

Cobblestone School closes; drive falls short

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Cobblestone School in Rochester's Neighborhood of the Arts has closed its doors for good after a last-ditch fundraising effort fell short.

The school, founded in 1983, was the only nonreligious private school in the city. It had 37 students in prekindergarten through sixth grade in 2014-15, down from about 160 a decade ago.

Declining enrollment led to mounting financial pressure. In May, the school started an online fundraiser for \$150,000, but it only reached about \$58,000 in donations. Tuition to the school was on a sliding scale up to \$12,000. The official decision to close was made June 18, according to Bridget McLaughlin, a teacher at the school for 17 years.

"It just turned out we didn't have enough money to sustain ourselves for an entire year," she said. "Even though we had wonderful families and they wanted to stay there, it just wasn't enough."

Faculty and parents said the school's strength was a commitment to finding each child's individual learning style. Small class sizes allowed for strong bonds.

Jennifer Koenig was president of the Parent-Teacher Alliance and had two daughters there in fourth and fifth grades.

"They really, really cared — and I know lots of places care — but they really cared about who our children were," she said. "There was an inten

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sive effort to get to know the child and how they learned on an individual level."

McLaughlin and Koenig said the school had funding in place for part of 2015-16, but a majority of voters, including parents, faculty, staff and board members, decided it would be too risky to try to make up the remainder during the school year.

Since families knew the school was in difficult financial straits, most had time to find a backup plan for their children. Koenig said her family is moving to Ohio for another job, but would have stayed if the school were still open.

Similarly, McLaughlin said, faculty and staff are looking for new jobs. There were four classroom teachers and five adjunct teachers, school codirector Sara Shaw said in May.

The school was in a 10,700-square-foot building between East and University avenues. It is owned by Flower City Management, which bought it from the school in November 2013 for \$425,000.

Representatives from the company did not respond to a request for comment Monday night. Cobblestone Board of Trustees Chairman Ken Smoker said the school had a 10-year lease.

"They're looking to find a tenant, but what their goals are for that tenant, I don't know," he said.

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“There was an intensive effort to get to know the child and how they learned on an individual level.”

JENNIFER KOENIG

PARENT-TEACHER ALLIANCE PRESIDENT AND MOTHER OF 2 STUDENTS AT COBBLESTONE SCHOOL



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