



Dozens show up to support proposed Casper charter school



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A long line of parents implored Natrona County School District trustees at a public hearing earlier this week to bring The Guild Charter School to Casper.

It was the district's first ever public hearing for a proposed charter. Other groups have initiated the application process, but none have come as far.

Parents, teachers, administrators, citizens, a member of a conservative advocacy group and even students attended. The majority spoke favorably, though some said they would like more information.

The hopeful co-founders of the school, Tiffany Leary and Wendolyn McGregor, began the meeting by explaining the details of the charter school.

The Guild would offer an alternative for students in the district.

The school promises a four-and-a-half-day school week, where students receive hands-on learning during field trips every week; a curriculum emphasizing classical learning, such as mastering Greek and Latin roots; a rigorous math program called Singapore Math; a character development program known as Great Expectations; and individualized learning plans for all students. The Guild would also cap class sizes at 16 students.

Charters are publicly funded schools that operate independent from the district. They operate on contracts, or charters, with the school district.

That gives them freedom to innovate, Leary said.

Parents spoke enthusiastically about the school.

Teresa Johnson, the parent of a Casper student, highlighted the individualized learning plans. Johnson said the plans would be fantastic for her student, who falls just shy of the district's gifted and talented program cutoff.

"This would give kids in the gifted program an actual meaningful choice," she said.

Amber Christensen, a teacher and parent, told trustees that she felt encouraged by the idea of a charter school. She especially liked the idea of community services and field trips on Fridays.

Brandis Sunday, a mother of four students who attend separate schools in the district, said she was most excited by the math curriculum.

Terry Lougee, who taught science in the district for 23 years and at a college in Alabama for more than 10, said he was impressed by the science curriculum and the opportunity it offered students to experiment.

But even with the public outpouring of support came worry from some parents. Lori Burns, a program facilitator in the district, prefaced her comments by saying, "I've worked with a lot of you guys." She said she has been a district employee for the past decade.

"I've seen you guys do some amazing stuff, but we're still losing some of our kids," she said.

Christopher Dresang, assistant principal at Natrona County High School, said he was on the fence about the charter.

He said he would like to know what sort of effect it would have on district teachers who left to teach there and wondered what it would mean for tax payers.

When it came time for trustees to speak, they were silent. They provided the school's founders instead with a list of questions.

Trustees will vote on whether to allow the creation of the school during a Sept. 28 board meeting. They will meet with the founders of the school during a work session at least one other time before then.