Proposal for Delano charter school draws fire

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The Kern County Board of Education is scheduled to vote Tuesday on a proposal for a new charter school in Delano. Supporters say the new school will mean better opportunities for kids, but the Delano Unified School District says it's not a good idea.

The Paramount Bard Academy will be both publicly and privately funded with Paramount Farms promising to invest millions in the new school.

If approved, the school will better prepare students to go to college, according to Principal Brent Malicote. "This is set up to be an educational choice for the community to make sure that students are prepared for college and give them an opportunity that is really unparalleled in the southern San Joaquin Valley," Malicote said.

Longer school days, smaller class sizes and a chance to earn college credits will be available to students at the new charter, he said.

Those selected to attend the school would be chosen at random from a pool of applicants representing different demographics within the Delano area.

The Delano Joint Union High School District opposed the proposal, saying the publicly funded charter will hold no accountability to the community and elected officials. "The charter will be receiving public funds but will not be accountable to our local school board," said District Superintendent Rosalina Rivera.

Rivera says public schools would lose money for programs they've worked hard to attain. "We do not feel that they have established in their proposal a reasearch based educational program that is far superior to what we are currently offering our students," said Rivera.

"It's going to benefit a lot of parents who are low income and can't afford private schools who would love to take the students and the kids to a school in that aspect," said Patricia Puentes, parent of a Delano school student.