

Imagine to build 2 charter schools in Indian River County

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BY Colleen Wixon

INDIAN RIVER COUNTY — Construction is expected to begin by the spring on the district's two new elementary charter schools.

"The process is already well underway," said Christian Cascone, director of development of the Space Coast region for Virginia-based Imagine Schools.

Charter schools are public schools operated by an individual company or group and get the same per-pupil money from the state as other district schools. As public schools, they cannot charge tuition.

Contracts have been written on two sites for the schools — one in the north county near 58th Avenue and 69th Street, and the other in the south county near 58th Avenue and Fourth Street, Cascone said.

The cost of the properties will not be available until Imagine Schools closes on them sometime near April, said Cascone.

Both schools are expected to open in August. Cascone doesn't expect any construction difficulties.

"We figure we've done schools in about 100 days before," he said.

Finding sites was not too difficult, he said.

"We just had to make sure they were the right ones," Cascone said.

The schools are expected to draw students from the entire county. The north county school is in the Treasure Coast Elementary attendance zone, while the south county school is in the Glendale Elementary zone, Indian River County School District officials said.

Joe Mills, assistant principal of Sebastian River High School, has been hired to be principal of both schools and is scheduled to assume his new position within a week, he said.

Cascone said each school should have about 300 to 400 students enrolled in the first year. The size of the school depends on how many actually enroll, he said.

The north county school will offer a Project Child concept, in which children are clustered together with the same group of teachers for three years. The southern school would offer a micro-society business concept, in which classes would learn to develop a business.

Imagine Schools initially applied for a charter contract with Indian River County in 2006. Acting on staff's recommendation, the School Board rejected the application after expressing concerns over

the company's finances and how it operated its other schools. That decision was overturned by the state Florida Department of Education's Charter Schools Appeals Commission.

In September, the board unanimously approved two five-year contracts with the charter school company.

Imagine Schools currently is working to build another charter school in Port St. Lucie. The site plan for that kindergarten- through eighth-grade school was approved last month by the Port St. Lucie City Council.

- The north county site, near 58th Avenue and 69th Street, is 10 acres
- The south county site, near 58th Avenue and Fourth Street, is 17.4 acres with a four-acre retention pond
- Sebastian River High School Assistant Principal Joe Mills has been hired to be principal of both schools. He is expected to start Friday.
- While enrollment has not started yet, interested parents can visit the Imagine Schools Web site at (www.imagineschools.com.) Parents also can call 13216636280 for more information.