

Nation's First Blended STEM Charter School Set to Open in Columbia

Written by Staff Writer

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Education improvement initiatives on the federal and local level are based on the belief that all children are capable of learning. However how each student learns can be as uniquely different as the individual. The South Carolina Science Academy, a new charter school, intends to address that reality by offering innovative learning techniques for teaching middle school students.

SCSA will be the first STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) centric blended public school in the nation. The blended model is based on a combination of traditional and online learning. Sometimes referred to as the flipped classroom or universal design for learning, students in grades six through eight will be able to connect to their school, teachers and curriculum 24/7 through a web-based platform. Students will gain additional class time to construct their understanding of what they learn using project-based, problem-based, and inquiry-based learning. The blended learning environment is also intended to allow students to collaborate more with educators and peers.

SCSA's mission is to develop innovative leaders by providing a diverse student body a world-class, science focused education within the core academic courses through STEM. In creating SCSA, the founders, consisting of educators, parents and community leaders, focused on what a modern student would need to be successful in an ever-changing academic as well as employment landscape. In addition to receiving South Carolina public funding for initiatives, SCSA is the recipient of a half a million dollar grant. The academy received a ten-year charter and was approved by the South Carolina Department of Education and authorized by the South Carolina Public Charter School District in 2011.

Nathan Yon, SCSA executive director, stated that today's students are naturally "mobile learners," they learn by doing throughout the course of the school day. "Students in traditional schools receive content the day of school, we give students the opportunity to learn content on their own time and in their own way," said Yon. Once students arrive at school, teachers confer

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with students to discuss what they are learning and, then, address any misconceptions and facilitate students' learning.

SCSA is a fully accredited public charter school serving grades six through eight and is free to any South Carolina resident. The school will be located in the old Parisian store in Richland Fashion Mall on Forest Drive. SCSA board member and Nationally Distinguished Principal Danny Shaw is excited about the location for several reasons. He believes that SCSA can help spur an economic resurgence of the mall and in the process strengthen the local community. Secondly, because SCSA challenges students by providing them with real-world problem solving opportunities, Shaw considers the business setting of the mall to be ideal for developing future innovative business and community leaders.

The South Carolina Science Academy will open its doors in August, 2013 and is currently enrolling students for the fall. Parents can register students at www.scscienceacademy.org.