State board greenlights Salem charter school

BY STEPHANIE JADRNICEK
THE JOURNAL

SALEM — Another green light has been given to a proposed charter school in Salem.

NEXT High School recently made its presentation before the South Carolina Public Charter School District's board of trustees, and on Monday, the board conditionally approved the needed amendment to NEXT's charter that allows the school to serve all middle and high school grades at an additional campus.

"I love to see this type of grit, determination and outside-the-box thinking from our school operators," SCPCSD superintendent Elliot Smalley said. "I put a lot of stock in the people involved in a project, and NEXT has great, high-quality folks working together to try to serve this community."

NEXT's board of directors has set several of its own stipulations for opening a new campus, as well. The board's initial target of 100 students was met within days of opening an online registration portal.

NEXT School Salem

"We are closing in on 150, and our next benchmark is to get to between 225-250 by mid-June," NEXT High School project facilitator Joe Greenberg said.

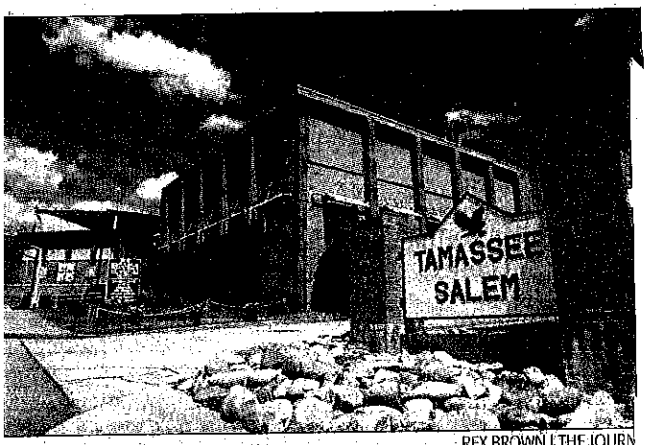
FOR MORE

School District of Oconee County officials have received a number of questions over NEXT High School students' eligibility to attend the Hamilton Career Center. To read more about the issue, turn to page **A5**.

The charter is now focusing on expanding its reach to areas outside of the Salem community. Since the SCPCSD has no traditional school district

SEE **SCHOOL**, PAGE **A5**

SCHOOL: 'This community greatly values having a school'



REX BROWN | THE JOURN

A new charter school set to move into the Tamassee-Salem Middle and High School building after the school closes its doors at the end of this year recently received conditional approval from a state governing body.

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boundaries, any South Carolina student can enroll at the proposed charter school in Salem. The school would hold a blind lottery to determine which students would attend if the demand exceeded the school's available space.

"We are working to get the word out about this new school choice now available in the region by posting signs and reaching out to community members in towns in the surrounding areas that are expressing interest in learning more about the NEXT School option," Greenberg said.

"We're confident that NEXT's innovative approach to education will be a great draw for families," NEXT High School founding CEO Zach Eikenberry added.

The proposed charter school would open in the building that will be vacated at the end of the school year due to the Oconee County School Board's decision to close Tamassee-Salem Middle and High School. The town of Salem will retain ownership of the building and plans to lease it to NEXT to operate the charter school.

With an approval to expand at an additional campus, NEXT is now in the process of conducting a required site and facility review to ensure code compliance requirements can be met to receive a certificate of occupancy from the State's Office of School Facilities.

"We hope to have that associated scope of services completed within the next few weeks," Greenberg said.

In the meantime, momentum has been amazingly positive, according to Greenberg. He said there is much left to do within an ambitious timeline, but the will and confidence grows by the day to be open and ready for students to engage when the school year begins in August.

"This community greatly values having a school nearby," Eikenberry said. "We've reached out to the district and had some pr ductive conversations tha will hopefully lead to a strong relationship based on our mutual interest of doing what's best for kids."

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