



CHOOSE *to* SUCCEED

January 13, 2021

Commissioner Mike Morath
Texas Education Agency
1701 N. Congress Avenue
Austin, TX 78701

The Honorable
Dr. Keven Ellis
Chair of the State Board of Education
1701 N. Congress Avenue
Austin, TX 78701

Dear Commissioner Morath and Dr. Ellis:

I write this letter in support of Nathan Balasubramanian and his application for 7Cs Academy. Nathan is unique among the cohort of 2021 applicants whom I've had a chance to meet. He is a life-long school district educator. He has risen through the ranks and held leadership positions at the campus and district level of several central Texas school districts. He understands the vital role that school districts play in creating a strong and thriving public education system in Texas, and he also understands how public charter schools can complement the existing system.

He has used his vast experience and expertise to craft a unique vision for a school, one that focuses on the whole child. He doesn't simply seek to make students smarter; he wants to make them more empathetic, more resilient, more conscious of what it means and what it takes to fully engage in the community and nation in which we live. Coming from a district, Nathan understands how to run and manage schools, he is clear on how to meet the needs of special populations, how to eliminate barriers to entry, how to comply with the myriad state and federal regulations that come with the territory. But he also understands that red tape and bureaucracy cannot get in the way of a good education.

Nathan has made a big splash in the community since announcing his intent to open a new school. He is holding neighborhood meetings to explain his vision to prospective parents, he has shadowed local leaders of charter schools to expand his understanding of what the job entails, he has reached out to civic leaders far and wide to listen and learn to their concerns as well.

We hosted an event for elected officials and superintendents of local charter schools, and I watched as Nathan introduced himself, built bridges, and advocated for his vision of what public education can look like. With an extremely long and difficult last name to pronounce, he led the group in a brief song that served as a mnemonic device to make saying his surname easier for all involved. I really appreciated the humility: some may be offended that their name is mispronounced, some may shy away from it offering a nickname instead; but he dove right in and tackled the challenge with joy and humility. This typified his approach to all aspects of his work.

Nathan is the complete package: experience, management acumen, a strong and clear vision, and spirit that embraces innovation. So impressed were we with his plans that we awarded a \$50,000 start-up grant to him, and we know that the best is yet to come. Thank you for giving him and his 7Cs Academy your full consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Thomas E. Torkelson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Tom Torkelson
CEO, Choose to Succeed