



THE MICHIGAN **FrontPage**

VOICE OF THE COMMUNITY SINCE 1916  
**MICHIGAN CHRONICLE**

# EduTech

The Michigan FrontPage / Vol. 8 • Issue 070 • September 2, 2009



## Cornerstone Schools spinning off two campuses as charter schools



**DR. ERNESTINE Sanders** reads to preschool children at Cornerstone School's Nevada campus. — Patrick Keating photos

**By Patrick Keating**  
**CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER**

In 1991, the private independent Cornerstone Schools embarked on a mission to both provide youngsters with an excellent education and instill in its pupils a strong sense of character.

This year Cornerstone, which is accredited by ISACS, Independent Schools Association of the Central States, and is also ISO-9001 certified, is set to spin off two of its three campuses as independent charter schools.

"This will be our only independent school," said Cornerstone Schools President Ernestine Sanders of Cornerstone's 18-acre Nevada campus at 6861 E. Nevada. Two schools operate on that campus, a primary school of pre K-5th grade, and a middle school of 6-8 graders. The school day runs from 7:55 a.m. -3:15 p.m.



**Dr. Ernestine Sanders**

The charter schools, which will open Sept. 9, will be located on Cornerstone's Grove campus, located at Six Mile and Schaeffer; and Redford campus at Plymouth and Telegraph in Redford.

Classes at the Nevada campus resumed in late August.

"By the time we get to Labor Day, it's not a start, it's the beginning of a long stretch," Sanders said.

The two new K-8 charter schools are called the Lincoln King Academy (on the Grove campus) and the Washington Parks Academy (on the Redford campus).

By 2007, Cornerstone had seven schools on five campuses but a decision was made to consolidate to three campuses last year. Sanders said the decision to consolidate was based in part on the fact that one former campus, the Iroquois Campus in Indian Village, only had about 100 students.

"We found that to be not an efficient way to go about educating our youngsters," she said. "So when we accumulated the Redford and the Grove campuses, it allowed us to expand and go beyond putting 100 students in one particular site."

Sanders said families and students who come to these schools seek Cornerstone out for excellence, as well as its Christ-centered mission.

"Here we believe that the true path to success is to follow teachings of Jesus," she said. "Through that and with that, our youngsters are competitive and they do exceedingly well."

While Cornerstone has a "Christ-centered" mission, and then Arch-

bishop Adam Maida assisted with the schools' founding, it isn't associated with either the Catholic Church or any other church or religious group. Sanders said Cornerstone uses the teachings of Jesus to help students with their moral development.

Sanders also said as students go into the Lincoln King and Washington Parks schools, Cornerstone gets a chance to service youngsters who previously hadn't had an opportunity to come to a Cornerstone school because their parents might not have been able to meet the financial criteria.

"But they'll come to a charter school at either of these two locations that will be equally excellent and meet their needs," she said.

The charter schools' authorizers are Grand Valley State University and Wayne County RESA.

Asked if there's any substantial difference to the education students will be getting at the two charter schools, Sanders said the Cornerstone brand is about educational excellence and measurable outcomes.

"Those are what we consider to be defining differences and how those are described in terms of that educational excellence," she said. "One of the defining differences, of course, is the longer school year."



Unlike most schools, which have a 180-day school year, Cornerstone has a 205-day school year. Sanders said the reconstituted charters will also have 200+ day school years.

The measurable outcomes include having students work beyond grade level, understand what it means to be of service to others and to be competitive in a global economy.

Another defining difference is Cornerstone's partner program. Sanders said partnering individuals give of their time and/or their financial support and many decide to partner with a particular child, coming to the school four times a year.

Sanders said the children get a chance to meet with individuals from all walks of life and that children at the charter schools will have the same opportunities.

Sanders estimated that the three campuses will have a total student population of C. 1100 when classes begin at the two charter schools. Of that, the Nevada campus will have C. 540 students.

Cornerstone schools also have an average of 23 students per class.

Other features of Cornerstone schools include classes in both Spanish and Mandarin Chinese. The schools have taught Spanish, beginning at the kindergarten level, since inception and added Mandarin in 2005. It's now taught in grades K-4. Spanish is taught in K-8, and will also be offered at the charter schools.

In addition, middle school students at the Nevada campus will be able to take a Spanish culture class.

Cornerstone also offers each child individualized learning in math and reading through a technological program called PLATO.

"It's a very powerful program when you think about making your decisions based on real data and not sometimes on just assumptions and guesses," Sanders said.

***For more information, call 313 892-1860, or visit [www.cornerstoneschools.org](http://www.cornerstoneschools.org).***

