

Community leader offers vision for rigorous new charter school

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By MIAWLING LAM

Children as young as five will learn fencing, chess, attend school on Saturdays and be given a rigorous, back-to-basics education at a new elementary charter school proposed for The Bronx.

Yes the Bronx chairman and Riverdale Senior Services board member Alec Diacou unveiled plans to open the Rosalyn Yalow Academy Charter School at last week's Community Board 8 education committee meeting.

The school, which has yet to be sited, will open with at least 224 K-2 students in fall 2013 and grow by a grade each year before eventually expanding to a K-6 school serving at least 448 kids.

Officials said they ultimately plan to seek approval to add grades seven and eight, thereby making it an elementary and middle school serving District 10 students.

Diacou, a former Community Board 8 budget chairman, said the school would institute a gifted model and focus on the traditional and classical subjects of English, math, the arts, foreign language, history and geography.

The school will also partner with the Kasparov Chess Foundation to institute a chess program, with Bronx Arts Ensemble to roll out a music curriculum and with former Olympian fencing champions to train students in the combat sport.

"The whole purpose of the school is to provide excellence in education, to raise the kids' standards so that kids

are prepared to go onto specialized high schools and four-year colleges," Diacou said.

"And the key to doing that for any children from here, or anywhere else, is a good early childhood education. And that's what we are trying to do."

Naming the school in honor of Dr. Yalow, a celebrated medical physicist who was the second female to win a Nobel Prize in medicine, was also deliberate move, Diacou said.

"She is a symbol of excellence for all of our children and the next generation, and that's why we asked her family if we could use her name."

Dr. Yalow lived in Kingsbridge for more than 60 years and died on May 30, 2011, at the age of 89.

School officials filed a letter of intent with the New York State Education Department on Tuesday, January 17, and will seek charter authorization from the New York State Board of Regents.

Under their proposal, the school day will run from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., and each grade will boast at least two classes of 28 students.

By the school's second year, classes will be held even on Saturdays.

"A lot of the parenting, the extra-curricular activities...your parents used to take the initiative to do. Since that is part of the problem, we're going to take over the role of the parent," Diacou said.

"That's why we have the longer school day and longer school week, so the kids get used to a habit of learning

and stimulus."

According to the letter of intent obtained by the Riverdale Review, the Core Knowledge curriculum, developed by E.D. Hirsch Jr., will provide the basis for the school's academic program.

Students will also be taught mathematics using the Singapore Math method. The approach, which helps kids develop a deeper understanding of numbers and concepts, is currently being used by the entire Scarsdale school district, Hunter College Elementary School, a public school for gifted children on the Upper East Side and P.S. 132 in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

Documents also show the school's

initial board of trustees will have five members: Diacou; Dr. Yalow's son, Benjamin Yalow; John W. Carr, a Manhattan resident and recently retired partner from the New York law firm Simpson Thatcher & Bartlett; Shirley Saunders, the Bronx County deputy city clerk; and Kyle Bragg, vice-president of 32BJ Service Employees International Union.

Per charter school regulations, admissions will be determined by lottery, with preference given to pupils residing within District 10.

School officials expect to file their application either during the first-round deadline on February 27 or second-round deadline on July 18.