

First charter school up, running

By Janet Bingham
Denver Post Education Writer

Colorado's first charter school, designed as a school "without walls," opened the year yesterday in a public library in Pueblo.

Classes today will be held at an art center — and on Monday students will begin nature studies by the banks of the Fountain River.

Mountains and forests, museums, parks, and a real-life archaeological dig also will be classrooms at the Connect School, established in Pueblo County Rural District 70 under the new Charter Schools Act, created to encourage innovation in education.

"We'll be going out on the job learning instead of just sitting in a classroom," said 13-year-old Dallas Gaulding as he and his new classmates gathered at the library in downtown Pueblo yesterday.

"In the classroom you learn out of books, but you don't get to see it and try it," said Gaulding. "The knowledge sits in your head. Here we'll use it as we learn it."

About 70 students from sixth through eighth grades enrolled for the school's first year of operation. "Here the community is the classroom; the world is the learning environment," said Helene Van Manen, mother of Sequoia, 11.

The Charter Schools Act, signed into law in June, authorizes parents, teachers and other citizens to establish experimental schools through a charter, or contract, with a local school board. The Academy



The Denver Post / Glen M. Hilde

READING WORKSHOP: Charter school teacher Ann Poffet, right foreground, passes out books to students in an outside reading workshop.

Charter School, which features a rigorous academic curriculum, is scheduled to open later this month in Douglas County as the second school under the new law.

Pueblo County's Connect School, which aims to connect students to the communities around them, was initiated by science

and technology teacher John Mikulas and his wife, Judy. Working with three other teachers, they will offer children basic reading, writing, math and vocabulary in the morning, leaving large blocks of time

Please see **CHARTER** on 9B

Charter school running

CHARTER from Page 1B

in the afternoon for major science and social studies projects and excursions.

The school has no single building or location. However, a renovated building in downtown Pueblo will serve as a central gathering place for excursions into Pueblo. The Beulah School near Pueblo Mountain Park will be a starting point for excursions into the mountains.

In technology labs at Pueblo County High and Pleasant View Middle School, students will use computers to analyze the data they collect and share it with schools in other parts of the country and the world.

Nature study sites

Students also will visit nature study sites regularly at the Pueblo Reservoir and the Fountain River. They will observe and eventually participate in an archaeological dig at First and Court streets in Pueblo, where part of the original settlement is being excavated by the Pueblo Historical Society.

"We're learning a lot the very first day," said Jaimie Carrington, 12, as students toured the library yesterday and were introduced to the computer catalog. "We're seeing the library and using it, not just hearing about it."

'They'll look for themselves'

Parents were excited about the hands-on opportunities the school will offer. "They'll look and see for themselves," said Josie Garcia, mother of Amber, 11.

Sally Callin said the school will prepare her son, Vai Rising-Moore, 13, "for the real world."

Before the Charter School law was passed, there had been talk of setting up the school as a private school, she said. "We would have been willing to pay \$3,000 a year for this opportunity," she added, "but there are people who couldn't have paid that and I know their children need it as much as mine."

Dave and Helene Van Manen had been teaching their son Sequoia at home. Said Dave: "We like the way the school will tailor programs to fit each child, rather than trying to fit the child to the curriculum."