

CHARTER SCHOOL GETS PHASE ONE APPROVAL FROM STATE OFFICIALS

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BELOIT - The University of Wisconsin System Office of Educational Opportunity on Nov. 13 approved phase one of an application for a new charter school in Beloit to be named The Lincoln Academy.

The phase one approval will allow for the submission of a phase-two charter application in early 2020.

A public hearing on the charter school proposal and process has been scheduled for 6 p.m. on Dec. 10 at the Beloit Public Library, according to a press release from Kids First Beloit, a citywide education initiative incubated and led by the Beloit 200 Education Subcommittee.

The parent information session is intended to share information about public charter school options, Kids First Beloit and The Lincoln Academy. An important goal will be to generate feedback from parents about what they want in school options for their children, according to information from Hendricks Family Foundation Executive Director and Beloit 200 Education Subcommittee member Lisa Furseth.

In an earlier Nov. 6 interview, representatives of the Beloit 200 Education Subcommittee announced the group was in the process of applying to open a public charter school designed to house 4K through 12th grades over a five-year rollout beginning in the fall of 2021.

The charter school is planned to be a public school - not a private choice, or voucher, school. The school's focus is to be on workforce readiness with accompanying internship and job exploration opportunities. The plan is to have graduates prepared to enter the workforce, attend post-secondary education or enter the armed forces.

Those on the initial application for the school and the non-profit Kids First Beloit included Mid-States Concrete Industries President Hagen Harker, Furseth, First National Bank President David McCoy, Hendricks Commercial Properties President and CEO Rob Gerbitz and Beloit Health System President and CEO Tim McKeveatt.

The Daily News requested the application documents from the University of Wisconsin System Office of Educational Opportunity in an open records request on Nov. 6, but has not received the documents as of yet.

According to the press release, The Lincoln Academy is one piece of a broader strategy to improve education opportunities for all 7,000 students in the School District of Beloit. Beloit 200 will continue its longstanding support of the Beloit School District. Organization members currently sit on the superintendent's employer advisory council and the district's revitalization task force.

"Named for one of the great unifying leaders in our nation's history, The Lincoln Academy aims to help develop extraordinary men and women who understand that hard work and perseverance in pursuit of goals and commitment to self, others, and community are the critical components of successful adults," the press release stated.

"Beloit cannot grow and thrive unless and until we as a community come together to eradicate the opportunity gap that unfairly limits the futures of so many children and families in our city. Beloit's employers must be able to find and recruit a talented workforce, and high-quality public schools are critical to that," said President and CEO at Hendricks Commercial Properties Rob Gerbitz. "As a member of the Formation Board of Kids First Beloit, and the president of Beloit 200, I am proud that we have taken an important step to make The Lincoln Academy a reality for hundreds of families. We believe this school will be an asset to this community and represent the diversity and unique spirit of Beloit."

Although charter schools may be authorized through their local school districts, the one proposed by Kids First Beloit has applied to be authorized through the University of Wisconsin System. If authorized as an independent charter, the school would receive state aid per student in the amount of \$8,618.

The preliminary budget figure assumes 48 staff members in year one, and 83 in year five. Kids First Beloit would oversee the school. Kids First would do its own fundraising and select board members to run the school. The board would then hire a head of school who would be in charge of hiring teachers and staff.