By Rob McCarthy

An advisory panel to Gov. Gavin Newsom has offered a compromise that could change how charter schools are approved or denied, starting next year. The governor’s task force on June 6 issued a set of recommendations that include giving charter school applicants more time to complete the process to open an independently run campus.

In return, a local school board’s decision to deny a charter school application would be harder to overturn. The compromise is noteworthy because of the timing of the report’s release and because charter school organizations and public school districts would have more leeway to act according to their recommendations.

Currently, the State Legislature is considering several charter school reform bills. It’s unclear whether any of the task force’s recommendations will find their way into the bills’ language. Newsom has demonstrated he’s open to bringing charter schools, which receive district funding yet operate free of local school boards, into the fold of programs that receive district funding yet operate free of local school boards. “Clear standards for local school districts, the task force report says.

Tighten the Rules for Launching Charter Schools, Panel Suggests

Making the proposal and how it plans to spend district money. The application process includes a public hearing, responding to district questions about concerns and drafting and reaching a contract between the charter school group and the district.

Both sides also agreed that the state needs to create an authority to govern charter schools. The new authority would create standards to guide local school districts, the County Board of Education and the State Board of Education — all of which have the power to approve a charter school application. There are dozens of charters schools operating across the South Bay, yet the state lacks any standards about oversight for local school official to follow. Without any clear guidelines, some local districts have come up with their own. “Clear standards for authorities (local districts) to follow would standardize oversight practices in the state,” the task force report says. The task force members also lamented the lack of training available to local school superintendents and their staffs for dealing with charter schools that open using district money. Some charter schools also open outside a district’s boundaries, and that scenario was addressed in the recommendations too. They called for a one-year moratorium on new virtual charter schools, which offered students coursework online instead in a classroom.

The growth of virtual charter schools has raised new concerns about the academic standards offered by the online educators and whether anyone is monitoring the curriculum and operations of these newcomers to the charter school industry. The yearto-term moratorium was supported by a majority of the task force, and virtual schools that demonstrate they are providing an educational benefit wouldn’t be affected by the temporary ban.

See Charter Schools, page 7