



November 4, 2007 Sunday

Charter school's popularity rises

School's waiting list hits 3,000, including the unborn
This story is the first of two parts in a series.

By GRETCHEN LOSI Staff Writer

APPLE VALLEY — Yet-to-be-born children are welcomed to apply.

Attendance at the Academy of Academic Excellence is so coveted that parents have put their yet-to-be-born children on the school's waiting list.

School spokeswoman Cheryl Thompson said the list, which is now approaching 3,000, includes unborn babies as far ahead as the class of 2026.

"To have 3,000 on a waiting list in a rural community is just unprecedented. It means the parents are speaking. They want changes in the public school system," said Gary Larson, spokesman for the California Charter Schools Association.

The school's accomplishments are numerous.

With a major focus on science and technology, its state and federal test scores are always among the county's highest.

And in order to attend, you have to be randomly picked from a lottery held three times a year.

The lottery works like this:

- A parent fills out an application with a copy of their drivers license and utility bill to show proof of residence.

- Each applicant receives a randomly selected computer lottery number.

- Each child is also issued a grade level ranking number.
- Three times a year, the school holds a lottery where the allotted amount are chosen. Because it's random, students from all walks of life are chosen. Nancy Felton has four children. Two children have already been selected. Her oldest was on the list nearly four years before being selected. He's now attending the eighth-grade at the Lewis Center. She is hoping her other two children will be selected soon.

"I think it's a better education, and they'll be going to school with kids whose parents made that same choice, to care," she said.

Thompson said that despite its impressive reputation, the school isn't for everyone.

"Some people leave because it's not the school for them. We hold everyone accountable, and many exit interviews state that the school is too hard for them," she said. "We're not saying we're perfect. We have problems to solve like others but we continue to improve."

Other schools and districts have taken note of their success and Thompson said that the

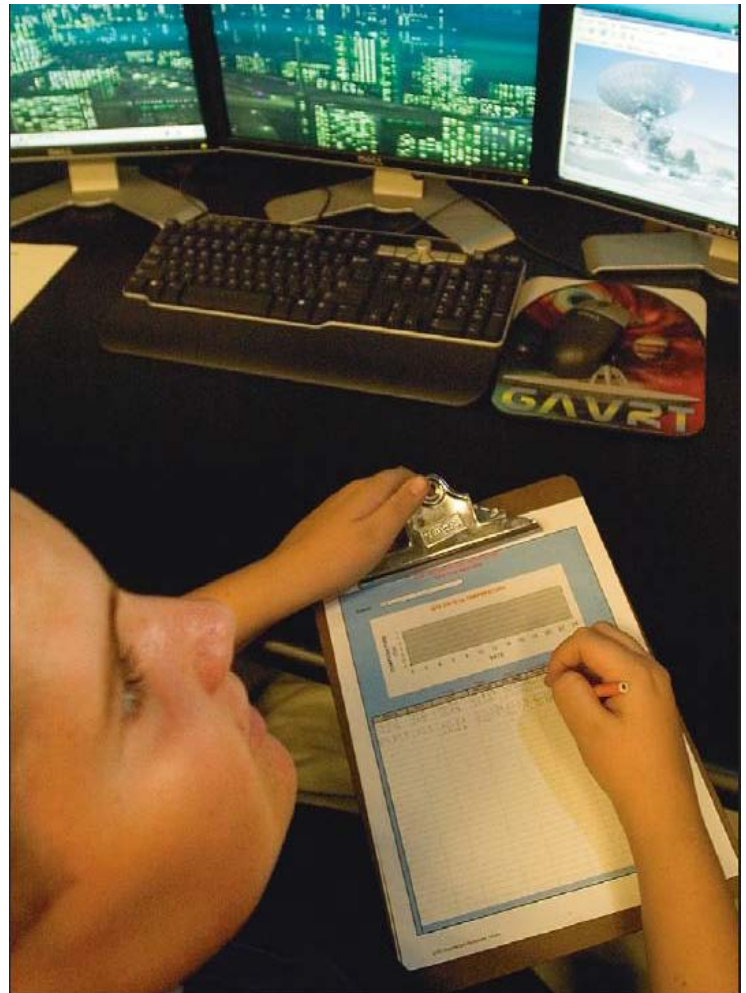
charter has been the model to replicate for Apple Valley's Vanguard school and University Preparatory in Victorville.

"These schools are a direct spin off of us. This shows the need for school reform," she said.

To apply visit the school's Web site at www.lewiscenter.org/aae/application.php.

Renah Agha / Staff Photographer

Jacob Painter, 13, examines the computer screen and takes down data from the Radio Telescope at the Lewis Center for Educational Research.



Renah Agha / Staff Photographer

Students in Mrs. Gaidzik's middle school science class in Mission Control.



Used with permission by
Freedom Communications,
2007