

22-year-old gets OK to open school

JUSTIN MURPHY

STAFF WRITER

Unlike most school leaders, Ted Morris' days in a high school classroom are still fresh in his memory.

It was only six years ago that he graduated from School Without Walls at age 16. Now, at 22, he's armed with a freshly minted doctoral degree in education and permission from the state Board of Regents to open a charter high school in Rochester in 2015.

"I remember being in school and feeling I was a bit more advanced and (not having enough options)," he said. "I wanted to grow up and open a school that's predicated on each student's needs and interests. ... I did it sooner than I expected."

It will be called Greater Works Charter School, accepting about 100 ninthgraders in its first year and eventually expanding to about 400 students in grades 9-12.

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One of the key tenets will be extensive use of online learning. Each class will have two certified teachers, or one teacher and one teacher's assistant; at any given time, each of them will be working with a third of the students and the remaining third — in particular, the more advanced students — will be working on computers.

"It allows the teacher to focus on students who need that direct or small group instruction," Morris said. "When you have one teacher in a room with 25 or 30 kids, they're not able to get that."

The school day (9 a.m. to 5 p.m.) and the school year (193 days, compared to 180 in the Rochester School District) will be extended. In addition, once the school is up and running, incoming ninth-graders will be required to attend a four-week "bridge program" in the summer.

A building has not yet been selected, but Morris said he has identified a spot in northwest Rochester and hopes to close on it by the end of the year.

After graduating from School Without Walls in 2008, Morris got a bachelor's degree at age 18 from Western Governors University, an online college based in Salt Lake City. He then received master's and doctoral degrees from Concordia University near Chicago.

Morris has an educational consulting firm and said he has worked with the Rochester Prep schools, among others. He also helped start three nonprofit organizations, he said: Sparq Rochester, a youth arts outfit; Greater Works Education Network, a fledgling statewide charter advocacy group; and Victory Living Christian Faith Center.

The name of the school, Morris said, refers to the potential of its students. Rather than funneling them all toward college, he said there will be an emphasis on laying out a variety of post-graduation choices, including career paths and the military.

"To me, it's essentially saying we're going to prepare our children ... to become self-sufficient citizens," he said. "The school is about preparing the next generation to do better, and be better, than we've done."

When it opens next fall, Greater Works will join six other charter high schools in Rochester: Rochester Prep High School, University Prep Charter School for Young Men, Rochester Academy Charter School, Young Women's College Prep, Vertus Charter School and

Rochester Career Mentoring Charter School. Some have significantly outperformed traditional public schools while others have posted less impressive results.

Charter schools have taken an increasingly large chunk out of the student body and funding in the Rochester School District, where officials have been trying to boost program offerings and academic results to retain more families.

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