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Santa Clara County school board hears case for Alum Rock charter school

By Jessie Mangaliman
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A proposed charter school for underachieving middle school students, rejected three times by the Alum Rock Union School District - twice this year - went on appeal before the Santa Clara County Board of Education Wednesday night, during a public hearing at which dozens of supporters and opponents pleaded their case.

The county board is scheduled to decide on the appeal on Nov. 26.

Supporters of the charter, proposed by ACE Public School Network, a San Jose non-profit, wore stickers that said "70 percent," in apparent reference to the number of eighth-grade students in the district who read below grade levels.

Under state charter laws, a proposed charter rejected by a school district can be appealed to the county board of education. If ACE wins its appeal, its school will be overseen by the county board.

Twice this year, the Alum Rock school board denied the ACE charter, citing concerns about its curriculum, budget and support from the community.

"It's not about supporting or not supporting any charter school," said Alum Rock Superintendent

Norma Martinez. "We support choice that's good for our kids and our schools."

Over the years, the district has made great strides in improving the achievement levels of its students, Martinez said.

Greg Lippman, executive director of ACE, said he had sought to collaborate with the district in creating a school that would help mostly Latino students learning English to be ready for high school, and onto a college track. The proposed charter would have extended hours, a rigorous curriculum, Saturday academies and strong parental involvement.

But after the Alum Rock school board voted 4-1 to reject the ACE charter in October - the first rejection was in July - Lippman said his remaining option was to appeal to the county board.

Lippman said his appeal focuses "on the incredible level of community support we have, the real need for a certain sub-group of students in that community, and the kind of services our school can provide."

Lippman is founding principal of Downtown College Prep, a successful San Jose charter that prepares underachieving Latino high school students for college. ACE charter is backed by parents and the community group, People Acting in Community Together.

Contact Jessie Mangaliman at jmangaliman@mercurynews.com or (408) 920-5794.

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