

## Antioch school district gives OK to new charter school

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Antioch will have another charter school next fall, although it won't be exactly as its two founders envisioned.

Antioch Unified School District trustees unanimously agreed Wednesday to approve the charter school that two teachers have proposed — but with conditions.

The original plan was to open an all-boys school designed to help minority children catch up with their white peers by offering a curriculum emphasizing science and math.

Caucasian students typically do better on state-mandated tests, particularly in these two subject areas, explained Karla Branch, an Antioch Middle School math teacher who launched the project with fellow English instructor Lawrence Rasheed.

And boys of all races are more likely to realize their academic potential when they aren't distracted by girls, she said.

The idea of opening a single-sex school didn't pass muster with the district's legal counsel, however, so now girls will be able to attend as well.

And although Branch and Rasheed still are calling the school R.A.A.M.P. Charter Academy, the acronym that once stood for Reaching African-American Males' Potential now is shorthand for Raising Academic Achievement Multi-Cultural Program.

Still, Branch says she wasn't disappointed when she learned late last month that she and Rasheed would have to make some changes.

"We saw this coming because we are seeking to be a public institution, and you kind of have to do the open-for-all

sort of thing," she said, adding that she appreciates district administrators' support for the concept.

"We knew going in that we were shooting for something pretty radical — certainly very different from the other schools that are out there."

The district's requirements won't change how she and Rasheed intend to run the school, Branch said.

What researchers have learned about how boys learn best will shape the way classes are taught, she said.

For example, youngsters will have a chance at the start of the school day to burn off energy so they then can concentrate on lessons more easily, Branch said.

The curriculum also will include more hands-on activities because boys tend to learn better by doing.

"They need to not just learn about the dirt but to play in the dirt," Branch said.

In addition, older boys will mentor younger ones, not only to help them with homework but to set a good example for them in general, she said.

The pair hope to start enrolling children in January, with R.A.A.M.P. Charter Academy opening in July as a K-4 campus.

They will add additional grade levels each year until 2012, when the first ninth-grade class will enter.

Classes won't have more than 20 students, and the maximum enrollment will be 200.

The first group of students might include Chaunté Sawyer's youngest child, Elijah.

He's not only easily distracted but headstrong, said the Antioch resident, who's black.

She regularly hears from Elijah's second-grade teacher that he doesn't follow directions, and although her 7-year-old is doing fine on his class work right now, Sawyer worries that he will start losing ground in middle school as math and science classes become more difficult.

Her two older sons also have struggled in these subjects, their grades hovering around a C-minus despite Sawyer's best efforts.

She's read to them regularly since they were babies, has hired tutors, enrolled her eldest in private school, insists that they finish their homework — and still their test scores are lower than they should be, she says.

With the chance to enroll Elijah in a smaller school designed specifically for boys like him, Sawyer seriously is considering taking the plunge.

"I've tried the other schools, and they have let me down," she said. "I'm (ready) to do something new."

For more information about the charter academy, go to [www.raamp.com](http://www.raamp.com).

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