



Making a play for funding

Charter School supporters want share of potential lottery cash

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The Roger Bacon Academy, a public school near Leland, has stellar test scores, a waiting list to get in and a growing student body that comes from five counties.

But it doesn't have a library, a cafeteria or a gymnasium. And it is not likely to any time soon. Like the state's other charter schools, the academy receives no money for building and other capital expenses.

The legislation that allowed charter schools to form in the late 1990s prohibits state funds from paying for land or buildings at the schools, some of which closed quickly. And local school boards have no obligation to help build the independent charter schools.

Roger Bacon, one of two charter schools in Southeastern North Carolina, makes do with about 30 percent less funding than traditional local schools, said Headmaster Mark Cramer.

That's a longtime bone of contention for many supporters of the state's nearly 100 public charter schools, and one that's increasingly an issue with the advent of the "N.C. Education Lottery."

From scratch-off games and Powerball, the lottery is expected to raise an estimated \$160 million a year for education – nearly 40 percent of it going to school construction, according to the N.C. Department of Public Instruction.

But with charter schools restricted from receiving state capital funds, a push has begun to get legislators to make a change so that the education lottery benefits them. Supporters of the change plan news conferences around the state on Wednesday to bring attention to the issue.

"We are public schools," said Yvonne Moncovich, a parent of two children at Cape Fear Center for Inquiry, and a member of N.C. Students for Equitable Lottery Funding. "If all the other public schools are going to receive the money, we should as well."

Charter schools are public schools that operate independent of local school boards with latitude to set their own curriculum and culture. They receive the same per pupil funding that conventional schools use, but they receive no capital funds, which are typically

used for school construction, maintenance and vehicles. Unlike school systems, they can't appeal to the public for a bond issue. Their numbers are capped at 100 in North Carolina.

Cramer said charter schools often need a benefactor to get started. The Roger Bacon Academy is on a wooded 50-acre site outside Leland that it leases from a foundation formed by school founder Baker Mitchell.

Meanwhile, Cape Fear Center for Inquiry stands to miss out on about \$30,000 a year from the lottery, not a huge amount, but important at a school where money is tight, said Principal Lisa Griffin.

The school rents space in a business park off Randall Parkway for \$26,000 a month and is trying to raise money to build a school on land it purchased in northern New Hanover County last year. It closed for a week last year to repair rain damage from Tropical Storm Tammy.

"Thirty-thousand dollars would be a nice chunk of change in our budget," she said.