

The Academy of Arts and Sciences will honor district requests and submit the petition for a Dual Language Primary Years Program to local districts:

The California Academy of Arts and Sciences (AAS) is coming to the San Joaquin Valley, and if you haven't learned about the Los Angeles-based Charter Management Organization (CMO) and the schools it operates, you soon will. The Academy is led by seasoned school leader and CEO Sean McManus, who has led both award-winning charter schools and International Baccalaureate (IB) Schools in the US and abroad. Last year the Academy made a move to Northern California and gained approval to operate a charter school in Sonoma County. This year the chartering group has received approval from three more districts in Northern California to open up four more schools in 2014 and 2015 respectively. The Academy of Arts and Sciences is now seeking approval to open and operate a public charter school driven by Dual Language Primary Years Program for students in San Joaquin County. Over the past eight months the Academy's executive leadership has worked collaboratively with a team of education leaders and local community members to develop the vision and the mission for the charter school that will now open in August of 2015.

In a letter of support for the Academy's original petition submitted as a countywide benefit charter, former California State Superintendent of Schools, Delaine Eastin states, "The plan for a Dual Language Primary Years Program that is before you will help to close the achievement gap for many Stockton children." However, at the conclusion of the County Office of Education's March 14th Public Hearing for the establishment of the AAS World Language Academy as a countywide public benefit, the charter management organization chose to withdraw its petition for consideration. It was somewhat unexpected to withdraw a petition that had garnered support and input from notable education leaders like Delaine Eastin, CA State Superintendent of Instruction (ret.), Jane Swift, CEO of Middlebury Interactive and Dr. Jeff Tilton, Superintendent of Charter Schools at DCS. However, the unexpected withdrawal came in response to hearing the considerable concerns from local school district officials and staff members feeling AAS was circumventing local control and questioning if the charter met the criteria for a countywide benefit charter. In response to this criticism the Academy decided to withdraw its countywide benefit petition and honor the request of local school districts to submit the petition directly to their respective school boards.

In contrast to the comments made by opponents, the supporters of the AAS World Language Academy consisted of parents and community leaders, such as Associate Pastor Betsy Ruvalcaba of the Life Center in Stockton, who was shocked by the negative comments and told the County Board of Education "I assumed to come here today and hear a YES for education, a YES for the World Language Academy." There were also several parents and students who spoke as proponents of Dual Language Immersion Charter Schools and the unique opportunity that the AAS World Language Academy will provide to students in the Stockton Community. Several parents and students spoke in favor of the World Language Academy with firsthand experience of attending a similar dual language charter school in Riverbank; Mia Alcalá-Van Houten stated, "I think you will find that the leadership of the school is prepared to run a school that will grow and succeed. At RLA we have large wait list and there are many families waiting to get into the school." The petition also drew several positive comments from County Board Members and no negative or oppositional comments from the County Office of Education leadership or its staff.

At the conclusion of the public hearing, the Academy's executive leadership felt validated and confident in their plan for establishing a PYP/DLI school in San Joaquin County as several points were made clear during the hearing: 1) both educators and parents support World IB as a quality educational model, 2) both educators and parents support dual language as a quality educational model, and 3) the AAS World Language Academy will be the first school in the county to implement both IB and Dual Language concurrently in a whole school setting. The Academy stands ready to work in a proactive, transparent and positive manner with local districts to create a quality public charter school option for the children of San Joaquin County. For more information on the Academy of Arts and Sciences visit www.aascalifornia.org.