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**"Learning to share: It's not just for kindergarten anymore"**

**By Katy Murphy**

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Last year, the principal of an elementary school in San Lorenzo brought her fifth-grade teachers to visit a nearby charter school.

To those unfamiliar with the charter movement — or with the origins of the KIPP Summit Academy in San Lorenzo — it might have looked like a routine classroom observation. But to Jason Singer, who was principal of the charter academy, it was "a pretty big moment."

The exchange of teaching practices between charter and noncharter schools is supposed to be commonplace. At the heart of California's charter movement, which led to the creation of independently run public schools in 1992, was a vision of reform: The new schools, without the bureaucratic constraints facing the other public schools, would be free to innovate, experiment and spur change from within.

Fourteen years later, some say, that vision has not been realized.

At an August charter school hearing called by state Sen. Joe Simitian, D-Palo Alto, Rick Pratt of the California School Boards Association said educators needed a better way to identify successful charter reforms — and to share those practices with other schools.

"We should be asking, 'What can charter schools teach us about educating kids?'" Pratt said.

Some note that it would be difficult, if not impossible, for regular district schools to implement some of the practices tried at charter schools, such as KIPP's Saturday classes or 10-hour school days. Asking students or parents to sign a contract before they register, for example, would be hard for a school that is required to enroll those students.

Still, tentative partnerships between charters and noncharters have begun in some unlikely places — including the Hayward and San Lorenzo school districts, which initially tried to keep the charters out of their districts.

"I think we're at a stage where we're going to see some marked differences in the way districts deal with charters and vice versa," said Sonia Torres of the California Charter Schools Association, who said that the exchange of ideas was a "top priority" for the organization.

Only months after the Hayward school board tussled with a charter organization over a new high school set to open in the city, the principal of the new charter school began to attend training sessions run by the district. There, he said, he began to have informal conversations with his district counterparts about such things as the scheduling of Advanced Placement and elective courses.

"I would by no means say the districts only need to learn from us," said Brian Greenberg, principal of Leadership Public Schools — Hayward, adding that the training sessions sharpened his awareness of the needs of English-language learners.

"The ideas need to flow both ways," Greenberg said.

KIPP Summit Academy in San Lorenzo, which begins its fourth year this fall, is also sharing ideas and resources with a district that initially rejected its charter petition. This fall, for example, San Lorenzo teachers are invited to take part in KIPP's training program on a different way to teach kids math.

"As far as I'm concerned," San Lorenzo Superintendent Arnie Glassberg said, "KIPP is one of our schools."

Glassberg said some of the major changes under way in the district schools — the reorganization of the high schools into smaller cohorts of students and the expansion of the elementary school day — reflect an attempt to offer more instruction time and a better learning environment for its students, things that KIPP offers.

"I think, to some degree, what we're doing at the high school is to attain one of the characteristics that kids feel at KIPP: belonging to a family," Glassberg said.

He added, "It just makes sense, when you have a successful program in your own backyard, to take a look at it."