

Uncharted Shores Academy looking to expand

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Uncharted Shores Academy, the only independent charter school in Del Norte County, has big growth plans - to the tune of \$5.5 million.

“Every year, more students are opting to come to our school, and there is simply no space,” said Margie Rouge, who as principal and executive director was a founder of the school when it opened in 2007 with 75 students.

USA is still classified as a non-classroom based school, though about two-thirds of its roughly 300 students currently learn from inside a classroom.

The charter school’s homeschool ‘Offshore’ option remains popular and structural changes won’t impact that offering.

However, demand for in-class instruction grew substantially in recent years resulting in a public lottery system that relegated some families to a wait-list.

“We expect the new campus to house about 300 Onshore students, but will continue to keep about 80-90 in our Offshore program,” said Rouge.

Some of USA's students currently learn from a school building located off E. Street in the heart of downtown Crescent City.

Earlier this month, the Crescent City Planning Commission approved the necessary permits that will allow USA to consolidate to 11 contiguous undeveloped lots of what's referred to as the "Roosevelt Subdivision." The consolidation and expansion will allow more families to send their kids to the 1.8 acre-site at the corner of Northcrest Drive and Washington Boulevard.

"We started with the goal of giving elementary homeschool students more support, offering classes for half the day, four days a week," said Rouge. "However, we soon had working parents asking for a full day of classes, and when we moved to our present main campus we began offering the Onshore option, which has become our most popular option for schooling."

The \$5.5 million to fund the project was garnered through a low-interest rate loan from the Rural Community Assistance Corporation, which will pay for the first of three phases. Phase one includes an office and middle school with an anticipated completion date in the summer of 2023.

Phase two will include the elementary and primary sections of the school - with an opening date sometime in 2025.

Phase three has not been funded yet, but will include construction of a 2,400 square-foot library and 6,300 square-foot gym - accounting for 26% of the overall project.

Though USA is a pre-K through 9th grade school, most of the expansion will occur at the pre-K, or what's dubbed the early learning or TK level.

"We are not planning to expand our high school," said Rouge. "Our current 9th grade is only a 'gap' year offered as an online option for those students who would benefit from it."

The expansion of the school's pre-K program will coincide with legislation that will continue to lower the entry age of students in the following manner: To those who will turn 5 through February in 2022-2023; turn 5 through April in 2023-2024; turn 5 through June in 2024-2025, and then to all 4 year olds by the 2025-2026 academic year.

"That lines up perfectly with our expansion plan," said Rouge. "We plan to have our middle school students move to a new campus in 2023-2024 and move our first grade to the main campus at 330 E Street. That will free up space for more TK in 2023-2024, when we will have twice as many people who qualify for TK as we do now."

USA just recently renewed its charter agreement for another five years with the Del Norte Unified School District.

"We want to be able to serve all students who want to attend, as we believe our school is a real benefit to this community," said Rouge. "Our graduates attend Del Norte High, Castle Rock or Sunset, and have done well at all the schools. We are proud of the impact we have already made in the community."

