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Two city charter schools offer new options

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Zaria Williams, right, 14, and her schoolmate Sakoi Bowman, 13, left, put together puzzle pieces as part of the orientation day activities for the new Career and Mentoring Charter School. The exercise is to the students to work together and to get to know each other. / MARIE DE JESUS/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



Written by Tiffany Lankes Staff writer

At the new Rochester Career Mentoring Charter [School](#), college comes early.

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“We start our high school the right way — with the outcome,” said Dennis Francione, the school’s founder. “They’re going to college.”

So on Monday, most of the 88 students who signed up for one of the city’s newest charter [schools](#) flocked to the Rochester Institute of Technology for their first day of class. The school is one of two new charter schools opening in the city this year, continuing a growth that has been going on since the state lifted the cap on how many charter schools can open in New York. The other is Young Women’s College Prep, which bills itself as the first public school in Rochester exclusively for young women. It opens Monday.

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Charter schools receive public dollars, but are run by independent boards that operate outside the authority of local school boards. Several years ago, the state more than doubled the number of charter schools it allows to operate in New York, opening the gates for educators to try their hand at running a school program.

Proponents of charter schools have long argued that they offer students more options, especially those from school districts that struggle to improve student performance. And this year's crop highlights that argument, each offering a program unlike any offered in the City School District.

Still, critics of charter schools complain that they pull money away from traditional schools, since state [funding](#) is tied to student enrollment. Due to the rapid growth of charters in the Rochester area, city school officials project about 433 more students will leave for charter schools in the coming school year, taking with them about \$5.7 million in state funding.

For students like Chybryanniya Coleman, however, Rochester Career Mentoring Charter School offers something she does not feel she can get at a city school.

"I needed a school that was smaller," Chybryanniya said.

The charter school will ultimately grow to about 320 students in grades 9 to 12, roughly half the size of even the smallest city high schools.

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