

The Da Vinci school

A new north suburban charter will stress the arts and sciences through a "core knowledge" curriculum.

By **Norman Draper**, Star Tribune

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The name's a dead giveaway. The Da Vinci Academy, set to open somewhere in the northern suburbs for the 2008-09 school year, will feature a heavy emphasis on the arts and sciences. One of the most recent charter schools to be approved by the state, the Da Vinci Academy plans to open with somewhere between 180 and 200 students in grades K-6, said school founder Kathy Reinartz, of Spring Lake Park. After that, the school will expand by one grade level a year until it covers kindergarten through high school. The school, named for Renaissance artist and scientist Leonardo da Vinci, is approved to have up to 400 students, Reinartz said. Like several other charter schools that have recently opened in Twin Cities suburbs, the Da Vinci Academy will base its curriculum on the "core knowledge" program pioneered by educator E.D. Hirsch Jr., who became famous after the publication of his books, including "Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know" and a series of books that include "What Your Kindergartner Needs to Know," "What Your First Grader Needs to Know," "What Your Second Grader Needs to Know," and so on. Core knowledge stresses the importance of learning plenty of facts as the key to a good education, and emphasizes that

children should learn certain things according to particular grade sequences. Charter schools are public schools, but they are allowed more leeway to devise their own programs and to govern themselves than traditional public schools. Sponsoring the Da Vinci Academy is the Friends of Ascension, which was founded by Twin Cities banker Bill Cooper to raise money for Ascension Catholic School in Minneapolis and found charter schools meant to emulate Ascension's academic success. Reinartz stressed that the core knowledge focus at Da Vinci doesn't mean its students will have their noses stuck in books all the time. "The kids won't just be learning out of a textbook," she said. "We'll use the Internet quite a bit, and we're going to have a visiting scientist once a month. We'll have plays, music, literature and poetry writing. If we get extra land, we'd like to have a garden and show the kids the science of that." Reinartz said school organizers are currently looking for a place to put the school, and that it might involve either building a school or renting space in an existing building. Blaine, Lino Lakes, Shoreview, Mounds View and Arden Hills are among the communities Reinartz said could be sites for the new school. "Now that we've been approved, we're going to start marketing in January and February," she said. "We see the interest as skyrocketing because there is no other charter school out here." Reinartz said school organizers have already raised \$540,000 for the school, much of it from a federal start-up grant for charter schools. She said 55 children are already slated to attend the school. With the Department of Education's approval of 11 new charter schools in October, there are now 158 charters approved to operate in Minnesota. Twenty-



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