

# The Press Democrat

THURSDAY, MAY 23, 2013

WWW.PRESSDEMOCRAT.COM

SANTA ROSA, CALIFORNIA

## CASINO CLASSROOM

Hundreds of job seekers learning how to deal at RP school  
**Empire News, B1**



## CRABTREE INJURY LEAVES BIG HOLE

49ers have few options to replace their top wide receiver  
**Lowell Cohn, C1**

# Chef to fix lunch for French charter school kids

Santa Rosa board approves \$95,300 a year to serve organic, family-style meals

By **BRETT WILKISON**

THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Goodbye, chili dogs. Bonjour, quinoa and free-range chicken.

A menu change is on the order for Santa Rosa's French-

American public charter school in August after city schools officials Wednesday approved spending an additional \$95,300 annually to support plans for organic meals and a communal-style dining experience for students enrolled at the institution, now finishing its first year of instruction.

The extra spending was approved on a 6-0 vote, with board member Laura Gonzalez, who

appeared opposed to the program, abstaining.

The funds would support a chef and one extra food service worker, beyond the one worker the school currently has, and a culinary program that would set apart the elementary school in yet another way from all other Santa Rosa public schools, where standard cafeteria-style meals and settings are still on the menu.

The money would come initially from a \$6 million nutrition services fund that supports food service at schools throughout the district. Going forward, the program's costs are expected to be covered by higher meal prices at the school.

Wednesday's approval came with a verbal promise from school backers that their foundation would pay any expenses not covered by increased lunch

prices. Meals for Santa Rosa's public elementary schools now cost about \$2.50 each. Lunches at the Santa Rosa French-American Charter School would jump to \$4.75 each, a cost borne by parents unless a student qualifies for free or reduced-priced lunch.

Critics and several board members voiced concerns that the cost would prove too high

TURN TO **CHEF**, PAGE A9



## CHEF: School's plans call for lamb, duck and tofu on lunch menu

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A1

for some households and create an unequal table across the district, where 64 percent of elementary students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

"That's my fear — that we have kids that are getting something that the rest of our kids aren't, and it may not be self-sustaining," said board member Jenni Klose, who voted with the majority but joined Gonzalez in voicing concerns about socioeconomic divisions that could be created by the program.

Backers of the charter school defended the culinary upgrades, pointing to the French focus on food and its place in the school's curriculum. They said they hoped their school would develop a model program that could be rolled out districtwide.

"Our hope is that our program would be piloted to make a change, a much-needed change, in school lunch

programs," said Najine Sharlat, a school founder and co-president of its foundation board.

The school's plans were outlined in its original charter agreement approved by the school board in December 2011 and spelled out in more detail in a district report this week. They call for healthier meal options, including a wider range of "non-traditional" entrees — lamb, duck and tofu paired with specialty grains such as kamut and spelt and vegetables such as kohlrabi and celeriac — all to be enjoyed in a slower-paced dining environment. The school currently has a one-hour lunch period, about 20 minutes longer than most other Santa Rosa public schools.

"I do have concerns that this not be de facto segregation," said Bill Carle, the board president. "We need to make sure that doesn't happen. (But) I'm OK trying this, because we said it was part of the project."

Total costs for the program, including the existing food service worker and two additional staff, plus the food itself, would range based on participation from \$183,400 to \$247,700, with the high end based on a 70 percent participation rate out of a projected 350 students.

This school year, meals for the approximately 250-student charter have been standard fare from the district's central kitchen off Ridgway Avenue. Going forward, the special charter menu would still originate from the kitchen but would diverge sharply in its daily offering.

All school board members voiced support for the healthier range of choices on the charter's future menu.

"We're eating ourselves into the grave in American society," board member Larry Haenel said.

But equity with other schools and the program's financial sustainability were primary points of debate.

The effort is set to generate net revenue of \$21,115 with 70 percent participation from 350 students but would run a \$19,205 deficit at 50 percent participation, district figures show. The projections assumed 40 students would qualify for free lunches, a figure representative of the school's current number, according to Doug Bower, the district's associate superintendent.

Board members wanted assurances the charter's foundation would step in to fill any gap. That commitment wasn't written into the funding approval they made Wednesday, but it came in a verbal assurance from the audience.

"Yes, absolutely," said Sharlat, the foundation co-president.

District staff are set to return in early fall with a financial analysis of the program's first few months and a report exploring how equitably the program has been implemented among students in the school.