

# Teachers OK Charter Bid for School

LA Times B-1  
■ **Education:** Faculty members at Pacoima campus say they can do a better job if they set the rules. Their application for new status goes to the L.A. Unified board.

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TIMES STAFF WRITER

Taking the next step in a bid to free their school from the control of the giant Los Angeles Unified School District, teachers at Vaughn Street School in Pacoima approved a proposal Wednesday detailing ambitious changes they would undertake as a charter school.

A sizable majority of the Vaughn Street faculty voted to approve the school's charter petition, which will transform the campus into a near-autonomous entity, exempt from state and local educational regulations, if accepted by the Los Angeles Board of Education.

The petition, which the elementary school's staff has developed over the past two months, calls for teacher control over curriculum, reduced class sizes, shared power among parents and instructors, and hiring of private companies to provide certain administrative services.

"We know a lot more how to educate this population than the bureaucracy, and this is our chance to do it," an elated Bobbi Himber, who teaches a pre-kindergarten class, said after the results of the balloting were announced at a special student assembly Wednesday morning.

School officials plan to hand-deliver the petition to the school board today. The campus can appeal to county education authorities if the board denies the application.

The school board must rule on Vaughn Street's petition within 60 days and if passed, it would go into effect in July.

The board has received three other charter petitions, one from a Westside magnet school and two from alternative schools for drop-outs.



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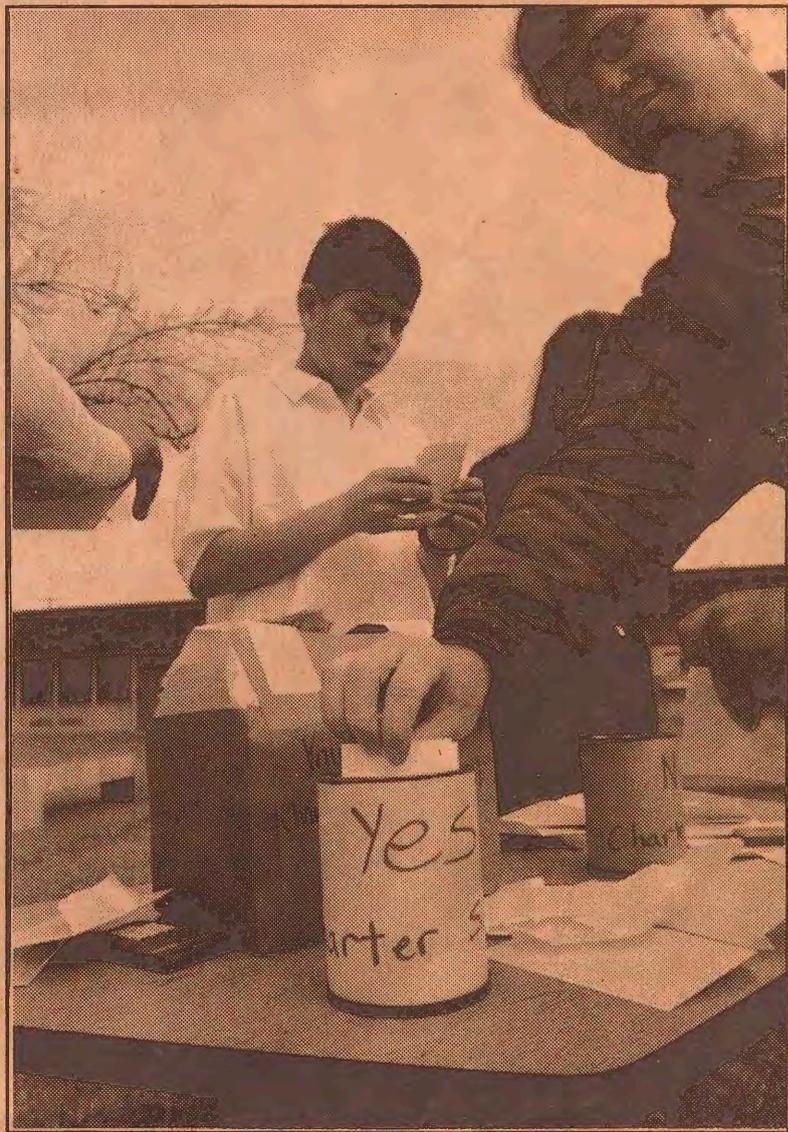


Teacher Serafina Reza and pupils, top, wait for results as students count votes cast by faculty, right. Principal Yvonne Chan smiles after announcement.

Under the state charter school law, which took effect Jan. 1, up to 100 schools throughout California and no more than 10 from any one district can be granted charter status, which would free them from the voluminous state Education Code. The schools would still receive state funding.

