

"Classroom Choice: Statewide enrollment in charter schools increased," by Danielle Deaver, *Winston-Salem Journal*, November 30, 2006.

In the past five years, Carter G. Woodson School of Challenge has gone from being labeled a "low-performing school" by the state to one that met federal testing standards for two years in a row, and its enrollment has increased enough that school officials are planning a new wing.

"The reason we expand is we advertise to parents about the choices they have," said Ruth Hopkins, the principal of Woodson. Woodson, which is on Goldfloss Street in Winston-Salem, is not alone in its expansion plans.

Statewide enrollment in charter schools, which are public schools that are overseen by the state and not local school boards, have risen from 15,290 in the first month of school in 2001 to 28,883 in the first month of school this year. "I just believe parents are happy with what is happening in those schools. Some are maintaining; we may have a few that are going down a little bit," said Jack Moyer, the state director of charter schools. State law says that there can be no more than 100 charter schools. Moyer said he hopes that the cap is lifted a bit in the future, but he knows it won't happen soon.

"Legislators are showing more interest in that, but I don't think it's ready. I think we have to continue to raise the level, raise the bar in schools across the state so people can see what's happening, and that takes a while," he said. Enrollment has increased in most Forsyth County charter schools as well, but not everyone is happy about it.

Charter schools get a set amount of money from the school system for every child they enroll. If Woodson's enrollment increases by 84 students, as is projected for 2007-08, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools will have to pay more money to the school. Woodson currently has 303 students in kindergarten through 12th grade.

In the impact statement that the school system must send to the state any time a charter school wants to increase enrollment by more than 10 percent, local school officials said that the situation will result in a large financial loss.

"In summary, using the most optimistic assumption, a school with 84 additional students by 2007-08 will result in a projected net loss of over \$540,000 to the WS/FCS," the impact statement said in part. Hopkins said that many parents are choosing charter schools because they are different from traditional public schools. "I think people are attracted to charters because it gives them the flexibility they're looking for," she said. "They're looking for a challenging environment, a less bureaucratic environment."

Woodson also has attracted parents by using only research-based teaching methods, Hopkins said. "No one's trying to fly by the seat of their pants anymore," she said. "You need to be using the data."

In the 2001-02 school year, the state considered Woodson a low-performing school because less than 50 percent of students were performing at grade level. The school improved over the years. It was recognized as a school of progress with high growth, and met Adequate Yearly Progress standards in 2003-04 and 2004-05. It did not fare as well in 2005-06, when it did not make Adequate Yearly Progress under federal guidelines and was considered a priority school -- one that has 50 percent or less of its students performing at grade level -- under state testing standards.

Hopkins said that Woodson prides itself on being part of the community and on welcoming students from all over the city and county. School officials plan to build a new gymnasium, computer laboratory and biology laboratories and classrooms, and they are hoping to open up the new spaces to the public as community rooms when the students don't need them.

School officials had plans drawn up for the addition last summer,

but do not yet have a timeline for building the additional space. Charter schools do not get money from the state for their building needs but must raise their own money for construction.

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