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Charter school fans march to protest funding slights

By Connie Llanos, Staff Writer

Article Last Updated: 06/06/2008 06:45:32 AM PDT

Holding up signs and sporting matching T-shirts, thousands of parents, students and teachers from charter schools across Los Angeles marched downtown Thursday to ask for more charter funds, protest potential cuts and announce formation of the first statewide charter advocacy group.

Although charter schools have begun to work with Los Angeles Unified School District officials, families and teachers still complained about the district's treatment of charters.

"Charter schools are still not getting their fair share. They get \$3,000 less per kid, and they don't get any facilities," said Jacqueline Elliot, who chairs and co-founded the new advocacy group, Families That Can, which organized the protest.

Elliott said she decided to form the coalition in an effort to give charter families a unified voice.

During their first organized demonstration, parents expressed concern over state budget cuts that are expected to slash \$353million from the district's annual budget.

Lakeview Terrace resident Naomi Ortega was among parents wondering how the cuts would affect Fenton Charter School, where her older son goes to kindergarten.

"We already get less money; we can't afford to lose anything else," Ortega said.

Still at issue for many is the district's decision to rescind campus space for charter schools.

Earlier in the year Ray Cortines, senior deputy superintendent for LAUSD, rescinded seven of 39 campus offers for charter schools because of space issues. The offers had added up to the largest ever made to charter schools.

"I know that there is a disagreement, but we just don't have any more seats in the places where they want to co-locate," Cortines said. "The district is still trying to find places where we might get the seven in."

Cortines said a meeting this week with the California Charter Schools Association kicked off a joint working group that will design the district master plan for charter facilities.

"I am looking forward to meeting these goals, and I really feel it's important we develop a plan going forward," Cortines said.

"Beyond the rhetoric, we have developed a working relationship."

Caprice Young, chief executive officer of the California Charter Schools Association, agreed

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that the district has made some positive moves.

But Young said it has taken years to gain progress, and after battling for so long, charter school advocates know the fight isn't over.

"We know we have to keep the heat on until we get real equity," Young said. "We are not going to back down because they are throwing us some crumbs."

In the meantime, Jackie Duvivier, who has twin girls enrolled at downtown Cals Charter School, is among parents who feel their kids are paying the price.

"My girls go to a great school, but it is inside a high-rise building in downtown," Duvivier said. "They don't have a lab or a gym. They miss out on the whole high school experience."

Lazaro Medina, parent of two elementary school students enrolled at Fenton Charter in Lakeview Terrace, echoed Duvivier's sentiments.

"Charters don't have fair facilities, but still students do great, above average. Shouldn't they take that into account?"

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Los Angeles Times

<http://www.latimes.com/news/education/la-me-charter6-2008jun06,0,1911004.story>

From the Los Angeles Times

Marchers in downtown Los Angeles claim unfair funding of charter campuses

Backers of the schools say the L.A. Unified district must provide space for their classrooms.

By Mitchell Landsberg

Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

June 6, 2008

They were well-organized, exuberant and very, very loud. Chanting "Support the law, support our charters," several thousand charter school parents, students and staff marched through downtown Los Angeles on Thursday to protest what they said was inequitable funding for their campuses.

"This is the beginning of something really big," Jacqueline Elliot, a co-founder of Partnerships to Uplift Communities, said to the demonstrators, who filled the street and sidewalks for a solid block in front of the Junipero Serra State Building. Elliot's organization runs eight schools in northeast Los Angeles and the San Fernando Valley.

Charter schools are public campuses that are typically authorized by local school districts but run independently. There are more than 100 authorized by the Los Angeles Unified School District, and they have grown increasingly restive over their difficulty in finding sites for their campuses.

They say the district is violating the provisions of Proposition 39, a measure passed in 2000 that requires school districts to provide space for charters.

This week, Senior Deputy Supt. Ramon C. Cortines wrote a memo reaffirming a decision to deny space in district schools to seven charters, saying it would hamper the traditional schools' ability to function.

Caprice Young, a former school board president who is now head of the California Charter Schools Assn., said after the demonstration that she considered Cortines' move illegal.

She also said the district refuses to release facility funds that are owed to the charter schools, and that charters receive \$3,000 less per pupil than in traditional public schools.

She said the charter operators organized the march from Los Angeles Unified headquarters to the state building because "the only way to be heard at the L.A. Unified School District is with a stampede or a lawsuit."

Interviewed later, Cortines said that he disagreed with Young on some specifics, such as the right of the seven schools to space on district campuses, but that he agreed with her overarching point that charter schools deserved equity.

"I don't see them as charter school students or L.A. Unified students; I see them as students of Los Angeles, and we need to make sure that there is proper, adequate space for the education of all the students," he said.

John Creer, director of planning and development for the district, said L.A. Unified had released \$58 million out of \$120 million in bond funds that are earmarked for charter schools, and has just formed a group to decide how to spend the rest.

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