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Rockford School Board Authorizes First Charter Public School

RCSI Applauds Move and Supports Approval of other Charter Proposals

ROCKFORD, IL – The School Board of Rockford District 205 unanimously approved a resolution Tuesday to authorize the Legacy Academy of Excellence as Rockford's first charter public school, a move applauded by the Rockford Charter School Initiative.

RCSI has been working since July, 2008 with a broad coalition of residents and leaders of business, government, religious, civic, social, and educational organizations to build awareness of and interest in bringing charter public schools to Rockford. "The School Board's approval is an important first step in what we hope is an expanded role for charter public schools in supporting the continued improvement of Rockford's public education," said Laurie Preece, RCSI's volunteer executive director. "There are some fine proposals still before the Board and we look forward to these charter operators working in successful partnership with Board and District leadership."

The Legacy Academy of Excellence plans to open for the 2009-2010 school year with kindergarten through fifth grade classes. The school will be located at the former Evergreen Elementary School site on Prairie Road in southwest Rockford, which will be leased from the current owner, Faith Center. Legacy's school mission is "...to instill a lifelong passion for learning within all...students while ensuring that all learners, including those considered to be 'at risk' [due to] economic and social background, succeed academically and become contributing citizens of a global society." The founders will operate the school based on a culture they call the "6 Rs": rigor, relevance, respect, relationships, responsibility and resilience.

The Board's approval was conditional pending a final public hearing to be held at 6:00 pm on Tuesday, January 20. This hearing is a process formality to ensure compliance with Illinois charter school law, and the School Board is expected to ratify Legacy Academy's proposal in that meeting.

MORE



(BOARD APPROVES CHARTER SCHOOL cont.)

Charter public schools have been operating successfully in Chicago for over 10 years, with most of them outperforming their neighboring traditional public schools in student achievement, graduation, college acceptance and truancy. “The hallmark of charter public schools is exchanging great operating flexibility and academic freedom for a high degree of performance accountability,” added Preece. “We have actively solicited charter operators with demonstrated excellence in urban environments similar to many of Rockford’s neighborhoods.”

In December the School Board received a second charter proposal from Chicago International Charter Schools for a new Rockford campus. CICS operates 12 schools in Chicago teaching 7,500 students, and will partner with Rockford-based Zion Development Corporation on a school in the Midtown area. On Tuesday, January 20, 2009 the Board’s Education Committee is meeting to review the CICS-Rockford proposal. The meeting will be held at 4:30 pm at District 205 offices at 201 South Madison, room 207.

A third proposal was submitted last week by Galapagos Charter School, who runs a school in Chicago’s Humboldt Park neighborhood. Galapagos has achieved significant standardized test score gains each year—including a 20% increase in math and reading last year—despite over 90% of its students being on the free- or reduced-lunch assistance program.

Community members are encouraged to offer their support for high-quality charter public school proposals that will improve public educational offerings in Rockford. They can learn more at www.rockfordcharterschools.com, inform their friends and families about the benefits of charters, attend and speak at School Board meetings, or contact Board members to voice support. Board member contact information is at <http://webs.rps205.com/district/sboard.html>.

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The Rockford Charter Schools Initiative (RCSI) is dedicated to improving public education by facilitating the development and successful authorization of excellent charter public schools for children in Rockford Public School District 205. RCSI is funded by a grant from the Emerging Opportunities Fund, a strategic initiative of the Leadership Council of the Rockford Area Economic Development Council, the Linda and John Anderson Family Foundation and other generous donors. www.RockfordCharterSchools.com.