

GODDARD IS BIG NEW FACE IN NURSERY SCHOOLS

Chain opens first of as many as 10 outposts in the city; connections needed.

By Miriam Kreinin Souccar • July 17, 2011

There's fresh hope for anxious Manhattan parents going through the grueling process of essays and interviews to secure an all-too-scarce slot at nursery school for their offspring.

The Goddard School®, a nursery school chain, is expanding into New York City. The first franchise is set to open Sept. 12 on the Upper West Side in a 10,000-square-foot space on the second floor of an apartment building on West 93rd Street and Broadway.

Executives at the chain—which is headquartered in King of Prussia, Pa., and boasts 372 branches in 34 states—hope to open 10 schools in the city over the next three years, mostly in Manhattan but possibly in Brooklyn as well.

“We have been trying to work in Manhattan for quite some time, but it's more challenging than other cities because of the high costs,” said Joseph Schumacher, chief executive of the Goddard School.

Franchisees pay Goddard around \$500,000 for furniture, equipment and other fees. On top of that, they need to cover the lease and build-out costs that bring the total tab close to \$2 million to open.

ONE OF SEVERAL

Goddard is just one of several private schools entering the market in response to the skyrocketing demand. Despite the recession, there are three to five children for every nursery school slot, education executives said.

In September, a 55,000-square-foot, for-profit school called the World Class Learning Academy will open in the East Village, accepting children from nursery school to fifth grade. A year later, another for-profit school called Avenues: The World School, will open in Chelsea.

New York's first Goddard School is owned by Bill Swan, a former associate dean at St. John's University. He took his inspiration from his own experience trying to find a place for his now 7-year-old child.

“There are a number of fine schools out there that don't need to be customer-service oriented because they're full,” Mr. Swan said. “I saw the need for a school that's parent-focused.”

DAY-CARE HOURS

Goddard's model is unique in the city. It is a fully accredited school but offers day-care hours and flexibility. Parents who pay for a full day—\$2,095 a month—can drop their child off at any time from 7 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. and pick up anytime between 2 p.m. and 6 p.m. There are spots for 120 children, aged 2 to 6. So far, 40 kids are enrolled to start in September.

Despite its appeal and even with all the demand, the clubby private school market in New York is difficult to enter. Parents covet nursery schools that have experienced “exmissions” staffers, who can use their contacts to help place students in the city's best grade schools.

“No parent who is interested in sending their child to an elite private school will want to send their child to a brand-new nursery school,” said Emily Glickman, head of a firm that helps parents with the application process. But, she acknowledged, the school could be a good fit for working parents or those planning to send their children to public school.

Rachel Corey, whose daughter will attend Goddard in the fall, said she chose the school because of the flexibility it offered and its reputation. It also doesn't hurt that Ms. Corey is planning to move to the suburbs with her family and doesn't have to worry about getting her daughter into private kindergarten.