

School 41 will close in June due to persistent poor performance and will reopen as a different school. Seven other city schools could face that fate. And while the district continues seeking ways to help schools improve, two more charters hope to open.

EDUCATION | BY TIM LOUIS MACALUSO

## Rochester district faces new charter openings

The Rochester Teachers Association issued a memo about two weeks ago to all of its members, informing them of a slew of job opportunities at School 41, a pre-kindergarten through sixth-grade school at 279 West Ridge Road in the Kodak Park neighborhood.

Under an order from State Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia, the school will close in June because of persistently low student performance and will reopen in the fall as a completely new school. Half of the school's teaching staff will be replaced, as will the principal, and any School 41 teacher who wants to continue to work there will have to reapply.

School 41 is the second Rochester school ordered to close; East High School, now managed by the University of Rochester's Warner School of Education, was the first. Seven other city schools could face that fate if their students' performance doesn't improve satisfactorily.

At the same time, the district faces growing competition from charter schools, which are siphoning off both students and state funding. And the State Education Department's Charter School Office has given its initial approval to

applications for two more charters in the Rochester district.

The Academy of Health Sciences Charter School proposes opening in the 2019-2020 school year with grades 5-8 and eventually growing to a full K-12 school. Its focus: preparing students for college or a career in health sciences and STEM-related fields. Warren Hern, former president and CEO of Unity Health, is the board president.

Boys to Men Community Charter School also plans to open in the 2019-2020 school year, offering grades 6 to 12 and growing into a full K-12 school. Students would be required to wear uniforms and discipline would involve alternatives to suspension, such as community service and school projects. Darryl Porter, a former Rochester school board president, is the school's founder, according to the application.

Like charter schools in urban districts around the country, the proposals from the Academy of Health Sciences and Boys to Men promise to give students a path out of poverty. Both applications offer elaborate explanations of how they will aggressively market their schools to poor students, conducting outreach to



As the Rochester school district responds to a state order to close another school, two more charter schools have gained initial approval to open in the city. FILE PHOTO

churches, recreation centers, and other community centers.

Rochester school officials say that the district's enrollment isn't declining, as it was a few years ago. Growth in the number of prekindergarten students and an influx of students from Puerto Rico has boosted the district's enrollment, the officials say. But that's hardly a long-term strategy.

Meantime, 10 charter schools are already operating in the district, and some of them have expanded.

Together, they are educating more than 5000 city students.

Leaders of the proposed Academy of Health Sciences and Boys to Men charters now face additional scrutiny by State Education Department officials. If they receive final approval, the district faces the prospect of losing as many as 450 students to each of the new charters during their initial five years of operation.

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