

# State OKs new midtown KC charter school

By Mara Rose Williams

October 27, 2015

Kansas City Star

A group of midtown Kansas City residents, seeking a diverse, high-achieving grade school in the city for their children, today got thumbs up from state education officials to open a new charter to fit their order.

The new school, proposed by Citizens of the World Charter Schools-Kansas City and sponsored by the Missouri Charter Public School Commission, had been working toward state approval since the idea for it developed in 2013.

On Tuesday the State Board of Education authorized Citizens of the World to go forward with plans to open schools in Kansas City.

“We are ecstatic,” said Luke Norris president of the Citizens of the World Kansas City board of directors.

Norris, who’s part of the grassroots group of parents who pushed for the charter, works for the national nonprofit Code for America and lives with his wife and 1-year-old daughter in Hyde Park, part of midtown.

To get state approval, the group worked closely with the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education over the last couple of months to make changes in the group’s proposal that pertained to board governance policy.

“Granting the charter is a validation of all the community’s hard work and motivation to bring another public school option to the community,” Kristin Droege, Citizens of the World Kansas City’s executive director said in a statement Tuesday after the vote.

“What’s clear is that families are choosing to stay in Kansas City, and we’re committed to providing students with an excellent learning experience that will guide them to their full potential,” she said.

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Part of the driving force behind development of the school had to do with young parents feeling as though they needed better school options in order to continue living and raising children in the midtown Kansas City area.

Parents, many in the middle to upper-income bracket said they wanted an ethnically and economically diverse school for their children that reflects the world they live in. At the same time they wanted a school that would maintain high academic standards.

Citizens of the World has its headquarters in Los Angeles, where it has three schools. Two more schools are in Brooklyn.

About 60% of the students attending Citizens of the World schools are children of color, half qualify for free and reduced lunch, and a quarter are English language learners.

The Citizens of the World plan for Kansas City is to open two kindergarten through first-grade elementary schools in August 2016, adding a grade each subsequent year.

Eventually, the charter group expects to operate four schools including elementary, middle and high schools, at a full capacity of 1,750 students in the area bounded by State Line Road to the west, Prospect to the east, Union Station to the north and Brush Creek to the south.

The charter school leaders said the group’s immediate priorities “include identifying affordable facilities and continuing to engage families and local leaders.”

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