

New charter schools planned for region

As many as four could reshape educational landscape

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Rochester Democrat and Chronicle USA TODAY NETWORK

As many as four new charter schools could open in the Rochester area in 2022-23, including one that counts a current RCSD principal and former RCSD board member among its proposed trustees. The four proposed schools are named:

- Rochester Sports Academy Charter School
- Rochester Excellence Academy Charter School
- Innova Girls Academy Charter School
- Genesee Community Charter School - Flour City Campus All four of them are waiting for approval from state authorizing entities. Together, they represent not only several hundred potential additional charter school slots in the area but a broadening of the scope of the charter sector in Rochester, including high-profile partnerships with large regional nonprofit organizations.

About 6,700 Rochester children attended charter schools in 2020-21 versus about 23,000 enrolled in RCSD. That number has been growing steadily for more than a decade and is expected to continue to do so.

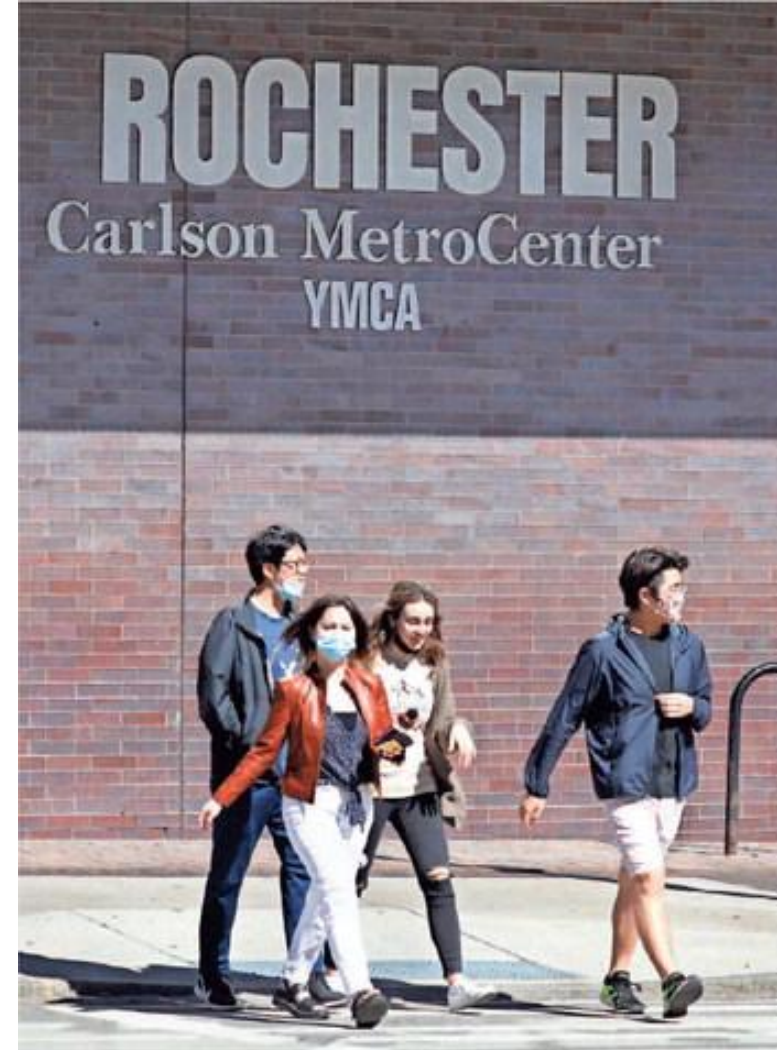
Uncertain allegiances

Rochester Sports Academy Charter School would be a 9-12 high school with an undetermined location in Monroe County. As its name suggests, it would provide an emphasis on sports-related fields including sports medicine, management, analytics, e-sports and

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Nina Delgado, a kindergarten teacher at School 8, shown working with students with the help of Daisy Spencer of Genesee Community Charter School. JAMIE GERMANO/DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE FILE



Chester F. Carlson MetroCenter YMCA on E Main Street in downtown Rochester, March 30. SHAWN DOWD/DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE

sports media.

