

KIPP charts course for San Francisco high school

By Ron Leuty

KIPP is graduating to high school.

The San Francisco-based pillar of the charter school movement wants to open its first high school in the city in time for the 2013-14 school year, zeroing in on poor households and minority students. But there's no guarantee that KIPP — short for the Knowledge Is Power Program — will get a passing grade from the San Francisco Unified School District.

The district will vote by June 26 on KIPP's application. If rejected, KIPP could appeal to state education officials.

The SFUSD board rejected three recent new charter school applications, from Rocketship Academy in Hunter's Point, Flex Academy in the Tenderloin and Mission Prep Academy. California education officials ultimately approved all three charters.

But KIPP and the district already are playing nicely together. The nonprofit and the district, which is required to have a public hearing within 30 days of an application and vote on the application within another 30 days, agreed to delay the process to match up with the SFUSD board's meeting schedule.

KIPP — an organization supported by Doris Fisher, co-founder of Gap Inc. , and her late husband, Don Fisher — is no first-year student of San Francisco politics and education. For nine years it has operated two middle schools, KIPP Bayview Academy and KIPP San Francisco Bay Academy in the Western Addition.

Both schools have had their charters renewed by SFUSD.

Those free, public, college-preparatory schools in two of San Francisco's poorest neighborhoods offer some measure of validation for KIPP's

mixture of high expectations for students, extended school days and long-term student support. The 255-student Bayview school last year received an academic achievement award from the California Department of Education.

The KIPP schools now are among the city's highest performing, said KIPP Bay Area Executive

Director Beth Thompson.

The high school initially would enroll 100 to 120 students, most of those coming from its two middle schools in the city, and have six to 10 teachers. Open slots are filled through a lottery system.

Ultimately, the San Francisco high school would expand to as many as 400 to 480 students and a staff of 30 for the 2016-17 school year.



Thompson at S.F. Bay Academy: "Our mission has always been about preparing kids for success in college and in life."

"We really didn't have a master plan," Thompson said about KIPP opening a high school. "It's just been a natural evolution of the success of our two middle schools. Part of that is the momentum through the families who are asking for this option."

The new school would cost \$8,650 per student per year, with about \$4,900 of that coming from state per-pupil funding. The remainder comes from federal funding, government grants and, about 20 percent, philanthropy.

The school would need to raise about \$1,650 per student per year from gifts, a KIPP spokesman said.

The majority of KIPP students qualify for free lunches and are the first in their families to attend college, Thompson said. Most students come from black or Hispanic households.

"Our mission has always been about preparing kids for success in college and in life," Thompson said.

KIPP is far from alone, though. There are 15 charter school sites in San Francisco serving 2,000 students, according to SFUSD officials, including Leadership High School whose charter renewal was unanimously approved in February by the SFUSD board.

"As long as there's a demand from parents in the community for a new model, and the schools are achieving results for kids, that's a great thing," Thompson said.

In all, KIPP operates 109 schools and 33,000 students in 20 states and the District of Columbia. That includes five middle schools in San Francisco, Oakland, San Jose and San Lorenzo and two high schools in San Lorenzo and San Jose.

If approved, the new high school would likely be in the Bayview, Mission, Western Addition or Potrero Hill and near public transportation, Thompson said.

"We want to be located in an area that has a student population that we hope to serve," Thompson said.