Charter school enrollment still climbing

Officials say number has reached 200

BY STEPHANIE JADRNICEK
THE JOURNAL

WALHALLA — Enrollment numbers continue to increase for NEXT School Eagle Ridge.

Over 20 interested educators and parents attended a meeting at the Walhalla branch of the Oconee County Public Library this week to hear more about the charter school, which will open in August in the former Tamassee-Salem Middle and High School facility.

NEXT School Eagle Ridge principal Joe Greenberg said school officials have been spreading the message through a grassroots movement.

"I've been in people's living rooms talking in small groups with them and their neighbors," he said. "We're just trying to educate, inform and answer questions in whatever venue is available."

The charter set up a booth at the recent Fourth of July celebration in Salem where Greenberg interacted with more than 30 families and handed

SEE CHARTER SCHOOL, PAGE A2

CHARTER SCHOOL: Set to open in August

FROM PAGE A1

out T-shirts to students who have enrolled for the fall.

"One of the students designed our first T-shirt, and his aunt printed them up; we've given them to all the volunteers and students," he said. "Looking out and seeing 30 to 40 kids wearing our T-shirts, and seeing how proud they were to wear them — it felt like a milestone. A concept turning into a reality."

The meeting in Walhalla was more of a question-and-answer session in comparison to the first NEXT meeting in Salem months ago. Greenberg told the group the history of how the school has gotten to where it is now and what needs to happen in the next six weeks.

Topics such as how the school will function, transportation, food and special education services were covered. Most of the questions were fielded by others in the audience who already knew the answers.

Before the Fourth of July event and prior to the NEXT board's decision to officially open the school in August, enrollment numbers were lingering in the low 160s. But Greenberg said that number has now jumped to 200.

"We've had a lot of people who've been on the fence since April or May, who either came through the Salem celebration or to the Walhalla meeting," he said. "They've been watching closely but didn't want to commit to something that might not happen because they didn't want to get their kids hopes up. Now that their questions have been answered, and the school's opening in August, they're ready."

He said although Salem has been the epicenter of their efforts thus far, they want to expand their reach regionally because NEXT School Eagle Ridge is not limited by conventional school district boundaries. Any student in the state of South Carolina can attend the school.

Next week, the school will announce some of its faculty hires, which Greenberg said would convince many others to enroll.

"I think we will reach another spike in interest when people start seeing that we're not just hiring anybody," he said. "The faculty are experienced educators with great credentials. This will instill further confidence in the model."

stephanie@upstatetoday.com | (864) 973-6686