

## Charter school focuses on health sciences

Will start as a middle school, grow from there

### Justin Murphy

Rochester Democrat and Chronicle USA TODAY NETWORK

The Academy of Health Sciences Charter School will open in fall 2019 as Rochester's newest charter school, with a board of trustees featuring several significant figures in the local medical industry. The school received a charter late last month from the state Board of Regents. It will serve grades 5-8 and expects a total enrollment of 425 students by the end of five years. Founding principal Wanda Perez said the school will feature STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and math) curriculum combined with a focus on social-emotional needs. The ultimate intention is to expand to grades 5-12, then K-12, she said.

"It blends so nicely for students in terms of seeing science as a holistic field and also really developing themselves as a whole person and community member," she said.

The board of trustees includes several people with significant experience in health care in Rochester, starting with Warren Hern, the founding board president and former president and chief executive officer of Unity Health System. Others hold top medical or administrative posts at University of Rochester Medical Center, Rochester Regional Health and Excellus BlueCross BlueShield.

"We know (health sciences) is the number one industry in Rochester and there can be so many opportunities for our students to be innovators and leaders in that work," said Perez, a Greece Athena alumna who previously led a charter school in Washington, D.C.

The school will begin in an interim location before eventually seeking a larger space as it grows. Perez would not disclose the initial location, but the charter application appears to describe the former Nazareth Academy building on Lake Avenue. That building already is home to Exploration

Elementary Charter School for Science and Technology and, on a temporary basis, Rochester Prep High School.

The school expects to enroll 100 students in 2019 and will use the common application that most Rochester-area charter schools share. Perez also said the school intends to collaborate with other schools, both charter and district.

"We know what's possible for students in the city of Rochester," she said. "We see it happening in some district schools and some public charter schools, and we want to provide another environment where students can excel the way we know they can."

The Academy of Health Sciences will be the 13th charter school in Rochester (some existing schools have more than one campus). Charter schools educate about 6,100 city students in 2018-19 as well as an increasing number from the suburbs.

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**Academy of Health Sciences Charter School will apparently open in the former Nazareth Academy building.** TINA MACINTYRE-YEE / ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE