

Charter begins signups

Arete to open in September

By John Zucal
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Officials with the recently approved Arete Academy Charter School have begun accepting applications for its first school year beginning in September.

The school is expected to house 60 students each in kindergarten and first grade during the 2011-12 year, school officials stated in the application they provided to the state Department of Education for review.

An additional grade will be added in subsequent years so that 300 students in grades K-4 will occupy the school by 2014-15.

The school was one of a record 23 charter applicants statewide that received approval Jan. 18 from the education department.

The Orange school is one of five sponsored by churches in the Black Ministers Council of New Jersey. Its executive director, the Rev. Reginald Jackson, is pastor of St. Matthew AME Church, which sponsored the school. Jackson also will serve as chairman of the school's board.

In a statement, Jackson said a key factor in the school, which will accept students from Orange and East Orange, is that students will be assigned classrooms based on gender.

"It is our belief, and there is plenty of evidence to support our belief, that gender-specific classes make a difference," said Jackson, who also serves as a member of the Orange Board of Education. "The evidence shows that students perform better when they are separated in classes according to gender. Boys especially learn better. Students have fewer distractions."

A. Zachary Yamba, former president of Essex County College, where Jackson serves as chairman of its board, said Arete's mission is to achieve the definition of its name: excellence.

Yamba said in order for the school to provide what officials believe will be a better education than would be offered in Orange and East Orange's public schools, the search for staff members will be meticulous.

Enrollment of students began Monday and will continue through March 11, said school officials. Applications are available at the church, 336 Oakwood Ave., Orange, weekdays from 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Under state law, applicants are not guaranteed to attend the school in September. Only if no more than 60 student applications in a grade are filed will all students be entered into the school.

When more than 60 applications in a particular grade are received, state law mandates school officials to conduct a lottery for seats. Students who are not selected will be placed on a waiting list.