

Round two for charter school

By Sarina Trangle

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Riverdalian Alec Diacou has revived his plans to open a charter elementary school in Community Education Council District 10, which includes Riverdale and Kingsbridge.

Last winter, Mr. Diacou submitted a letter of intent to the Board of Regents. He and the charter's nine other founding members then decided to postpone the application a year to tweak the school's model and build more partnerships.

They're beginning the application process again and intend to open Rosalyn Yalow Academy next fall, according to Mr. Diacou, who runs Yes the Bronx, a non-profit that aims to erase negative stereotypes about the borough.

The school is named after the Nobel Prize-winning physicist who lived in Kingsbridge for more than 60 years and conducted her research at the James J. Peters VA Medical Hospital.

Mr. Diacou, a Riverdale Senior Services board member, said he wants to create a "rigorous" school that will prepare students for college, noting that the results of state tests for District

10 are "very, very bleak."

If approved, he said the academy would begin each day at 8 a.m. and run until 6 p.m. Mr. Diacou said the ten-hour day was designed to accommodate working parents. During its second year, the school would require students to attend class on Saturdays.

Mr. Diacou, who is self-employed and works in real estate, has partnered with a variety of organizations to expand the school's curriculum. He intends for the school to offer arts through a collaboration with the Bronx Arts Ensemble; chess with help from Kasparov Chess Foundation; a science curriculum by partnering with the American Museum of Natural History; and fencing.

Rosalyn Yalow Academy incorporates many activities that Mr. Diacou said his three sons participated in while attending District 2 public schools in Manhattan.

"The American Museum of Natural History is a second home to my kids," Mr. Diacou said. "They're all in sciences and it's become part of their DNA. That's what we want to do for kids in District 10."

The school plans to work with

the Riverdale Mental Health Association to provide guidance counselors and social workers and to create a family support initiative.

Robert Brewster and Donna Demetri Friedman, executives of the Riverdale Mental Health Association, are among the charter schools' founders. Others include: Shirley Saunders, the Bronx deputy clerk and a City Council candidate; William Scribner, executive director of Bronx Arts Ensemble; John Carr, a retired lawyer, Sandra Hayes, a math professor at City University of New York; Michael Rosen, a financial executive, Ben Yalow, Ms. Yalow's son; and Mr. Diacou.

The founding members are still looking for a building to rent. They're considering moving into Catholic Schools slated to close, including Our Lady of Angels in Kingsbridge Heights, and the Van Cortlandt Jewish Center, which is struggling to survive now that the Department of Education is no longer a paying tenant.

Originally, the school planned to open with 28 students in three grades: kindergarten, first grade and second grade. Depending on how much space the school is

able to rent, Mr. Diacou says Rosalyn Yalow Academy may start with two grades.

The school would add a grade each year until it has grown into a kindergarten-through-sixth grade school. At that point, Mr. Diacou said he will try to expand the charter to include seventh and eighth grades.

If approved, Rosalyn Yalow will be the sixth charter school in District 10, which includes Riverdale, Kingsbridge, Marble Hill and Van Cortlandt Village.

Of the city's 32 general education districts, 16 have fewer charter schools than District 10, 11 have more charter schools than District 10 and four districts also have five charter schools, according to the Department of Education's 2012-2013 charter directory.

State Sen. Jeff Klein and Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz said they would need to review the charter school's plan before commenting on it.

Mr. Dinowitz said he's not generally a supporter of charter schools, but wants to ensure that charter schools' expansion under a 2010 state law brings "the best" possible schools to District 10. Mr. Klein wouldn't disclose his position on the matter.