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## Charter high school given green light

### CONDITIONS FOR CAMPBELL DISTRICT CAMPUS

By Maya Suryaraman  
Mercury News

The board of the Santa Clara County Office of Education on Wednesday cleared the way for a new charter high school for at-risk students in the San Jose area.

On a unanimous vote, the board granted permission to the non-profit Leadership Public Schools to start a charter school within the Campbell Union High School District. And the board gave LPS until February to meet nine conditions, including submitting an adequate plan for measuring student progress.

While supporters of school choice and LPS lauded the board's decision, others who fear the new charter will drain resources from the Campbell district expressed disappointment.

``We keep trying to re-invent the system instead of fixing what we have," said Jenna Skinner, a parent with a student in the Campbell district's Del Mar High School.

Leadership Public Schools already operates a high school campus in Richmond that is in its second year and another in East San Jose, which opened in September. Two more LPS high schools are scheduled to open in Oakland and Hayward this fall. The Campbell charter campus is slated for a fall 2006 opening.

The non-profit is one of many charter-school operators in California seeking to serve low-income and minority students, who are not achieving at the same levels as other pupils. Both the state and federal governments are pushing public schools to find a solution, and several charter schools have sprung up hoping they can crack the problem.

LPS is banking its success on the small-schools model. The organization's plan is to keep class sizes at each of its high school campuses below 25, and total enrollment below 500. In contrast, large comprehensive high schools typically enroll about 1,700 students.

LPS launched its efforts to open a charter in the Campbell district after being approached by People Acting in Community Together, a local church-based community advocacy group looking for ways to better educate the San Jose area's at-risk students.

``We need a small-school option for those kids who will do better in a smaller school," said PACT member Susan Price-Jang.

LPS originally took its petition for a charter in the Campbell district to district officials. But in January, the district rejected the non-profit's request, saying LPS lacked a track record.

``Our main concern is, we had no achievement data to look at," Superintendent Rhonda Farber said.

Staff members and several Campbell-district parents also worry about the financial impact of an LPS charter. Campbell would lose more than a half-million dollars in state per-pupil funding for every 100 students who choose a charter over one of Campbell's comprehensive high school campuses.

``The financial crisis that this would impose on the district is something I don't think this district can bear," said Skinner.

Over the past few years, the Campbell district, like others across the state, has made substantial budget cuts, including reducing its teaching staff. By law, districts with charters in their boundaries also have to provide the charters with classroom space if any is available. This can also create friction.

``School districts are feeling the money pinch right now," said Deborah Connelly, a consultant in the state Department of Education's charter schools division.  
``Having to provide facilities to charters is not helping that."

Connelly said that problems arise because districts have their own needs for facilities which conflict with the charter's.

However, state law does not allow chartering agencies to take into account the financial impacts on school districts if a charter opens within its boundaries.

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