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## **SCSU sponsors charter school**

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A charter school sponsored by St. Cloud State University was one of 20 schools approved by the Minnesota Department of Education.

Fraser Academy, which will be in the Richfield area near the Twin Cities, will open in the fall.

The state's charter schools are growing at an unprecedented clip. Beginning in 1992, it took 10 years to reach the 10,000-student enrollment mark. But with rapidly expanding interest, charter schools may reach 20,000 students in half that time.

St. Cloud State leaders hope the charter school will become a practicum site for its students. About 1,600 students are enrolled in the university's college of education.

Fraser Academy will be a kindergarten through fifth-grade school, but it will open as a kindergarten through second-grade school, said Fran Umerski, instructor of child and family studies at St. Cloud State and project liaison. Fraser Academy will add one grade each year until it fills the fifth grade, Umerski said. About 300 students could be enrolled in the school.

### **Statewide growth**

The recent growth in charter schools is attributed in part to increased comfort with the schools, which are public but run by teachers and parents independent of districts. Additional money and technical support could also be making a difference.

The expansion is expected to mean Minnesota will have more than 100 charter schools with an enrollment of 15,000 next fall. Statewide, 840,000 students are enrolled in traditional public school programs.

Nationwide, about 2,700 charter schools have an enrollment of more than 680,000.

Fraser Academy extends the work of Fraser School in Richfield, which serves preschool children, Umerski said.

"People in that organization felt the need to pursue a charter school for older children in the elementary grades and continue the work they have been doing," she said. "Their plans are to serve typical children but also children with special needs."

Umerski estimates about 40 percent of students at Fraser Academy will have special needs, compared with about 12 percent in regular public schools.

### New opportunities

As the school's sponsor, St. Cloud State will be responsible for monitoring the school's fiscal health and student progress, Umerski said.

The university became involved when it was approached by staff at Fraser School. Leaders said yes because the university could be involved with the school from the beginning, Umerski said.

"Being involved in the curriculum development portion, assessment portion, that means a lot to the college of education, versus being approached by other charter schools that are failing or having problems," Umerski said.

Federal and state money means sponsoring the school won't cost the university anything except its faculty members' time, Umerski said. So far, 12 faculty members have been tapped to serve on committees for the school. Umerski is on the Fraser Academy board of directors.

"A big part of what we do is service to the community, and we know this is not in our community, but it's close by," Umerski said. "It's more work for faculty, but again, being involved in the planning part was advantageous to us. We hope they are successful, and we hope to have more diverse opportunities for our students."