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## Schools

# Charter Schools Still Open to Debate

Can they coexist with traditional public schools? League of Women Voters will ask the question this week.

By [Marilyn Joyce Lehren](#) | [Email the author](#) | September 19, 2011

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When it comes to charter schools in the suburbs, [Gov. Chris Christie](#) seems to be leaning that they're not needed in high-performing school districts like Livingston. But that hasn't stopped the conversations about two proposed Mandarin-immersion schools who will learn by the end of the month if they will be allowed to open.

The debate last spring was intense, with hundreds of residents turning out to [Livingston Board of Education](#) meetings, [joining protests](#), and sending a petition to the Department of Education in hopes of persuading officials that the schools are an unnecessary drain on dwindling school funding.

The two bilingual boutiques seeking approval in Livingston and neighboring school districts -- Hanyu International Academy Charter School and Hua Mei Charter School -- spent time this summer [clarifying key issues](#) in their applications in hopes of joining the scores of other charter schools that have opened their doors in New Jersey.

If these two charters are approved -- or others in the future -- the question remains: Can charter schools and traditional public schools coexist?

The Livingston League of Women Voters will ask the question on Wednesday at a debate between Dr. Julia Sass Rubin, a founder of Save Our Schools, and Carlos Perez, president of the New Jersey Charter Schools Association.

"There have been these tensions building up especially in the last six months as more higher-income districts try to get charter schools," said Rubin at a recent public forum in Montclair. "In New Hampshire, for example, they require a local vote before there's a charter school."

The tension over charter schools in "affluent suburbs" should make for a lively debate.

According to [Perez](#), "If charter schools shake up the status quo and force good suburban schools to become great world-class schools, then charter schools are serving their purpose."

Learn more at the free program presented by the League of Women Voters will be 7:30 p.m. at the Livingston Community Center, 204 Hillside Ave., Livingston.

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