

SCHOOLS

New public charter school being planned in Wauwatosa

Evan Casey

Now News Group

Wisconsin Innovation Academy, a new public charter school, is coming soon to the site of the Wisconsin International Academy in Wauwatosa, according to new plans submitted to the city.

The 4K to eighth-grade school will serve up to 500 students after a renovation at the international academy, 11811 West Bluemound Road.

The Wisconsin International Academy operates a dormitory for Chinese high school students and provides transportation, meals and other programming as they attend one of five partner high schools in the Milwaukee area.

Wisconsin Innovation Academy's director Matt Gibson said the idea for the

school began during the coronavirus pandemic after the pandemic caused international borders to close. He's hoping the charter school will attract students from different cultural backgrounds in the Milwaukee area.

"The intention of it is to share our education expertise and our location with local guests as well as with kids from China and other places internationally," Gibson said.

Gibson is the former superintendent of the Elmbrook School District.

"We have a big campus here with a lot of space and we have a really good location," he added.

Much of the academy will be renovated, as parts of the dormitory will be repurposed for classrooms.

Gibson said renovations will come in

phases; the school plans to open in time for the 2022 school year.

Starting in fall 2022, the school will have six classrooms and enough space for 150 students.

"Wisconsin Innovation Academy provides a challenging, high-quality learning experience within a diverse and inclusive, global-minded community, and prepares students as innovative thinkers who are curious, collaborative, college-ready, and prepared to excel in a diverse, intercultural world," planning documents say.

Gibson said the school will provide transportation for students if needed.

The school will focus on an "inquiry-based education," or a "teaching method that combines the curiosity of students and the scientific method to enhance the development of critical thinking skills

while learning science," according to a research article on that teaching method from the University of Florida.

The content instruction will be in English, with required Chinese or Spanish as a second language.

The charter school has already received authorization from the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee Office of Charter Schools.

Neil Palmer, Elm Grove village president, wrote a letter of support for the school. Palmer said he knows Gibson as well as Jian-Guo Sun, the president of the international academy.

"The mission of Wisconsin Innovation Academy will be academic, intercultural and international, all critical and timeless values for educational institutions," the letter said.