'So many students nowadays look into sports as a career with the focus on being an athlete, but what we see now is there's so many places in the sports realm without being an athlete,' said Gabriel Marshall, the lead applicant and the assistant vice president for student success and

Anti-Poverty Initiative.

Innova Girls Academy Charter School would serve girls in grades K-6 and focus on STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art and math).

retention at Buffalo State College. 'A lot of kids don't get that exposure until later on, so we wanted to bring that to students earlier in the process.'

Among the proposed trustees for the venture are Natalie Sheppard, a former Rochester school board member; Mary Andrecolich-Montesano Diaz, principal of RCSD's Rochester International Academy, and James Reaves, a well known former professional basketball player and assistant principal in Greece.

Split allegiances are inevitable when educators serve charter schools and traditional public schools simultaneously. There was public outcry after U Prep Charter School CEO Walter Larkin was nearly appointed to the Rochester school board, and then again when William Clark was in fact appointed to the board immediately after resigning from the Rochester Prep board.

Rochester Sports Academy, in its proposed state, has a particularly dense thicket of potential entanglements that Marshall said are still being worked out.

The school's letter of intent said it would locate in either Greece or Gates Chili and draw students primarily from those districts; Andrecolich-Montesano Diaz said she joined the board with the understanding that the school would not compete with RCSD.

In an interview with the *Democrat and Chronicle*, though, Marshall said the search for a building had widened to include the entire county, and that the school likely would recruit in RCSD after all.

'We understand people's full-time jobs, (and) we're not trying to be unethical or burn any bridges,' he said. 'We just want to find something that's beneficial for students.'

Several charter schools are located in the town of Greece, but most landed there only after failing to find a suitable building in the city of Rochester. They still draw their students primarily from the Rochester City School District.

High-level partnerships Rochester Excellence Academy Charter School would serve students in grades K-4 with 'rigorous academics, a values-based community and individualized supports.' It would be

It is being designed as a 'Girl Scouts Academy,' where all enrolled students would be Girl Scouts (unless they choose otherwise) and the curriculum follows what a girl might typically experience in after-school activities, proposed Head of School Lindsay Swanson said.

It also would have a partnership with Young Women's College Prep Charter School, an existing high school, thereby creating a potential K-12 single-gender pipeline.

Both Innova and Excellence Academy have been developed with the support of BES, a national charter school incubator.

They, along with Rochester Sports Academy, are seeking a charter from the state Board of Regents. Their full applications are due in July, with a decision to be made in November.

Replication and integration

Another school is applying instead to SUNY, the state's other charter authorizing agency. That is Genesee Community Charter School, which is looking to open a second K-6 school called the Flour City Campus. It would be at or near the current Rochester Museum and Science Center location.

GCCS is currently chartered by the Board of Regents, which has criticized it repeatedly for maintaining a student body that is much wealthier and whiter than RCSD. In 2020 the Regents gave the school only a short-term renewal.

In response, school leaders are asking SUNY not only to open a second location but to adopt the charter for the existing school as well, putting the Regents out of the picture.

In the application for the Flour City Campus, School Leader Shannon Hillman said that forcing GCCS to replicate RCSD's demographics means consigning it to failure, given the history and effects of school segregation in the region.

'Rochester schools are still deeply segregated, which deprives all students of the benefits of integration, and GCCS - Flour City Campus therefore does not seek to exactly replicate these segregated data described above,' Hillman wrote.

partnered with the YMCA of Greater Rochester and potentially could be located at the Carlson MetroCenter on East Main Street.

The YMCA announced in March it would close the fitness center at the Carlson MetroCenter. 'We believe we can better serve the city of Rochester by using those resources in other ways,' President George Romell said at the time.

Among the proposed trustees of Excellence Academy is Aqua Porter, executive director of the Rochester-Monroe

Instead of matching RCSD's demographics, Hillman proposed, GCCS would match the demographics of the city as a whole: close to 40% white, 40% Black and 20% Latino.

A decision from SUNY is due June 15. As with the NYSED applications, the new GCCS school would not open until 2022.