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New charter school with an emphasis on history and hands-on learning coming to Loudon



Benjamin Franklin Academy charter school founders Marcie J. Ouellette, Michael Dupont and Patricia Humphrey. Marcie Ouellette Courtesy photos



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A new public charter school is coming to Loudon this fall with plans to emphasize history education and hands-on learning in a small-school environment.

The school, called Benjamin Franklin Academy Charter School, is planning to open in September on a 7-acre campus at 157 Chichester Rd. in Loudon, about seven miles south of the New Hampshire Motor Speedway. It was approved as a charter school by the state in December.

The school's three founders, Patricia Humphrey, Michael Dupont and Marcie Ouellette, began the project in 2021. Humphrey has also founded three other New Hampshire charter schools – the Academy for Science and Design in Nashua and Spark Academy and Founders Academy in Manchester. Dupont is a Founders Academy social studies teacher.

“We feel that we’ll be able to be another option for students and their families for school choice and to recognize that one size doesn’t fit all,” Ouellette said. “We

want to support educational opportunities for all students.”

Benjamin Franklin Academy is expected to open as a middle school serving grades 6 through 8, with a projected enrollment of 75 students. But over the next five years, the school plans to expand into a middle-high school serving grades 6 through 12 with an enrollment of 200 students.

The school will be receiving a federal startup grant of \$1.1 million, distributed by the New Hampshire Department of Education as part of a program to expand charter schools in the state. In 2019, New Hampshire was awarded a \$46 million federal grant from the U.S. Department of Education’s Charter School Program to expand options for at-risk students. New Hampshire now has 33 operating public charter schools, with more on the way.

Benjamin Franklin Academy’s liberal arts curriculum will place a strong emphasis on history education, and the history curriculum will guide lesson planning for other content areas. For example, a unit on ancient Greek history may be accompanied by building a replica Trojan horse, Ouellette explained. The school’s programming will place emphasis on hands-on learning and a “project-based” approach, which will include building, artisan and agricultural trades.

“Hopefully the end result is that they either move into a trade, find a passion or a hobby for life or even just an additional skill to have in their life toolbox,” Ouellette said.

The school campus will be divided into classroom areas for traditional learning, workshop spaces and outdoor learning areas. Two buildings exist on the Loudon property, and the founders are working with a construction company on site plan, which is subject to approval by the Loudon Planning Board. Their goal is to finish work by June.

The school’s name comes from an inspirational quote many attribute to Benjamin Franklin, which says the “pursuit of happiness” as referenced in the Declaration of Independence is not a guaranteed right but something for individuals to pursue.

“That actually is the frame of our programming,” Ouellette said. “We want to provide students with the opportunity to define their own happiness and to catch that happiness from themselves.”

Benjamin Franklin Academy is hosting a series of informational meetings in surrounding towns throughout January and February, where families can hear more about the plan for the school.

Local information sessions:

- Pittsfield: Jan. 31, 6-7:30 p.m., Pittsfield Community Center, 68 Main St.
 - Concord: Feb. 9, 6-7:30 p.m. Concord Parks & Recreation Department, 14 Canterbury Rd.
 - Loudon: Feb. 16, 6-7:30 p.m. Maxfield Public Library, 8 N.H. 129.
 - Epsom: Feb. 23, 6-7:30 p.m. Epsom Public Library, 1606 Dover Rd.
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