

Sarasota charter school will hone body and mind

Middle school with fitness focus is set to open in August

By [Kim Hackett](#)

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Earth movers are still preparing the foundation for a \$2 million charter middle school at the South County YMCA, but the principal said the building blocks are in place for a fitness-centered school to open in August.

"Education comes first," said Oleh (pronounced Olek) Bula, the new principal of the SKY Academy and a former Marine captain.

"Whether your child is academically gifted or struggling, physically out of shape or a stellar athlete, we welcome you."

Bula, 44, who was principal of a charter school in Orlando last year and has also worked as an assistant principal, arrived for his first day of work Monday, to coincide with the first day of school registration.

The YMCA also announced the school's name and its meaning. "SKY" is an acronym for "Strength and Knowledge at the YMCA."

Brain research shows children "learn more when they are physically active," Bula said, adding that each student will have fitness and academic plans and will read for at least 90 minutes a day.

The day will include about 90 minutes of fitness, including gymnastics, skateboarding, rock-wall climbing, swimming or whatever the student chooses.

Exercise physiology and nutrition will be included in the science classes. The cafeteria will serve healthy food.

The book "Spark" by Dr. John Ratey sparked YMCA leaders into pursuing a fitness-based school more than a year ago, he added.

Builders are working on the two-story, 18,000-square-foot school that will eventually include 10 classrooms for grades six through eight.

The school is open to all Sarasota County students entering grades six and seven. The YMCA anticipates about 120 students the first year and adding eighth grade in 2012.

Charter schools are funded with tax dollars and there is no tuition.

Students will receive free YMCA memberships and before and after-school care if needed.



STAFF PHOTO / KIM HACKETT

SKY Academy Principal Oleh Bula began work Monday at the South County YMCA's planned charter school.



Limited bus service will be offered.

The school will be on the west and opposite side of the YMCA's fitness center, site of the old fitness center.

Teachers have not yet been hired but Bula said he will be looking for "motivated" educators who want to become part of "something great."

Bula, whose name is Ukrainian, earned a doctorate in educational leadership at the University of Central Florida, after five years in the Marine Corps, which also included service in the Gulf War. He speaks fluent French, Russian and Romanian.

The military "taught me about leadership," Bula said. His new job will be "preparing kids for a transition to enter life."

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