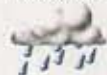


Weather



Rain due to arrive
Forecast, B8

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WEDNESDAY, December 21, 2011 | providencejournal.com

EDUCATION

New chapter for Meeting Street School

Private institution seeks to open a mayoral academy featuring inclusive classrooms

By LINDA BORG
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

PROVIDENCE — The Meeting Street School is seeking to expand its model of including regular students in the same classroom as special-needs students by opening a charter school in Providence.

In its application, the Grace School Academy proposes to open a K-8 mayoral academy, primarily for students from Providence and North Providence.

If approved, the charter school would follow the model used by the



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Students at the Grace School, part of a program at Meeting Street School where regular students are fully integrated with special-needs students.

SEE CHARTER, A8

CHARTER

Continued from A1

Seeing beyond differences

Meeting Street School's Grace School, a private K-8 facility where students with disabilities, some of them profound, attend all of their classes with students who have no disabilities.

The Grace School was created five years ago on the belief that, in an inclusive classroom, children learn to look beyond the disabilities of their classmates and see them as fellow children. The appeal to parents of non-disabled students is that the school has small classes, a low student-to-teacher ratio and an individual learning plan for every student.

In the proposed charter school, each classroom would have 20 students, 17 non-disabled selected by a blind lottery and three children with special needs who would be drawn from Meeting Street.

"Those three students could come from any dis-

trict," said John Kelly, Meeting Street's president. "Meeting Street would assume those costs."

Meeting Street School is a private, nonprofit entity that receives some funding from private sources and some from school districts that pay tuition to send their students to the Eddy Street school. The Grace School Academy would be a public charter school.

The Grace Academy, which would be located on the Meeting Street campus on Eddy Street, would open with 68 students with the goal of 306 students after eight years. Ultimately, a minimum of 85 percent of the school's students would come from Providence.

Each class would be taught by a traditional instructor and a special-education teacher who would float between two classrooms.

There would also be a teaching assistant in every class.

One of the limitations of existing charter schools, Kelly said, is that they have a lower enrollment of students with severe and profound disabilities than the public schools in their home districts.

"The Grace School Academy would address this gap... and serve as a replicable model for other mayoral academies, charter schools and school districts," the application said. "Part of our mission will be to serve as a training ground and teaching site for teachers, administrators, parents and others to learn about inclusive educational models and translate them back to their own districts."

Meeting Street chose to apply for a mayoral academy rather than a regular charter school for a couple of reasons:

■ To partner with the Providence and North Providence school districts, something the mayoral model encourages because of the lead-

ership role played by the mayors. The mayor of one of the two towns would be the chair of the school's board of overseers. (The Providence school superintendent would also be one of the 11 overseers.)

■ Mayoral academies can opt out of the state and local retirement systems.

Kelly said Meeting Street didn't want to manage two separate retirement systems. This way, all of the employees would have the option to contribute to the equivalent of a 401(k) plan rather than a more costly pension.

Mayoral academies are also exempt from paying the prevailing wage of the sending district, but Kelly says that wasn't a consideration, adding that his teachers already earn 85 to 90 percent of the market wage.

The proposal already has the support of Mayor Angel Taveras of Providence and Mayor Charles Lombardi of North Providence.