

# Proponents put charter school drive on the road to reality with petition

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A charter school is a good idea, its supporters say, and Wednesday they took the first steps toward making it a reality by seeking district endorsement.

But while some Santa Barbara school board members said they agreed, they also told roughly 20 supporters that the board will need a multitude of questions answered before agreeing to sponsor the charter.

"In order for the board to make an informed decision, it needs to know what the impact on the rest of the schools would be, adverse and beneficial," said board President Lee Scharfeld.

After the board accepted a petition from proponents, it instructed the charter group to hammer out any unanswered questions with staff members. The board has 30 days to make up its mind.

By law, a charter school must have the approval of a school board before it can open its doors. The board is responsible for ensuring that a charter is carried out properly.

Charter schools grew from legislation introduced by state Sen. Gary K. Hart, D-Santa Barbara-Ventura. The law allows the schools to operate without the constraints of state education codes.

*'The support is there.'*

**VANESSA KIRKER,  
CHARTER SCHOOL PROPONENT**

Charter school proponent Vanessa Kirker, who faced board members with fellow supporter Colleen McCarthy, said the board's inquiries expected. She assured the board that the group has answers to questions on housing, budgets, organization and educational issues.

"The support is there," she said after the questioning. "I'm just happy we got the cooperation."

Wendy Kanter, who initiated the charter, said the group would go to another district if the Santa Barbara district rejects the proposal.

"There's a lot of parents who want to make this happen," Kanter said. About 50 families and 30 individuals have signed onto the project.

Kanter and the other parents envision a school similar to the district's Open Alternative School. OAS uses non-traditional techniques to teach its elementary- and junior-high-age students.

"I think the Open Alternative School is a wonderful model for what we're doing," said Kanter, who has a child at OAS. "We're really going to design programs to meet individual needs. I don't

think this is unique. We'll be able to do more of it."

Charter school parents also want to blend the techniques used in private schools such as Waldorf and Montessori schools. Like OAS, the charter school would emphasize heavy parent involvement.

Blas Garza, assistant superintendent of elementary instruction, said the parents' proposal has some good points.

But one disadvantage to the charter concept is "everybody who applies for one can select who comes to their schools," he said.

Kanter said the group has a committee to deal with ethnic diversity. The charter law requires a school's enrollment to reflect the community it serves.

Cindy Heller, Santa Barbara Teachers Association president, calls the charter concept "a very dangerous situation" for teachers. "You could lose every right if you have a charter that is not well written," she said.

Issues such as working conditions, hours and tenure that are spelled out now in a contract for Santa Barbara district teachers may not be addressed in a charter, she said.

The union does not have a position on charter schools, but it advises teachers on the risks, she said. Kanter said the group intends to address teachers' rights in its charter.