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Editorial: Charter backers' history reassuring

APPLICANTS FOR TWO NEW SCHOOLS IN EAST S.J. DESERVE A FAIR HEARING

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Tonight and in mid-December, two school boards will decide applications for two charter schools proposed for East San Jose that exemplify what charters can offer: new opportunities for low-income, minority students to excel. We expect that the trustees will give the proposals a fair hearing. That is what the state charter law demands, and what families in East San Jose deserve.

ACE Public School Network's charter middle school would offer children in the Alum Rock Union Elementary School District who already have fallen significantly behind a chance to catch up and get on the college track.

KIPP San Jose Collegiate High would offer an intensely rigorous curriculum in a small-school setting for students from the East Side Union High School District. It would be the natural extension of KIPP Heartwood Academy, a charter middle school in Alum Rock whose primarily Latino students have leaped over the achievement gap with test scores that rival schools in the most affluent areas of Silicon Valley.

Proponents of the two charters have a track record that should reassure school officials. Greg Lippman,

the executive director of ACE, co-founded Downtown College Prep, the charter high school in San Jose that sends formerly low-performing students to four-year colleges. Sehba Ali, the principal and founder of KIPP Heartwood and the driving force behind KIPP Collegiate, can count on the resources and expertise of the San Francisco-based KIPP, which oversees 57 schools in 17 states.

Tonight, the Santa Clara County school board should grant ACE's charter a conditional approval. The Alum Rock school board rejected the charter three times, despite ACE's efforts to work with the district. In encouraging opposition to the charter, the district has pitted parents who are satisfied with the current schools against those who want an alternative - a divisive and short-sighted tactic.

The analysis of the charter by county office of education staff faulted aspects of ACE's instruction plans, but nothing serious enough to derail the proposal. It dismissed Alum Rock's wholesale objections and, noting ACE's successful summer school for low-achieving students, said the charter qualified for preferential treatment.

East Side Union has some demanding programs, like the successful International Baccalaureate at Andrew Hill. But with more than 20,000 students, there's room for more. KIPP San Jose Collegiate would offer 400 students something the district tried, but later abandoned, at Evergreen Valley High: a small-school model.

KIPP Collegiate would be open to all students in East Side Union, but would give preference to KIPP Heartwood graduates, who have thrived in the close, supportive atmosphere and small classes. Through a longer day (7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.), a longer school

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year, summer school and tutorials, KIPP Collegiate would accelerate the progress of non-Heartwood students who enter ninth grade behind their peers. Completion of all courses for entrance to a University of California or California State University school and admission to at least two four-year colleges would be graduation requirements. The school would count on the Gates, Walton and other foundations for substantial support.

Indications are that East Side Union would view KIPP as a partner, not a threat. That's an enlightened perspective - and encouraging.