.4	61.6
Reading – Grade 4			
RISE Grammar	101	61.4	38.6
Fulton County	6,313	33.9	66.1
State	97,138	41.3	58.7
Reading – Grade 5			
RISE Grammar	91	41.8	58.2
Fulton County	6,452	22.3	77.7
State	97,467	31.9	68.1

At each grade level, the percentage of FCS students scoring in the *Proficient* and *Distinguished* categories in ELA is significantly more than at RISE Grammar. Generally, FCS has 24% more students in the *Proficient* and *Distinguished* categories per grade level compared to RISE Grammar.

Figure 7: 2022 Georgia Milestones Performance, Charter/District/State Comparison – English Language Arts ELA					
# Tested		% Beginning Learner	%Developing Learner	%Proficient Learner	%Distinguished Learner
ELA – Grade 3					
RISE Grammar	76	44.7	35.5	18.4	1.3
Fulton County	6,191	28.9	22.4	27.0	21.8
State	97,496	37.8	26.1	24.6	11.4
ELA – Grade 4					
RISE Grammar	101	48.5	25.7	22.8	3.0
Fulton County	6,313	24.3	26.2	30.5	19.1

State	97,138	31.5	31.8	25.7	11
ELA – Grade 5					
RISE Grammar	91	37.4	34.1	26.4	2.2
Fulton County	6,452	19.2	28.1	37.3	15.3
State	97,467	26.8	33.8	32.9	6.4

RISE Grammar scholars did not perform better in math than their State and FCS peers. The percentage of FCS students scoring in the Proficient and Distinguished categories at each grade level is significantly higher than at RISE Grammar. Depending on the grade level, FCS has 24% - 39% more students in the *Proficient* and *Distinguished* categories per grade level.

Figure 8: 2022 Georgia Milestones Performance, Charter/District/State Comparison – Math					
# Tested	% Beginning Learner	%Developing Learner	%Proficient Learner	%Distinguished Learner	
MATH Grade 3					
RISE Grammar	75	32.0	49.3	18.7	0
Fulton County	6,177	15.3	29.5	32.5	22.7
State	97,496	37.8	26.1	24.6	11.4
MATH – Grade 4					
RISE Grammar	100	44	40	14	2
Fulton County	6,300	17.8	27.8	32.9	21.5
State	97,138	31.5	31.8	25.7	11
MATH – Grade 5					
RISE Grammar	93	69.9	23.7	5.4	1.1
Fulton County	6,442	27.6	26.5	25.2	20.7
State	97,467	26.8	33.8	32.9	6.4

To show RISE Grammar's performance compared to FCS schools, comparator schools' scores are provided. The comparator scores, when - highlighted in grey indicate that the comparator school's performance was lower than RISE Grammar School for the same metric. Comparative performance between the charter and district schools that scholars would otherwise be designated to attend. That metric uses CCRPI as the comparative measurement, which is not available for years one and two of RISE's charter term. The following analysis uses state-mandated assessments to determine if RISE Grammar outperforms the comparison group.

The Georgia Milestones *Reading* assessment measures grade-level performance in literacy skills for the tested grade. Third, fourth, and fifth-grade scholars at RISE outperformed four of six comparison schools.

Figure 9: RISE Grammar School and Comparison Group Schools- 2022 GMAS Reading			
# Tested		% Below Grade Level (Lexile < 520L)	% Grade Level or Above (Lexile ≥ 520L)
Reading – Grade 3			
RISE Grammar	76	48.7	51.3
Asa Hilliard	68	48.5	51.5
Hamilton E. Holmes	71	57.7	42.3
Love T. Nolan	87	44.8	55.2
Brookview	67	52.2	47.8
Feldwood	124	58.1	41.9
Mary M. Bethune	83	69.9	30.1
Reading – Grade 4			
RISE Grammar	101	61.4	38.6
Asa Hilliard	61	67.2	32.8
Hamilton E. Holmes	97	54.6	45.4
Love T. Nolan	100	64.0	36.0
Brookview	62	64.5	35.5
Feldwood	94	66.0	34.0
Mary M. Bethune	86	50	50
Reading – Grade 5			
RISE Grammar	91	41.8	58.2
Asa Hilliard	63	42.9	57.1
Hamilton E. Holmes	88	38.6	61.4
Love T. Nolan	95	42.1	57.9
Brookview	78	43.6	56.4
Feldwood	119	33.6	66.4
Mary M. Bethune	90	50.0	50.0

CCRPI – A Look Back

RISE Grammar outperformed a few of the comparative elementary schools in both 2017-2018 and 2018-2019. However, in 2017-2018 the school's initial CCRPI did not include progress or closing gap points. The Progress component of CCRPI focuses on the academic growth of all students — both low and high achieving. Without the prior year's comparison, no scholars could register a score. The closing gaps component of CCRPI is based on the expectation that all scholars will make improvements in all areas of achievement. This component is based on set improvement targets for subgroup performance. Given that 2018 was the first CCRPI score, academic improvements could not be measured. In 2019, both progress and closing gap scores were earned.

