

March 20, 2026

State Charter Schools Commission of Georgia
c/o Guin Jones and Allen Mueller
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1356 Twin Towers East
Atlanta, GA 30334

Rockdale County Public Schools received a Letter of Intent on October 30, 2025, for a start-up charter school proposing to open in the fall of 2027. The petitioner voluntarily moved forward in the process and submitted the full petition for Harvest Academy on December 31, 2025. The Rockdale County Board of Education voted to deny Harvest Academy’s petition on March 19, 2026.

RCPS Review Cycle

After receiving the full petition, the Rockdale County Public Schools (RCPS) Review Committee thoroughly reviewed and evaluated the petition using the rubric provided by the State Charter Schools Commission. The committee also engaged in a comprehensive interview with Harvest Academy Board members, representatives from their Educational Service Provider (ESP), and their financial service provider. The 90-minute interview was held on Wednesday, February 25, 2026.

Upon completion of the review cycle activities, the committee recommended the RCPS Board of Education deny Harvest Academy’s petition. The RCPS Board of Education voted unanimously to deny Harvest Academy’s petition at the regular business meeting on Thursday, March 19, 2026. Please note that the review and final vote were completed within 90-days of the petition’s submission; *State Board Rule 160-4-9.05*.

Reasons for Denial

The following insufficiencies render this petition irreparable for the 2026 Review Cycle; *State Board Rule 160-4-9.05*

Vision and Mission

- The limited mission of personalized learning was given without evidence to support community or student need driving the mission or taking part in the development of it.
- There is little evidence to support Harvest Academy as a STEAM school. The arts are not included as a component of instruction or learning in the petition.
- There is insufficient evidence of community need with only 75 survey responses mentioned during the interview.
- There is no evidence to support the need for the requests for flexibility requested in the areas of Competencies and Core Curriculum, Employment, Conditions of Employment, Consolidation/Organization of Schools, Personnel Policies and Benefits, and Professional Standards.

Academics

- There is insufficient evidence that Harvest Academy is prepared to support the academic needs of all students. The proposed personalized learning model is not innovative and does not address the academic, social, or emotional needs of students that are not otherwise addressed by Rockdale County Public Schools.
- There is no curriculum for Math and English Language Arts (ELA). The petition states it will use the Georgia Standards for Excellence (GSE) as their curriculum. The Georgia Department of Education has moved away from GSE for Math and ELA.
- There is not a clear direction on how the school will address pacing to ensure students meet the required standards prior to spring Georgia Milestones Assessments (GMAS) which the school intends to use as their primary assessment.
- The petition states that students will be assessed using GMAS in 5th grade for social studies which does not match Georgia’s testing requirements.
- There is no clear plan to serve gifted students.
- There is no plan for the use or the procurement of technology for students or staff.

Community Need, Demand, and Engagement

- There is no evidence of community need, demand or engagement in the development of the petition.
- There is little evidence of partnerships within Rockdale County.

Governance

- The petition lacks a plan for oversight and evaluation of the Education Service Provider (ESP).
- The governing Board did not demonstrate that they operate independently from the ESP, particularly during the interview.
- The petition includes confusing terminology, making roles and responsibilities unclear between Springs Charter Schools, Springs Public Charter Schools, and Harvest Academy.
- There are critical gaps in Board member expertise that was explained as once approved, several Board members will be replaced to address these gaps. There was not a clear plan for recruiting new Board members with the needed expertise.

Operations

- There are several operational concerns with the petition. The idea behind the proposed innovative model is a farm school. The petition states the first two years will likely be in a church or other rental facility. They stated the “farm” will be raised beds of food and flowers that they will grow. No additional information to support the farm learning model was given during the interview beyond the raised beds. This does not support the petition that describes interactions with farm animals and more.
- There was little evidence to support a school safety plan which was explained as a Board member is a law enforcement officer who will guide them. They did state they will have a school resource officer at the school daily, although this is not reflected in their budget.
- There is no clear plan for student and staff meals beyond using a “farm-to-table” model consisting of eating what they grow. The ESP did state they plan to use the federal National School Lunch program but offered no further information on how that would operate.
- The plan for transportation is to give families gas cards. There is not a plan for families who may not own a vehicle or could not provide their own transportation for reasons other than cost.

Services for Special Populations

- There is not a clear plan to support the needs of special populations.
- The petitioner will use contract services to address the needs of special populations but lacks the financial resources in the budget.
- The petition states the assistant principal is the person responsible for IDEA compliance. The plan does not include an assistant principal until year three.

Finance

- The budget provided is not viable and does not support academic and operational plans. One glaring omission from the budget is the expense of the ESP and the expected increase in ESP cost over the five-year period. The person from the financial agency stated this expense was “hidden” in the student line item to make the budget work.
- The petition mentions a start-up loan provided by the ESP with no repayment of that loan reflected in the budget. The rationale given was that the loan was part of the ESP negotiations and may not have to be repaid.
- The budget also has no contingency plan in the event enrollment numbers are not met.
- The budget does not contain any capital outlay money for projects that are mentioned in the petition.

Rockdale County Public Schools appreciated the opportunity to review Harvest Academy’s charter petition. Please reach out to me if you have any questions or need clarification on the review process or anything else provided in this letter.

Sincerely,



Cindy Ball
Chief Community Relations Officer