

# Process getting tighter for charter school applications

## Dept. of Education increases scrutiny

**JUSTIN MURPHY**

STAFF WRITER

A month after a 22-year-old managed to gain the right to open a charter school with a rsumfull of fraudulent credentials, the New York state Education Department has tightened its scrutiny over the process.

Ted Morris Jr. was the lead applicant for Greater Works Charter School, which was approved to open in 2015-16 in Rochester. But it turned out that Morris, who claimed to have a doctoral degree, in fact had no college degrees at all. Much of his listed work experience was also fabricated.

That led to questions about how his application had gotten through the supposedly rigorous review process. State Board of Regents Chancellor Merryl Tisch blamed it on state education department staff; the department said it was reviewing its procedures.

In a memo dated Dec. 12, it introduced some changes. First, instead of having a "lead applicant" in charge of the proposal, each school must have an "applicant group" comprising its board of trustees and any other members of the planning group and prospective school employees. All group members will have to submit a rsum a "statement of intent" laying out their relevant experience and involvement with the school application, a transcript from the school where they got their highest degree, and three letters of recommendation from people outside the applicant group. Group members will undergo a criminal background check and fingerprinting, at the group's expense. A new trustee cannot be appointed to a school's board without going through that verification process and getting state approval. According to the new regulations, the submission of misinformation can lead to the whole application being dismissed, and all members of the applicant group are required to report misinformation submitted by any member of the group.

Joe Klein, who helps recruit high-quality charter schools through his organization E3 Rochester, applauded the change.

"It's a good idea," he said. "I know why they're doing it, but it doesn't hurt at all. Anything that strengthens incoming (application) quality helps."

In the case of Greater Works, Morris resigned the day his fabrications came to light, and the school's application was withdrawn shortly thereafter. The other trustees still hope to open a different school in Rochester at some point.

[JMURPHY7@DemocratandChronicle.com](mailto:JMURPHY7@DemocratandChronicle.com) [Twitter.com/CitizenMurphy](https://twitter.com/CitizenMurphy)



**Ted Morris Jr. resigned as leader of a board that was granted a charter school when falsehoods were discovered in his resum.**

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