

LA TIMES A-3 2-12-93

Under legislation sponsored by state Sen. Gary K. Hart (D-Santa Barbara), up to 100 schools can obtain charters that give them authority to operate outside the dictates of the many volumed state Education Code and free them from reporting to a school board and a district administration. In exchange, charter schools, which will be reviewed every five years, must produce measurable results, including meeting state standards for student achievement.

In theory, freedom from bureaucratic regulations will enable charter schools—one of the hottest ideas in the decade-old movement to improve U.S. education—to concentrate on delivering educational programs tailored to their students.

Minnesota stepped cautiously into granting such autonomy in 1991, allowing groups of licensed teachers to form eight new public schools. Last summer, Hart overcame opposition from the California Teachers Assn. to win passage of a more ambitious plan for the nation's most populous state. Late last month, Gov. Pete Wilson said he wants to expand the program by seeking legislation to allow entire districts to chart their own courses.

"I believe this will enable us to build a school of staff, community members, parents and volunteers that provide the very best education we can," Yucca Mesa Principal Eva Kinsman said. "We no longer have to worry about whether something we want to do fits in

Please see CHARTER, A34

State Gives Charters to 9 Schools

■ **Education:** The facilities are the first in California to gain independent status. The vote allows public campuses nearly absolute freedom to reinvent themselves.

By JEAN MERL
TIMES EDUCATION WRITER

In El Dorado County, the Community School will open its doors from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. with an academic program aimed exclusively at students for whom traditional methods have failed.

In Sonoma, a new public campus will be modeled on a system of private education started in Europe shortly after the turn of the century. And in San Bernardino County, parents at Yucca Mesa Elementary School will sign contracts agreeing to participate in campus life.

These are among the nine schools that made history Thursday by becoming the first charter schools in California. With a vote of the State Board of Education, California became the second state to give public campuses nearly absolute freedom to reinvent themselves.

CHARTER: 9 Schools Achieve New Status

Continued from A3

with school board policy, just about whether it is best for our children."

The staff at Yucca Mesa, a kindergarten through sixth-grade campus in Yucca Valley and the first in Southern California to win charter school status, plans to build on some of the programs under way at the Morongo Unified School District Board of Education. They include an intensive intervention project for first-graders who show signs of falling behind in reading and math, after-school programs for gifted students and a system for including severely handicapped students in regular classroom activities.

About 20% of Yucca Mesa's 550 students qualify for special classes because of emotional, learning or physical disabilities. But because of efforts by teachers, families and the other students, all but two are able to spend at least half their day in regular classrooms, Kinsman said.

Second-grader Claire Mohler helps classmate Christina, who is nearly completely deaf and has other handicaps. Claire took a sign language class at school so she could communicate with Christina.

"I like to help her do lots of things, getting off the swings or going to lunch and the library. In class I make sure she knows what to do, like to sit down or to color," said Claire, who first met Christina in kindergarten. "Now she's my friend."

Kinsman said charter status will allow the school to add programs that would not have been possible because they conflicted with board policies. One involves setting up separate classes for students whose behavioral problems make them likely candidates for failure down the road.

By the start of school this fall, when Yucca Mesa expects to strike off on its own, Kinsman expects to have negotiated contracts with par-

ents. They will agree to spend a minimum number of hours on a range of activities—including volunteering in the classroom, helping with a fund-raiser, and cutting out bulletin board materials at home. Parents who do not want to participate can have their child bused, at district expense, to another school. But Kinsman said she is going to great lengths to meet with all parents on evenings or weekends to persuade them of the benefits and to work out a "mutual support agreement" suitable for each family.

There are some rules that the new charter schools must follow: They cannot charge tuition or violate the state Constitution, they must adhere to applicable federal regulations and requirements, be non-discriminatory in admissions, and demonstrate how they will achieve a racial and ethnic balance that reflects their communities. Anyone can start a charter school, but an existing private school cannot apply to become one.

The state's charter schools law, which went into effect Jan. 1, requires that schools submit detailed proposals to their school board for approval. Once local approval is granted, the charter application is forwarded to the state board for final designation, on a first-come, first-served basis.

Decisions on such matters as whether to keep the district's em-

Eye-Popping Escape Leaves Clue to Crime

EL CERRITO, Calif.—Police are looking for a 24-year-old former convict after finding an unexpected clue at the scene of his alleged eye-popping escape.

Detectives found a plastic eyeball marked "A. Harris" at an apartment complex where a 28-year-old man was wounded by two gunmen Jan. 16. Aaron Levall Harris, the fake eye's apparent owner, is a suspect, police said.

Detective Shawn Maples said it appears the prosthetic eye popped out of its socket during an escape from the second-story apartment.

Harris lost his left eye when wounded by a shotgun blast in 1988, according to police.

—Associated Press

Please see CHARTER, A35

CHARTER

Continued from A34

ployee unions or what textbooks to use are left up to the individual schools. Charter schools will get the same amount of public funding as their more traditional counterparts.

The state's first charter schools include:

- A sixth through 12th-grade campus in Sonoma County that will provide business or industry apprenticeships for all students.

- Two campuses in western Placer County that will enable students to earn credits for non-classroom activities and issue diplomas based on specific academic achievements.

- A home schooling program, under the auspices of the Bennett Valley Union Elementary School District in Sonoma County, which will provide money to parents who want to teach their children at home.

- Schnell Elementary School in Placerville, which will feature computer-based instruction and flexible age and ability grouping.

- A kindergarten through eighth-grade campus in Sonoma, which will use the approach of the Waldorf system, in which teachers stay with the same students each year.

- A campus in San Carlos in San Mateo County that will offer a longer school year and require students to perform community service.
