



Group eyes vacant Illinois Street building for charter school

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An educational group is planning to spend about \$4 million to renovate an Indianapolis warehouse to open its first charter school in what it hopes will become a statewide network.

Boston-based Phalen Leadership Academies intends to open the school in August in a vacant 63,000-square-foot building at 2323 N. Illinois St. The building has been little used since printing-products supplier Ross Gage Inc. moved to a bigger facility on Brookville Road in 2007. The school would be called the George and Veronica Phalen Leadership Academy.

The city's Metropolitan Development Commission is scheduled to hear details Wednesday on the renovation project as part of a rezoning petition for the 1.88-acre site just south of Fall Creek Parkway.

Phalen Leadership Academies [received \\$1 million](#) from education reform group The Mind Trust in 2012 to help it launch schools.

Founder Earl Phalen plans to combine the grant with a variety of other contributions to open five charter schools in the Indianapolis area and ultimately start 10 schools statewide. Major donors may have schools named after them, Phalen said.

Before adding other schools, the organization must submit reports to the Indiana Charter School Board to verify that its first school has performed as promised and that it has the staff and financial capacity to launch another one.

“They have to show us that they are meeting or on obvious track to meet our performance criteria,” said Claire Fiddian-Green, executive director of the Indiana Charter School Board, which was created by the state Legislature in 2011. Phalen Leadership Academies will need at least one and maybe two years of academic data from its first school to show it is ready to start another one, she said.

The inaugural Illinois Street school, named after Phalen’s parents, will enroll 300 students in kindergarten, first and second grades during its first year. It will add one grade every year until it reaches 8th grade. It plans to have 900 students schoolwide by then.

About 25 teachers and administrators will work there initially.

Principal Jeremy Baugh said Phalen Leadership Academies incorporates a “blended learning” model that relies heavily on technology.

The school will use a 225-day calendar of eight-hour days, compared to the traditional model of 6.5 hours a day for 180 days. Twenty-five of the school days will be part of the Summer Advantage learning program—a local program Phalen started in 2009 that now serves 15,000 students.

Phalen Leadership Academies will ramp up its outreach in March as it continues to enroll students and hire staff for the upcoming school year, assuming it receives its necessary rezoning approval, Phalen said.