

# Thwarted charter founders try again

## This time they use different name

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The former trustees of Greater Works Charter School are applying again to open a charter school in Rochester, this time under a different name and without their disgraced 22-year-old leader.

Greater Works was approved by the state to open in 2015-16 before it was revealed that its lead applicant, 22-year-old Ted Morris Jr., had fabricated most of his academic and professional experience.

Morris resigned, and the remaining trustees withdrew their application. The New York State Education Department, which failed to catch the lies in the first place, later instituted new safeguards to verify applicants' credentials.

The remaining trustees, led by Keuka College education professor Peter Kozik, said at the time that they planned to resubmit their application without Morris, and they started that process in January with a formal letter of intent. The name of the venture has been changed to ROC Charter School.

The vision of the prospective school is somewhat different — for instance, the school would eventually serve grades 7-12 rather than just 9-12.

The letter of intent acknowledges the problems with Greater Works, but Kozik said the Morris affair, while unexpected, did not throw the remaining trustees far off their path.

“We didn’t lose much momentum at all,” he said. “There was really no sense of our progress being slowed.”

One other group of applicants submitted a letter of intent to open a charter school in Rochester. That school would be called Exploration Charter School for Science and Technology, and would serve grades K-5. It would be distinguished by a commitment to learning through scientific inquiry, according to the letter of intent, including robotics, green technology, computers and engineering.

Among its trustees are two educators at other local schools. Joseph Saia is the director of Discovery Charter School in Greece, which also serves elementary school children, and Christopher Potter is a special education teacher at Webster’s Willink Middle School.

A survey of other Rochester-area charter schools’ websites indicates that Saia and Potter would be the first charter trustees affiliated with other local schools except two Discovery trustees: Joseph Martino, the executive director of the Norman Howard School in Henrietta, and Donna Dedee, president and CEO of School of the Holy Childhood, also in Henrietta.

Monroe County Chief Financial Officer Robert Franklin is also named as a trustee. It appears he would be the first local public official to serve on a charter board except Daniel Aureli, a Discovery trustee who is also the town of Irondequoit’s deputy attorney. Saia, Potter and Franklin did not respond to requests for comment.

ROC Charter School and Exploration Charter School are two of 38 letters of intent submitted to the state Board of Regents by its January deadline. Some of them will be invited to submit full applications, and some of those finalists will be granted approval to open.

At the moment, no charter schools are scheduled to open in Rochester in 2015-16, but enrollment at the existing ones is growing. More than 4,100 city students currently attend charters, and the Rochester School District is anticipating there will be an additional 723 in 2015-16 .

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