

Come Learn About Gate City Charter School for the Arts

Come out and learn more about the Gate City Charter School for the Arts, set to launch fall of 2014.

By Carol Robidoux, Patch Staff

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Karin Cevasco and Rebecca Fredrickson have learned a lot in the process of launching a charter school for the arts.

First and foremost: Never give up.

"We learned to always maintain a positive attitude and professional manner in everything we do," said Fredrickson.

"And to never give up hope," added Cevalasco.

All interested parents are invited to attend a meeting of the Friends of the Gate City Charter School set for Thursday Sept. 26 at Nashua Public Library, to connect and get involved.

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Cevalasco and Fredrickson met years ago when their oldest kids were in preschool. They got to talking about their shared interests in the arts and education, and realized they also shared the same vision for the kind of education they wanted for their own children, which coincided with a call out from the state offering start-up grants for people with charter school proposals.

"We took that idea and ran with it," said Fredrickson.

The two friends were relaxing over coffee at Riverwalk Café recently, with three of their collective mob of five kids in tow, while their moms discussed the journey they've been on so far.

The quest to establish Gate City Charter School for the Arts has been a bit of a roller coaster over the past two years – after pouring months into their proposal and gaining some momentum last year, the state placed a moratorium on new school approvals in 2012, which was a stand-off with the state legislature over funding.

All that changed in June of 2013, when the state budget was passed, including \$3.4 million earmarked for new charter schools. Gate City Charter School for the Arts was approved by the state Board of Education on July 18 as a Nashua school offering arts-integrated curriculum for K-8, one of 22 charter schools with state approval.

Cevalasco and Fredrickson never lost heart, and actually now regard the one-year holding pattern as time invested in strengthening their ties within the charter school community.

"We've come together and created a real community of support," Cevalasco said.

It's also given them more time to inform people about how charter schools operate.

"It's important for people to know a few things about charter schools – we still get asked how much it's going to cost. Charter schools are part of the public school system, so there's no tuition. And they provide open enrollment – which means kids from anywhere in the state can attend," Fredrickson said.

Their goal is to open in Nashua, Cevalasco said, although they're currently still in the process of finding the right location. Nashua would provide public transportation for students within the district. Parents for students from outside of Nashua would have to provide their own transportation. Initial enrollment is projected at 100 students for K through fourth grade, adding 60 students in grades 5 through 7 in 2015 and expanding to eighth grade in 2016, with a full enrollment of 180 students.

They are also in the process of hiring two key positions – a business manager and a director, both of which they expect to have nailed down by early 2014.

Then, it will be full steam ahead for opening their doors in fall of 2014.

A school for the arts does not mean academics takes a back seat, Cevalasco explained.

"We still have to adhere to curriculum standards, meeting or exceeding the common core guidelines. Arts integration doesn't necessarily mean we're only looking for students who are artistically inclined, or those who will be drawn to art or music. Our curriculum will integrate individual arts as a means to academic success. We will use the arts as a way of looking at different subject areas."

Cevalasco and Fredrickson believe the creative arts stimulate the brain, allowing for a greater depth of learning and understanding.

"The other thing fascinating thing is that the U.S. Department of Labor estimates 60 percent of the current elementary population will enter into careers we can't even imagine, so the question is how to prepare them for those careers, which are all going to be about ingenuity and problem solving and creativity – the arts help to foster those skills," Cevalasco said.

For those who have concerns about charter schools taking resources away from established public schools, Cevalasco and Fredrickson say the truth is that charter schools are part of the public school system.

"So, while we might take a student – and the money that comes along with that student – away from an existing school, in New Hampshire, charter schools represent a small percentage of the total public school population," Fredrickson said.

"And as the movement grows in New Hampshire, a goal of charter schools is to be able to take these specific models we're trying and sharing that at a broader level, to make sure our models could be replicated. This is a time of transition in public schools. They're transitioning to the common core, and we believe there is this great opportunity to take our arts integration model and use this as a successful model for change," Cevalasco said.

The Friends of Gate City Charter School for the Arts, an advisory committee, will hold its first meeting on Thursday, September 26, 2013 at 6:30 pm at the Nashua Public Library.

This committee, overseen by the school's board of trustees, upholds the mission of the school through a variety of support tasks and through fundraising efforts.

Volunteer opportunities include:

- Event Coordinators
- Fundraising
- Share Your Talent – Guest Artists and Family Learning Event Leaders
- Office tasks
- Facility Readiness
- Baking and Cooking Volunteers
- Library Volunteers (help solicit donations of books to build the school library)
- Musical Instrument Volunteers (help solicit donations of musical instruments)
- Serve on Ad hoc Committees on the Board of Trustees

The Friends of Gate City Charter School for the Arts is open to any community member who wishes to support the mission of the Gate City Charter School for the Arts. Please join us on September 26th to hear about the school's mission and a brief overview of the enrollment process. As well, learn how you can volunteer your time and expertise toward the success of Nashua's newest public chartered school.