

**Urban Choice now says it'll stay open**

School chief says charter gets short-term renewal

**Justin Murphy**

Rochester Democrat and Chronicle USA  
TODAY NETWORK

A month after announcing it would close at the end of the school year, Urban Choice Charter School in Rochester now says it has received a new recommendation from the state for a shortterm renewal of its charter.

The state Education Department's Charter School Office, which visits charter schools and makes recommendations to the Board of Regents about whether to renew their charters, has made no public announcement about either the preliminary closure recommendation or a change of heart. The Board of Regents is not expected to take formal action until next month.

In February, though, the K-8 school on Humboldt Street told its staff, parents and 400 students it was preparing to close after the Charter School Office had recommended against a renewal of the charter after 2019-20.

Nelson Blish, chairman of the school's board of trustees, said the initial determination was based mostly on students' state test scores.

Fewer than one in five students rated as proficient in either math or English on last year's tests, and both numbers declined from 2018 to 2019.

The school appealed the decision, though, and noted that students' performance so far this year on a similar, unofficial proficiency measure pointed to likely substantial gains this spring — although, as it turns out, the state has canceled all testing for the rest of the year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The (Charter School Office) liked our response enough that they reconsidered it," Blish said. State and school officials will be meeting often to continue to develop an improvement plan, he said.

A full charter renewal term is five years, but Blish said the state indicated it would recommend something shorter than that, likely two years.

A state Education Department spokeswoman said Tuesday that the Board of Regents has not yet acted, but did not address the Charter School Office recommendation. The department did not respond on time to a *Democrat and Chronicle* Freedom of Information request for documents related to Urban Choice's potential renewal.

The school building is now closed due to coronavirus. When the 2020-21 school year begins, it likely will be at a new site. The board of trustees is finalizing a purchase agreement

charter schools is April 1. A common application and more information on the schools is available at [www.goodschoolsroc.org](http://www.goodschoolsroc.org).

Contact staff writer Justin Murphy at [jmurphy7@gannett.com](mailto:jmurphy7@gannett.com) or at 585-258-9886.



**Urban Choice Charter School on Humboldt Street in Rochester.** JUSTIN MURPHY/ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE

for a new building, the location of which Blish would not reveal.

The deadline to enter into the lottery enrollment process for all Rochesterarea