

Charter school director sees renaissance in Midtown education as application period continues

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Dr. Kristin Droege

The news that two additional charter schools plan to open in Kansas City's urban core is great news for Kristin Droege, executive director of the Citizens of the World Kansas City school. That public charter will open this fall at a still-undisclosed location in Midtown and is now accepting applications for kindergarten and first grade students.

Recently, the Urban Neighborhood Initiative and the Kansas City Public Schools said they [plan to open a school called the Kansas City Neighborhood Academy](#) between 18th and 52nd Streets and from Troost to Prospect Avenues. Crossroads Academy also [said recently it will merge with another public charter school, Scoula Vita Nuova](#), and open a downtown high school in 2018. Meantime, Crossroads will open a second elementary school at 11th and Washington. For Droege, it signals a renaissance for schools in Kansas City's urban area.

For decades, Midtown parents often moved to the suburbs when their children reached school age. That led to declining population in Midtown, but began to change when a group of Midtown parents issued what's thought to be the first RFP in the country for a charter school. Citizens of the World, with schools in California and New York, responded to the RFP and chose to open a new school in Kansas City.

“We’re seeing a critical coming together of parents who want to be here,” Droege said.

She added that business leaders know they can’t attract talent and grow without good schools, and the addition of both public and charter schools in Midtown “is the piece that will make it all work.”

So rather than feeling competitive, Droege sees the other schools as good for Citizens of the World’s effort.

“Quality education struggles in a vacuum,” she said. “We can support each other.”

Looking for the charter school pioneers

Droege knows something about starting charter schools. In 1999, when her own son was four, Droege and a colleague founded Mountain View Montessori School in Victorville, CA. She then served as principal during the opening of Larchmont Charter School-West Hollywood.

Recently, she’s been spending a lot of time talking to Midtown parents who are wondering if Citizens of the World is a good fit for their children. She says parents need to evaluate whether the needs of each individual child can best be met through a public, private or charter school.

She thinks the best fit for a Citizens of the World student is a family that wants to be very engaged in the school, values diversity, and likes a project-based style of learning.

For some parents, it may seem like a risk to enroll in a new school, but Droege says for some, it’s a great opportunity.

“For every charter school, there’s a first class. We call them the pioneers. The pioneer group has a tremendous amount of leadership opportunity,” she says.

For example, third graders may choose the school mascot. The first students will form the first student council. Parents and students will have lots of chances to make decisions that affect how the school develops.

She also knows the challenges of a startup school. Usually one major challenge is funding, since state dollars come from students that are enrolled. She considers Citizens of the World fortunate to have garnered [local philanthropic support](#) in Kansas City, with the Ewing Marion Kaufman Foundation, the Walton Family and the Hall Family Foundation contributing \$2.65 million.

Details about the application process for fall of 2016

Citizens of the World Kansas City opened enrollment for kindergarten and first graders in November. Parents can [apply online](#) or drop off an application. The deadline is February 26, and if there are more applications than classroom seats, a lottery will be held in March.

The first year, the school will serve 288 students in classes of 24 students each. The following year, the school will expand to serve 432 students in grades k-2.