School Name	2018 CCRPI Score	2019 CCRPI Score	total +/-
FCS	80.6	82.8	2.2
STATE	77.8	77.1	-0.7
RISE Grammar	56.2	67.2	11.0
Asa Hilliard Elementary School	67.2	65.6	-1.6
Bethune Elementary School	57.4	53.2	-4.2
Brookview Elementary School	64.5	67.4	2.9
Feldwood Elementary School	48.7	69	20.3
Hamilton E. Holmes Elementary	63.3	71	7.7
Nolan Elementary School	49.9	62.4	12.5

When looking at RISE Grammar compared to similar south Fulton County schools in the 2018-2019 timeframe, RISE Grammar outperformed schools on certain components of CCRPI. The following charts show CCRPI as well all 2018 and 2019 CCRPI components for Fulton County Schools, the State, RISE Grammar and six (6) other elementary schools.

Again reflecting to 2018 and 2019 when the comparison group were broken down further to review comparable components of the CCRPI formula, RISE Grammar outperformed schools in the Content Mastery and Readiness components. Content Mastery looks at whether scholars are achieving an appropriate level to prepare for the next grade level.

Readiness measures whether students are engaged in opportunities that prepare them for the next level, college, or career. In 2019 in terms of *Readiness* on the elementary school level, RISE Grammar earned a 73.3 and failed to outperform FCS (83.7) and the state (81). The indicators for elementary school include literacy, student attendance, and beyond the core. The beyond the core indicator measures the percent 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.

Readiness Indicators – RISE Grammar School, State, District, and Comparison Group

2019 CCRPI Component	State	FCS	RISE Grammar	Holmes	Hilliard	Nolan	Bethune	Brookview	Feldwood
Literacy	53.24	61.69	29.60	32.98	30.36	25.88	29.54	31.10	32.13
Student Attendance	91.18	90.67	90.43	84.05	74.39	83.11	77.97	75.34	78.96
Beyond the Core	98.46	98.85	100	100	92.83	99.14	97.80	99.35	100

At the last contract renewal RISE Grammar indicated in their application that intensive school improvement efforts, along with the monitoring of standards alignment and targeted professional development, would be used to ensure future progress and ultimately exceeding FCS in terms of academic proficiency.

Current Charter Term - Year 2 CCRPI - (Content Mastery and Readiness) in 2022

Now looking at 2022 when looking at the comparison group in content mastery, RISE Grammar only outperforms one of the comparison schools.

School Name	Content Mastery
FCS	75.4
STATE	63
RISE Grammar	38.2
Asa Hillard Elementary School	41.8
Bethune Elementary School	38.8
Brookview Elementary School	38
Feldwood Elementary School	41.1
Hamilton E. Holmes Elementary	39.2
Nolan Elementary School	43.3

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 indicators for elementary school include only 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. RISE Grammar slightly outperforms most of its comparative schools in terms of Literacy and Beyond the Core. However, previously mentioned iReady data gives a complete picture of RISE Grammar performance and shows that the school performs lower than most of its comparator schools in reading and math.

2022 CCRPI Component	FCS	RISE Grammar	Holmes	Hilliard	Nolan	Bethune	Brookview	Feldwood
Readiness	78.50	66.70	67.0	63.70	64.20	63.2	64.6	64.5
Literacy	59.08	33.59	34.98	28.25	32.20	22.87	29.94	29.57
Beyond the Core	98.01	99.79	99.05	99.08	96.24	98.60	99.26	99.51

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 Grammar 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 Grammar (formerly the Latin Grammar School) was approved 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 a few findings on that initial audit, it was deemed unqualified. Since that first audit, all audits have been unqualified, and there have been no additional internal control issues.

The school struggled to maintain a leader during its charter term, as evidenced by school having three principals. In that charter contract, the board voted to remove the founding principal of RISE Grammar and placed the RISE Prep Executive Director in charge of the RISE Grammar.

The school never launched the required surveys to evaluate the parent and teacher satisfaction metrics 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, but the survey did not contain the proper descriptors. Due to the questions asked, the 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 two 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 Grammar board employed reasonable and effective accounting, internal controls, and budgeting practices. To ensure proper resource allocation, new fiscal controls were put in place, and an experienced charter school CFO was hired. RISE Grammar maintained strong organizational viability, practiced sound decision-making and fiscal management, thus ensuring the responsible stewardship of public monies.

- Each year of the first term, RISE Grammar has operated in accordance with all board financial approved policies.
- At the end of the first charter term, the school has 60.47 days of cash on hand.
- RISE Grammar 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 have been 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 have 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 at 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 slightly higher than the recommended level.

Amana	CHCS	FAST	Hapeville	KSFA	RISE**	Skyview	TMSA
0.83	0.11	0.14	0.46	0.37 <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. The board members with important institutional knowledge have left the board. Thus, the board has not been able to sustain itself as a highly productive board and has leaned too heavily on its Executive Director.

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. In this most recent contract term, the school did not enter grades into the student information system in a timely manner which impacts FCS's own reporting requirements and can negatively impact district funding.

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 Grammar'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.