

ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

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New Charter School Proposed In Springdale (nwaonline.com)

SPRINGDALE — A public charter school is planned to open in Springdale in 2014, if approved by Arkansas' Department of Education.

Plans for Ozark College and Career Academy were in a letter of intent filed Monday with the department. It would be an open enrollment charter school to accommodate at-risk, low income and minority students and their families in inner city Springdale, said Christine Silano, executive director of Ozark Education, a nonprofit group planning the school.

Organizers want to establish a school serving kindergarten through 12th grade. The school would open with 108 students in kindergarten through eighth grade. The enrollment would be capped at 245 students with the high school grades added as the students advance, Silano said.

The final application isn't due until later this summer. The institution may be one of the first to follow a new process for approving charter schools that came out of the Legislature this year, said Phyllis Stewart, chief of staff at the department.

The Board of Education gave a green light to the process in a unanimous vote Monday. A committee of up to 11 staff members will review applications and approve new charter schools.

Tom Kimbrell, education commissioner said he, six assistant commissioners and the chief legal counsel will make up the authorizing committee. Staff members of the state charter school office will be nonvoting members of the panel.

Brenda Gullett of Fayetteville, chairman of the Board of Education, said the board maintains oversight of the committee's actions. She said she has a "great deal of confidence" in staff members screening the applicants.

"The board is not anti-charter. We're anti-ineffective schools," Gullett said. "Charter applications will get the same scrutiny and have the same hurdles as before."

As an open enrollment charter school, students can be admitted from any school district. Silano said she wants to attract a core group from east central and north central Springdale, especially students from low income or minority students.

"These are the kids with fewer choices for education," she said. "We want the school to have a one-room schoolhouse feel to it and to help students avoid the bumps in the road toward graduation."

Ozark Education received a \$250,000 Public Charter Startup Grant from the Walton Family Foundation. The first payment is for \$30,000 with the balance of \$220,000 comes when the charter is approved, Silano said. According to the foundation website, the grants are provided to school developers who serve low-income children and demonstrate the capacity to raise student achievement.

Charter schools receive the same per student aid as other schools, which this year is \$6,267. Charter schools don't receive local tax revenue and don't charge tuition.

Silano declined to discuss where the school might be located. "We're looking at different options right now," she said.

Springdale Superintendent Jim Rollins said Thursday he had no comment on the proposed school until he looked at the letter of intent.

The Board of Education denied an application four years ago for a Dove Academy of Excellence in Springdale that would focus on primarily Hispanic students.

Frank Holman, former superintendent in the Lincoln School District, wanted to start a charter school offering online and classroom courses statewide. The state board questioned if classroom space could be provided throughout the state for face-to-face instruction and denied the application earlier this year.

Holman said last week he planned to meet with his board soon to decide if he wants to reapply and go through the new process. "I'm thinking about it," Holman said.

Haas Hall Academy in Fayetteville and the Benton County School of the Arts in Rogers are the two open enrollment charter schools in Northwest Arkansas. The third will open in August in Bentonville. The Northwest Arkansas Classical Academy will open with students in kindergarten through eighth grade, adding ninth through 12th grades over the next five years. The enrollment cap is 685 students by the fifth year.

Atkins superintendent says farewell (Russellville Courier)

ATKINS — School superintendent Boyce Watkins will leave the district on June 30. He departs after a seven-year tenure at Atkins to take care of his and his wife Yvonne's aging parents.

His administration at Atkins, which began in the summer of 2006, was only one leg of a 32-year adventure he plans to continue in the Arkansas public school system.

"It is certainly bittersweet," he said. "I'm not finished with school business yet, and if the opportunity is present, I will continue to stay active in the profession."

Watkins taught grades 4-6 and middle school classes at Cave City before taking the principal job at West Side Elementary School at Greers Ferry where he was administrator for 13 years.

He was superintendent at Waldron for five years before coming to Atkins and enjoyed a three-year appointment at Alread prior to that.

Watkins and his wife Yvonne, who is a national board certified master teacher, have plans to move closer to their mothers' homes. They will be closer to the family who needs them most right now.

"My wife and I have aging parents living in Stone and Sharp counties," Watkins said. "I need to take time out and spend it with family.

"Yvonne was a literacy specialist at Atkins and already has a job at a school where we are relocating. I thoroughly enjoy what I do and I am young enough to return."

The Atkins School District has experienced several changes during Watkins' time at the helm.

"My goal was always to leave the school district in better shape than when I arrived," he said. "We've been able to provide a new facility for grades K-8. The high school has new additional facilities in the form of classrooms. We are able to provide more safety as well since the new storm shelters for students and staff were completed."

Implementing new methods for teaching and assessment was an integral part of his administration. Changes in the way public schools provide instruction is another part of improved education experiences at Atkins.

"It is an exciting time right now," he said. "We are transitioning from Frameworks Standards to the Common Core Curriculum, and full implementation takes place this school year.

"We are also in the process of switching from the No Child Left Behind guidelines to Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which emphasizes equal education opportunities."

Watkins claimed the staff is responsible for the improvements seen at the school. It was the spirit of teamwork he saw every day that lent to the success of educating Atkins' students and cementing a bright future.

"I'm just glad to be a part of it," Watkins said. "The new Teacher Excellence Support System (TESS) coupled with a professional faculty and staff, has been the primary contributors to improved student performance."

Aside from ensuring improved student performance, a solid financial statement and new facilities, it is easy to discern Watkins has a passion for Arkansas' public education system.

"I still enjoy what I do and have several years left to work," Watkins said. "There is much that I would like to contribute and help provide support for in Arkansas' school districts."

Mid-South band director charged with indecency (WMC-TV, Memphis)

Video available at <http://www.wmctv.com/story/22592923/mid-south-band-director-charged-with-indecency>

WYNNE, AR - (WMC-TV) - A Mid-South band director admitted to police that he exposed himself to a 16-year-old student in the Wynne High School band room. Nicholas Wayne Wooster is out of jail and on bond as of Friday after being charged with sexual indecency with a child.

In a small town like Wynne, Arkansas, trust usually comes easy but when it is broken it put everyone on edge.

"It's a shock to everybody that it happened here in Wynne because nothing like this ever really happens here," said police chief Jeff Sanders.

The 35-year old Wynne High School band director was arrested Wednesday.

Sanders said Wooster admitted to police, in a taped interview, to taking a girl out of study hall and to the band room. Then kissing her, exposing himself to her, and asking her to have sex with him.

"Somebody that's in authority ... that teachers that does that to a child, that's just a shock it self," said Sanders.

Sanders said a call into the Crimes Against Children Hotline in April lead to the investigation and arrest.

An affidavit also claimed that Wooster kissed that student and sent explicit sexual messages on Facebook.

Action News 5 went to Wooster's home, but no one answered the door despite a car was parked in the driveway.

A first court date is set for July 25. No one from the school district was available for comment.

Wooster has been ordered to not attend school functions or have contact with students.