

New Atlantic City charter school to open in September

By **DIANE D'AMICO** Education Writer | **Posted: Thursday, May 29, 2014 5:07 pm**

After two years of postponements, the operators of a new charter school in Atlantic City said they will be ready to open in September.

The Atlantic City Community Charter school will open at a temporary site at 200 N. Texas Ave., near the city's Texas Avenue School. The charter plans to start with 150 students in grades K-5, then expand to as many as 950 in grades K-8. The school must still get final approval from the state Department of Education, which reviews the school's final preparedness plan and makes a decision by July 15.

The school is being managed by CSMI Education Management in Chester, Pa., which runs a K-8 charter school serving more than 3,200 students in Chester, Pa. It also operates the Camden Community Charter School in Camden, which opened in September 2013.

Max Tribble, senior vice president at CSMI said they plan to use the temporary building in Atlantic City for only one year, and are actively looking for about three acres in Atlantic City on which to build a brand new school modeled after the Camden school. That facility uses a modular construction system, with replacement wall panels that allows for rapid construction and easy replacement of damaged walls.

Tribble said as in Camden, each classroom will have an electronic smartboard. There will be a computer lab, and a cart of iPads in every classroom.

Gaeton Zorzi, senior vice president of elementary programs at CSMI, will serve as administrator of the school. He said they received more than 200 applicants for the opening class. The kindergarten, first- and second-grade classes are the largest groups. The school plans a maximum class size of 24, but some may be smaller depending on application patterns. Staff is in the process finalizing admission commitments and getting student records from the public school district. Families can still apply, but will be placed on the waiting list.

Zorzi, whose background is in special education and English as a Second Language, said the focus of the school will be on literacy and reading skills. He has been hiring the 12 staff members needed, including regular education, special education, reading and English as a Second Language teachers.

Tribble said the school is also working with Comcast, which has a program to provide home computers for \$149 and broadband Internet access for \$10 per month to eligible families. Some students may be eligible for free computers.

The school was approved by the state Department of Education in January 2011 but delayed opening

while looking for a location. CSMI attempted to open the school last year at the site of the Oceanside Charter School, which closed last June, but could not generate enough enrollment in time.

Charter schools are funded through the local school districts. Atlantic City school Superintendent Donna Haye said they did budget for 150 students to attend the new charter school in 2014-15. The district has budgeted about \$4.2 million for area charter schools in 2014-15, up from about \$3.5 million this school year. Charter schools receive 90 percent of the per-student cost in the home school district. Atlantic City's budget shows the district anticipates spending almost \$21,000 per student on education costs in 2014-15.

Currently just two charter schools operate in Atlantic County, the Galloway Community Charter School and the Charter Tech High School for the Performing Arts in Somers Point. The International Academy of Atlantic City has submitted a proposal for a school, which if approved by the state could open in September 2015.

Contact Diane D'Amico:

609-272-7241

DDamico@pressofac.com