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School runaround: why parents are frustrated

Mercury News Editorial

The resistance that Leadership Public Schools has encountered from local districts illustrates why some parents are frustrated, and groups like PACT organize them.

Two years ago, the East Side Union High School District board, at Superintendent Joe Coto's prodding, rejected Leadership's application for a charter school.

On appeal, the county Board of Education saw through the rebuff and unanimously approved the school. In its first year, Leadership's East San Jose campus is an ambitious alternative for low-income students.

Now, Campbell Union High School District is giving Leadership the runaround. Last month, the school board rejected Leadership's proposal for a 450-student charter school that would target low-performing kids in the Del Mar High area. At least this time, the district gave reasons -- 10 pages' worth. But it's a laundry list without substance -- a game of gotcha citing typographical errors among reasons for denial. It's obvious district officials resent or don't understand charters.

Some skepticism might be justified if Campbell Union were doing a bang-up job with all kids, and Leadership were fly-by-night. But Leadership's founder, Mark Kushner, a former principal, is a charter school leader. His non-profit network is backed by the Gates Foundation and NewSchools Venture Fund -- a creation of venture capitalist John Doerr and others.

The Campbell school would be modeled on Kushner's first school, Leadership in San Francisco, where nearly every student has defied odds and gone to college. So far, Leadership, in East San Jose, has met all goals the county set.

Leadership will now appeal Campbell Union's denial to the county Board of Education. The board should unanimously approve it later this spring.

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