The intent is to allow teachers the freedom to shape their classes to improve student performance, especially for pupils identified as academically low achieving. President Clinton has embraced the charter concept, and it re-

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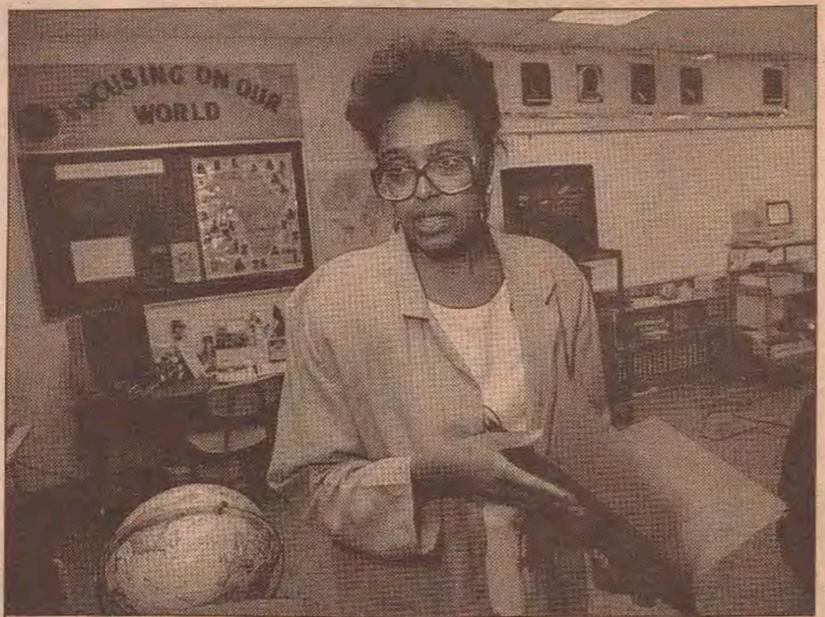
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cently received a boost from Gov. Pete Wilson, who last week proposed allowing entire charter districts.

So far, nine campuses, nearly all in Northern California, have become charter schools, according to state education authorities.

Wednesday's vote at Vaughn Street, which serves about 1,100 mostly poor and minority students, capped weeks of intense and sometimes testy discussions by administrators, teachers, office workers, classroom aides and parents. In a series of weekend and after-school sessions, they hammered out the 45-page petition, at times sharply disagreeing over questions of governance and employee unionization.

"We had hard feelings, but at the end we came to consensus," said Jorge Lara, a father of two children



DAVID BOHRER / Los Angeles Times

Teacher Stephanie Moore helped in the charter drive, but she has also been critical of some of the provisions for its implementation.

at Vaughn Street who fought for greater parental representation on the various campus committees that will run the school.

"I never thought we would get through all this," he said, wiping away tears after the ballot tally was announced. "It was very diffi-

cult."

Out of a 42-member faculty, 31 teachers voted yes and six voted no, with five abstentions. Under the law, only a simple majority vote of teachers is required to approve a petition.

The petition proposes a new

identity for the school—the Vaughn Street Next Century Learning Center—and a \$4.6-million budget made up of per-pupil state funding and outside grants. No class would have more than 27 youngsters, and teachers would form teams and plan curricula including a liberal number of field trips and enrichment programs.

Hiring, firing and salary determinations would be left to committees made up of parents, administrators, teachers and other employees. Medical benefits would initially come from the district, but the campus staff reserves the right to change that, as well as to turn to outside contractors for services such as maintenance and security during the five-year duration of the charter.

In one of the more controversial passages, all Vaughn Street employees would be represented by one union, which for the first two years would be United Teachers-Los Angeles in a "noncombative," substantially reduced role. UTLA would mediate internal disputes and provide legal counsel and other information. Vaughn Street's staff wrote into the petition their own policies dealing with issues such as teacher tenure and seniority.

As a concession to non-teaching

staff, all employees—not just teachers—would have a say in switching to another union after the two-year period with UTLA.

That proviso, and what she thought was the weakening of teacher control on various committees, led Stephanie Moore—one of the leaders of the charter move—to abstain from voting Wednesday.

"It's most important that the teachers maintain control. The law gave a mandate to teachers. I can't help it if parents are mad about that, if teachers' aides are mad about that," said Moore, who teaches fifth grade and is the UTLA representative at Vaughn Street. "We're the ones who will be held accountable if this thing

doesn't work."

Nonetheless, Moore said she still supports the charter school concept. She and others also view it as the logical conclusion for Vaughn Street, where three years of restructuring under Principal Yvonne Chan have turned what was once acknowledged as one of the worst schools in the district into a campus often commended for its innovations in delivering social and academic services to students and their families.

"They've been working so hard on reform these past two or three years," said Assistant Supt. Sara A. Coughlin, who oversees the San Fernando Valley's elementary schools. "It's a natural next step for them."