

Berkeley Does Not Need a Charter School

By PRISCILLA MYRICK ²⁰

I agree with the Coalition to Defend Affirmative Action (BAMN) that Berkeley does not need another a charter school ("Activists Protest City's Proposed Charter School," Oct. 8-14). Besides the paramount issue that a BUSD charter school would "codify separate and inferior education" for black and Latino students, a BUSD-sponsored charter school will tap into limited public resources in terms of facilities, parcel taxes and state money intended for Berkeley public school students. A charter school is open to any student in California. In the current economic environment BUSD public education is already being short-changed. Why siphon off scarce resources?

BUSD Director of Facilities Lew Jones reportedly said that a new facility for a charter school could be built using \$1.8 million in unallocated bond money in BUSD's facilities budget. Why should the District use bond money to fund a charter school facility when Berkeley High is chronically short classrooms that should have been built with the last bond money? In fact, Lew Jones reported to the BUSD last spring that all of

the \$116.5 million Measure AA bond money intended, in part, to build a classrooms at Berkeley High was gone and that much needed classroom space at the Berkeley High would need to be funded from a future bond measure. Let's build classrooms at Berkeley High before any charter school.

Moreover, Berkeley already has one charter high school—CalPrep, run by a partnership between Aspire public schools and UC Berkeley—sponsored by the Alameda County Office of Education. BUSD rejected sponsoring CalPrep last year. In April 2008 Superintendent Huyett told the CalPrep folks that BUSD did not want any direct involvement in any charter school activities.

Alameda County Office of Education approved the CalPrep charter school in June 2008. If Berkeley students wish to attend a charter secondary school, CalPrep is up and running at St. Joseph the Worker school in Berkeley, and any Berkeley student may apply.

Although I am not in favor of charter schools in Berkeley, at least Aspire Public Schools had a track record in terms of successfully establishing and running schools that improved student achievement. On the other hand, the organizers

of REALM, led by the principal at B-Tech, BUSD's continuation school, do not appear to have a track record in terms of successfully leading a secondary school. According to the California Department of Education website, none of the students at B-Tech tested proficient in either English language arts or math in 2009. B-Tech enrolls only about 120 students and has a graduation rate of 54 percent. According to the 2009 Accountability Progress Report presented to the BUSD board at the last meeting, B-Tech's API declined 106 points. The school board should be concerned about the lack of academic progress at B-Tech, but adding a charter school is not the answer.

If the 2020 Vision Planning Team recommends another charter school or alternative program, the BUSD board should reject such a proposal. Berkeley does not need another charter school or alternative program. Scarce resources should be efficiently focused on providing adequate facilities and education for the 16 schools already run by BUSD. Let's start by closing the achievement gap in BUSD's own schools.

Priscilla Myrick is a Berkeley resident.