

Board OKs charter school with required Arabic classes

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The Fulton County school board has approved a first for metro Atlanta: a public elementary school that will require students to learn Arabic.

Amana Academy, a start-up charter school, is expected to open in August in an undetermined location in Sandy Springs or south Roswell. With board approval, the charter proponents say they can proceed with negotiations on a site.

The state Board of Education also has to approve the application, but the state coordinator for charter schools has told Amana proponents it should

not be a problem, said Ehab Jaleel, one of several dozen Fulton parents who organized the charter school.

Amana Academy will feature daily Arabic lessons, an emphasis on group projects, separation of boys and girls for academics, and a community service requirement.

Proponents hope to open with 326 students, eventually expanding into the middle school grades. As a public school, enrollment is open to all students in Fulton County.

The Fulton board approved the charter school in February with a 5-2 vote, with chairwoman Katie Reeves and board member Liz Hausmann opposed.

After the vote, Jaleel said the next steps will include hiring a staff of teachers and a principal.

The organizers were excited at the approval, Jaleel said. "This is really going to be a neat place for kids."

Charter schools are public schools that receive public money but operate independently. The structure allows them to offer unique features, such as the Arabic program at Amana.

Because public school money follows the number of enrolled children, Amana can expect \$2.4 million in local dollars if its projections are accurate, not including a federal start-up grant for expenses such as furniture and books.

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