could be first of kind

Phil Beighley/The Post-Bulletin

Michael Dorer, left, principal of Bluffview Montessori School in Winona, looks at David Miller's illustration for the story "Twas the Night Before Christmas." Dorer's school has been approved by the Winona School Board to become the nation's first charter school.

Rochester Montessori eyes charter school status

Rochester 12-9

By Mike Dougherty
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The Rochester Montessori School is one of about 15 schools statewide exploring the possibility of becoming a charter school.

The Montessori school's board agreed to allow Bob Ruud, principal of the school, and another parent to investigate the process for establishing a charter school.

Ruud said the school is interested in the idea, but will decide whether to pursue the idea further during its Dec. 18 board meeting when Ruud will present his findings.

The Montessori school, which has been open since 1968 in Rochester, would have to change the makeup of its board to meet the requirements for charter schools. A majority of the board must be faculty, while no faculty are now on the Rochester school's board.

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— Bob Ruud
Rochester Montessori School

A capital campaign being undertaken by the school is to build a 20,000-square-foot building nest spring in the northeast portion of the city. The school has 170 students in preschool through sixth grade. One of the requirements of a charter school is that it be non-sectarian. Having its own building would make sure it is non-sectarian.

"We want our children to be able to continue in the Montessori school, so that is a concern," Ruud said. "You cannot choose who gets in the school and who does not and we are concerned our children might not get in if a lottery system is used for admittance. We are continuing to investigate the process and are trying to draw as many parents into the plan (as possible) as we proceed."

But a hurdle that has not been approached yet is getting the Rochester Public School Board's approval of the plan.

The school district is locked in a strike with the Rochester Education Association and must come up with a new bond issue election date and possibly a new bond issue proposal. Those items will be the focus for some time. Winona, which could be the first charter school, had opposition from the school administrators and the teachers' association, but the school board approved the charter school.