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Syracuse charter school to open new building in Geddes, extend school year

sasgrad.JPG

New York State Education Commissioner John King speaks at the Syracuse Academy of Science Charter School's graduation at The Landmark Theater last June. (*Scott Schild | sschild@syracuse.com*)

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The expanding Syracuse Academy of Science Charter School will take over a closed Catholic school building in Geddes this summer, creating a third location for its students.

Tolga Hayali, superintendent of the school's Syracuse and Utica academies, said SAS will establish a fifth-through seventh-grade middle school in the old St. Charles Borromeo school building at 200 High Terrace St. SAS will maintain its K-4 school in the old St. James school at 4387 S. Salina St. and its 8-12 high school at 1001 Park Ave.

Both of the existing buildings are in Syracuse, and the state will continue to consider SAS to be headquartered in the city. That means city students will get preference in attending all three locations.

The school has received permission from the state Board of Regents to expand from 696 students to 975 over the next few years. Hayali said the school has a waiting list of more than 1,000 students.

The Regents also approved the school's request to extend the school year from the traditional 180 days to 195 days, Hayali said. He said he would like to extend it even more.

"Our vision is year-round, but our budget now only allows for an additional 15 days," he said. "Hopefully this will have a great impact on our students."

About 180 middle-schoolers will attend classes in the new building, with the school year starting Aug. 18.

Like all of the state's charter schools, SAS receives funding from the state based on where its students live. More than 95 percent of its students live in the Syracuse school district, so the state aid for those students goes to SAS rather than to the district. The district also is responsible for transporting those students to the school.

Charter schools are free and open to children from any school district within the state, although preference

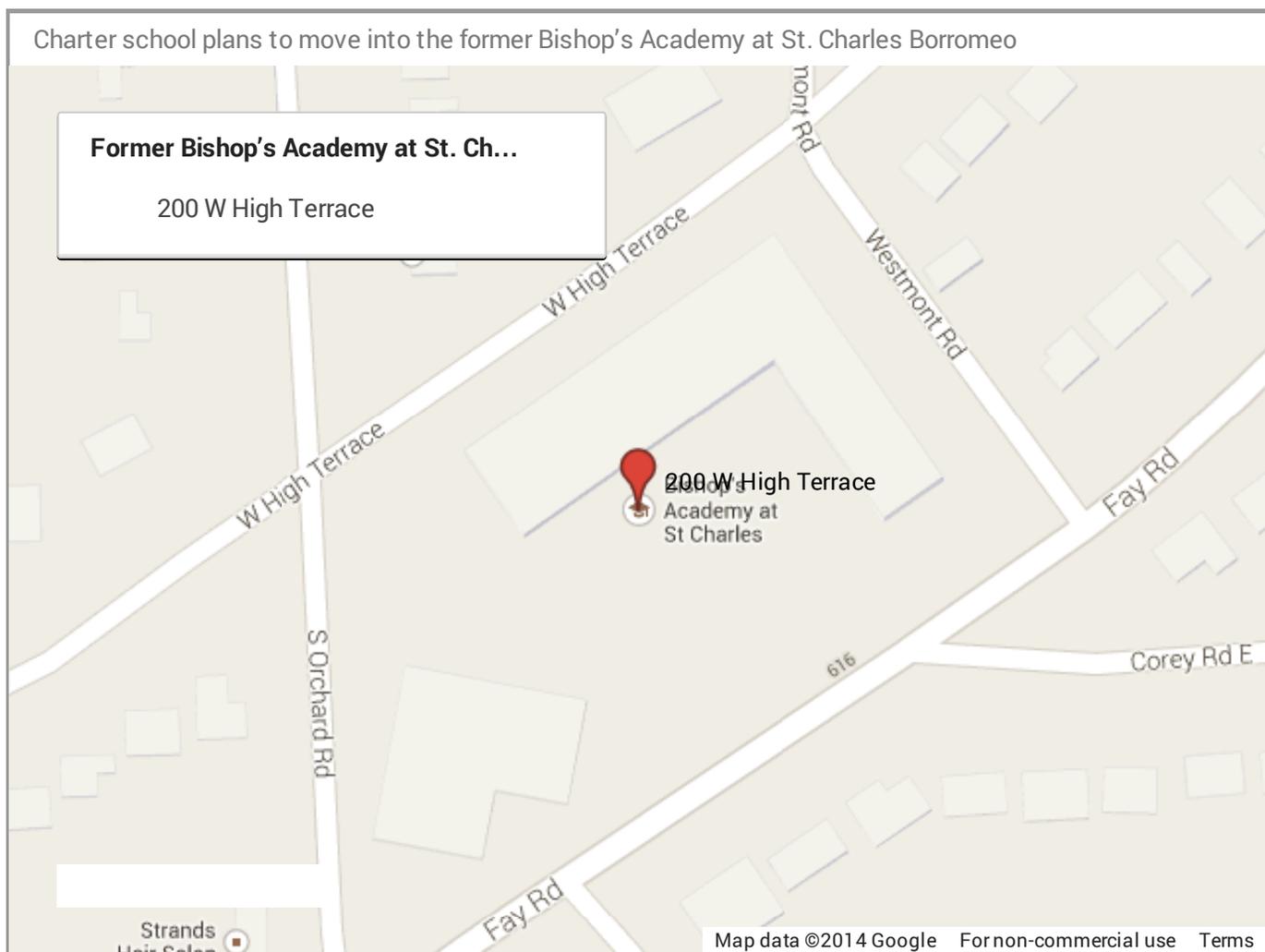
can be given to home-district children and children with siblings already in the school.

Hayali said SAS first tried to procure the old Elmwood School on South Avenue in the city, but the city district is using it for administrative functions.

Terra Science and Education Inc., the non-profit organization that rents the other buildings to SAS, will purchase the Geddes school. Fehmi Damkaci, president of the charter school's board, would not provide the purchase price because it is still in negotiation. He did say that Terra Science will fund about \$500,000 worth of renovations to the building, including putting on a new roof, air-conditioning all the classrooms, bringing doors up to code for people with disabilities and installing new flooring and electrical systems.

Hayali said he sees no issue with moving one of SAS' buildings outside the city, where most of its students are.

"It's really close, honestly," he said. "I still consider it as Syracuse."



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