
Board approves charter school for former Harding building

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NOTE:

A new charter high school will open this fall in the Harding Middle School building, Oklahoma City School Board members decided Monday night.

Board members voted 4-3 in favor of allowing Families for Excellence in Education Inc. to operate Independence Charter High School at Harding, 3333 N Shartel Ave., which closes this month. School board Chairman Cliff Hudson was absent from the meeting.

The school board approved the application for the new school more than three months ago, but board members last week asked interim Superintendent Pamela Powell and her staff to visit with charter school officials about where they wanted to locate the school and the extent of its boundaries.

The school's attendance zone stretches roughly from NW 23 to the district's northernmost boundary near Memorial Road and from the Broadway Extension to the district's westernmost boundary along Portland Avenue and Meridian Avenue.

Board members approved a three-year contract, with 5 percent of the funding received by the school to be retained by Oklahoma City Public Schools.

Last week, several board members weren't in favor of the three-year contract. Board member Terri Silver, who voted against the contract Monday night, said charter school contracts with other new schools, including the Marcus Garvey Leadership Academy, have been set by the board at one year.

Excellence for Education operates Independence Charter Middle School in the former Burbank Elementary building, 3636 NW 65.

Board member Al Basey said the organization's charter middle school has been successful, so he supports an extended contract.

"I think a contract for a high school has to be three years," he said. "There are about \$500 million in grants that can be picked up by a high school if you have a three-year contract."

The school will offer a college-preparatory curriculum and require students to take four years of English, math, science and social studies. Janet Barresi, the school's founder, said she hopes the school will be competitive with other college-preparatory high schools in the area.

Independence Charter High School will open this fall for ninth-grade students.

Barresi received hugs from supporters Monday night after the board's decision.

"I'm very pleased we've finally been able to come to an acceptance of the contract," she said. "We're excited now to be able to implement nearly two years of planning for this high school and to provide outstanding

Board approves charter school for former Harding building opportunities to students of Oklahoma City."

Barresi said the school will add a grade level in each of the next three years.

She said the next step is to hire a principal. Her organization has received more than 25 applications, she said.

Barresi said she expects to hire nine or 10 teachers for fall.

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