The academy has 188 students. Organizers hope to break ground on the middle school this summer.

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WIMAUMA - When Mark Haggett first came to the Redlands Christian Migrant Association Wimauma Academy in 2001, he started as a middle school teacher.

“The middle school portion of the school was phased out in 2005,” Haggett said. “We’ve always had the demand for those classes, but at the time we didn’t have the room or the funding.”

The RCMA provides child care and education to children of migrant farmworkers and rural, low-income families. The organization operates two charter schools, in Immokalee and Wimauma. The Wimauma academy received an A on the state’s academic report card.

Now Haggett is the school’s principal, and he hopes to have classes for grades six to eight up and running by the 2011-12 school year.

That effort recently got a significant bump thanks to a contribution from an area organization.

John Kirtley, chairman of Step Up for Students, has pledged $100,000 of his money toward the middle school expansion.

In addition, Kirtley has secured a matching $100,000 donation from the Walton Family Foundation — which funds programs in specific areas of K-12 education — and has vowed to help raise the rest of the money the school needs to complete its $1.6 million capital campaign.

“This school is a perfect example of how the distinctions of ‘public’ and ‘private’ are increasingly meaningless. Here you have a nonprofit organization providing a customized education that low-income parents freely choose as the best for their children.”

JOHN KIRTLEY
Chairman of Step Up for Students

The school announced its $1.6 million capital campaign for the middle school expansion in August. Since that time, the school had raised $600,000, but fundraising efforts had leveled off in recent months.

“This donation puts us at a little more than halfway toward our goal,” said Haggett, who hopes to break ground on the project as early as this summer.

“More importantly, it gives our capital campaigns a jumpstart and re-energizes everybody involved.”

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