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MINORITY STUDENTS' PLIGHT IGNORED

CAMPBELL-AREA OPPONENTS WOULD DENY PARENTS A TOOL TO HELP KIDS REACH COLLEGE
MERCURY NEWS EDITORIAL

A charter school that was denied a fair shake by the Campbell Union High School District got a second and, we hope, fairer chance this week before the Santa Clara County Office of Education.

A couple of dozen parents, administrators and teachers attended the appeals hearing, which was requested by the charter school outfit called Leadership Public Schools. What quickly became evident was that differences in their perspectives were as wide as gaps in wealth and education.

The opponents of Leadership Public Schools were, for the most part, white, middle-class parents from the area in Campbell and West San Jose served by Del Mar High. The proponents, a few speaking through interpreters, were working-class Latinos or their advocates.

A turf dispute

Leadership's opponents would never consider sending their kids to a charter school like Leadership, yet they would deny others the chance to do so. The proponents are those who would benefit from the small, close-knit atmosphere and remediation-intensive curriculum that Leadership would offer.

The opponents take umbrage that a charter school network based in San Francisco would come onto their turf and impose a "Kentucky Fried" charter like the ones that Leadership has created in Richmond and in East San Jose. A charter school, one speaker said, should originate in the community and respond to local needs. School administrators argued that a charter would divert resources from the school.

But what if the resources aren't bringing results and needs aren't being met? In 2002-03 (the latest data on the state Web site), 38 of 236 graduates of Del Mar completed the course requirements, known as A-G, for admission to a California State University or University of California school. Not one of 14 African-American graduates and only three of 46 Latino graduates (6.5 percent) satisfied those requirements. Those who criticize Leadership's lack of hard numbers should reflect on Del Mar's data.

Some aren't served

Comprehensive high schools like Del Mar are like Sears, and charters are the niche stores. They're not for everyone; they can work wonders for some.

It takes a strong organization, commitment and extra money to create a charter school targeting underperforming students. Those who argue that blue-collar, minority parents in Campbell should create their own are either uninformed or insensitive to these families' struggles.

Notwithstanding the hard work of many teachers, minority kids at Del Mar aren't graduating with skills they need. Leadership founder Mark Kushner has created a small-school model that worked in San Francisco, where nearly every kid went on to college. It could work in Campbell.

Parents deserve that choice.