

## Three charter schools apply to open in Rochester

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Rochester Democrat and Chronicle USA TODAY NETWORK

Three charter school applicant groups are seeking state approval to open schools in Rochester starting in 2020.

It is the largest group of potential operators to advance to the full application stage in the charter school creation process in several years. One of the schools has an informal connection to Rochester Academy Charter School, while another is making its second bid for approval.

The Citizenship and Science Academy of Rochester Charter School would serve grades K-6 in its initial term. It would have a focus on STEM and environmental education and would require extended community service work.

It would be part of the Science Academies of New York, joining two schools in Syracuse and one in Utica. They have affiliations to the network of exiled Turkish cleric Fetullah Gülen, as does the existing Rochester Academy Charter School.

The proposed board chairman of Citizenship and Science Academy, Fehmi Damkaci, is also the founder of Terra Science and Education, a nonprofit contractor also associated with the Gülen schools in New York. He did not disclose that experience on the publicly available portion of the charter school application to the state Board of Regents, although he said he did so in a non-public portion.

A 2017 *Democrat and Chronicle* investigation showed that Terra made an eyebrow-raising profit in purchasing and renovating the Rochester Academy Charter School building on Latta Road and highlighted numerous ties among the Rochester and Syracuse charter schools, Terra and several openly Gülenist organizations.

Gülen has been subject of a diplomatic tiff between the United States and Turkey.

Boys to Men Community Charter School would be a male-only school serving grades 6-12 with a focus on character-building and a 10-hour school day. Its board president would be former RCSD administrator Joseph Bivins; the application was first created by Darryl Porter, a former RCSD board president.

Boys to Men submitted a letter of intent to open in 2016 but did not advance.

Collegiate Charter School of Rochester would serve grades K-5, with two teachers in every classroom and a “structured, joyful, and results-driven” approach.

The board chairwoman would be Lenora Reid-Rose, director of cultural and linguistic competence at Coordinated Care Services, while the head of school would be David McBride, a former principal in the Rochester Prep network.

The three applications go before the state Board of Regents, which will decide within the next few months whether to permit them to open.

One charter school is opening in 2019-20, the Academy of Health Sciences. Another, ROC Achieve, closed in June due to poor performance over its initial fiveyear term.

Charter school enrollment in the city of Rochester will be about 6,200 in 2019-20, compared to about 25,000 in RCSD. That number has been growing steadily for 15 years.

The Rochester school board will hold a hearing on all three applications at 5 p.m. Aug. 8 at RCSD headquarters, 131 W. Broad St.

