New charter schools hold lottery drawings

Schools continue to accept applications

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LAFAYETTE — Acadiana Renaissance Charter Academy, a new charter school planned for Youngsville, held a lottery earlier this week to select students for the 591 seats available in kindergarten through sixth grade.

No lottery was needed for its sister school, Lafayette Renaissance Charter Academy, because the number of applications didn't exceed the 591 seats available there, said Colleen Reynolds, a spokeswoman for Charter Schools USA, the company that manages both schools.

Both schools are under construction either in or near neighborhood developments. Lafayette Renaissance is a few miles from a new, third charter school — Willow Charter Academy — that is managed by a separate company, National Heritage Academies.

Willow Charter held a lottery earlier this month to fill its available 492 seats for students in kindergarten through the fifth grade.

As part of each school's admissions policies, students selected by lottery must accept their seats within a certain time period or lose their seat to students on a waiting list or new applicants. All three schools continue to accept applications.

Some parents who attended the Willow Charter lottery earlier this month said they had applied to all three charter schools and that they'd likely accept their seats because of its proximity to either their home or their child's current school.

Charter schools are public schools and are eligible for state and local funding. Their presence in Lafayette Parish could mean that the Lafayette Parish School Board loses as much as $7 million in state per-pupil funding, depending on how many Lafayette Parish public school students enroll in these charter schools.

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April 19, 2014
The walls of a new charter school are being erected Friday at the Couret Farms subdivision in Lafayette.

**CHARTER**

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The competition for students is of concern to School Board member Mark Allen Babineaux. During the board’s April 16 meeting, Babineaux asked if the school district was taking steps to encourage parents to remain with the school system. Babineaux said he is concerned some advertisements for the charter schools allude to deficiencies in the traditional public school system.

The School Board rejected the applications last year from the charter schools, though the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education later approved the school organizers’ applications. Three schools will open in August and another two — a K-8 school and a high school — will open in the next few years.

Babineaux asked how or if the district’s contract for public relations services provided by BBR Creative were being used to encourage parents to stay within the traditional school system. The district pays $3,000 a month for the contracted services.

During the April 16 meeting, Superintendent Pat Cooper said it’s the responsibility of the board — as well as the district and its employees — to promote the benefits the school system offers students.

“It would help if School Board members (would) be champions for the school system,” Cooper said.

Cooper told Babineaux that more money would be needed to produce advertisements.

“Three thousand dollars won’t even buy one single TV commercial, so if you’re willing to give us a huge PR budget, we can have all kinds of things on TV and promotions. I don’t think we need to do that,” Cooper said. “The work of our teachers, students and principals speaks for itself.”