Manatee Community College is already approved to keep students longer than other such colleges by offering four-year degrees in nursing.

Now, the college wants to get students who are younger, too.

College officials are looking at creating a charter school on MCC's Bradenton campus for grades 6 through 12. The school would be housed in existing classrooms and serve roughly 300 students.

Known as a collegiate school, the curriculum would emphasize entrepreneurial skills and green industries. The school would aim to particularly help students who would be the first in their family to go to college.

Upperclassmen at the school would be able to take college courses ahead of time.

"They can get their high school diploma one week and their AA degree the next," said MCC President Lars Hafner. "They're getting a jump on college."

The move is another departure for MCC, which in the last year has sought approval to offer several four-year degree programs and next week will officially change its name to State College of Florida.

MCC board members voted Wednesday to conduct a viability study into the school by the end of this year. If the study comes back positive, the school could open by the fall of 2010, Hafner said.
Several former community colleges, including Northwest Florida State College, have opened collegiate high schools.

But MCC would be the first in Florida to also teach middle-school grades, Hafner said.

Charter schools receive 95 percent of the per-student allotment of state funding that would normally go to the school district.

Hafner said additional funding could come from grants and a $52 million increase in charter school funding by the federal government.

The plan comes at a time when enrollment at nearby district high schools has been falling.

Manatee County schools Superintendent Tim McGonegal said Hafner has downscaled plans for the school and addressed concerns that it would siphon off elite students.

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