

AMSD Position on Charter Schools

The Association of Metropolitan School Districts supports quality public school choice programs that allow students and parents flexibility to choose the public school that best meets their needs. AMSD further believes that students and families are best served when charter schools are held to the same high standards applied to traditional public schools.

AMSD BELIEVES

- Locally elected school boards must be allowed to represent the interests of taxpayers when charter schools are established, and their decisions should not be subject to appeal. Current law does not allow for adequate oversight and accountability.
- Charter schools should be more accountable for the costs of special education services for their students. Current law allows charter schools to bill the resident school district at full cost for special education services, removing any incentive for charters to manage special education costs.
- Charter schools' autonomous governance structure can lead to problems with financial oversight and solvency. Over the years, thousands of students in Minnesota charter schools have had their schools close. This is true despite the fact that charter schools receive an average of \$852 per pupil more revenue than traditional public schools¹.
- The goals for racial integration spelled out in state statute and rules should be applied to charter schools. Students of color represented 90% or more of the enrollment of 22.9% of charter schools, versus 16.1% of schools in Minneapolis and St. Paul and 6.6% of all AMSD schools.
- A charter school's sponsoring organization should be represented on a charter school board, and the current requirement that teachers hold more than 50% of board seats should be removed. Also, to enhance accountability, eligible sponsors should be limited to Minnesota-based entities.
- The State should assume responsibility for financing transportation costs for charter school students. Statewide, school districts transported over 29,500 charter school students in the 2007-8 school year. The Minneapolis school district estimates an expense of \$2,473 per charter school student. This figure is well above the statewide average cost per transported student of \$631.

BACKGROUND

In 1991, Minnesota authorized the creation of the nation's first charter schools. Advocates suggest that the strength of the charter school model originates in the autonomy in their governance, which fosters

“creativity and innovation in teaching and learning.”² Since their inception, charter schools have experienced varied degrees of academic and financial success, but have continued to grow in number and in enrollment. From the 1998-9 to 2008-9 school years, charter schools grew from 36 to 153 (423%) in number, and increased in enrollment from 4,907 to 32,776 (568%).

Recent research indicates that traditional public schools produce higher levels of student achievement than charter schools. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in 2006 released a comprehensive study of grade 4 test data in traditional public and charter schools. The study of 150 charters and 6,700 public schools showed that test data (whether adjusted for student and school variables or not) revealed reading and math scores in traditional public schools at levels 4-6% higher than in charter schools.³

A recent analysis by the St. Paul School District indicates that when accounting for differences in student demographics, students in the traditional St. Paul public schools earned higher MCA-II scores than their counterparts at charter schools located in St. Paul. The traditional St. Paul public schools had a higher percentage of proficient students in 28 of the 34 cases in which 2006 MCA-II scores could be compared.

A 2009 report issued by the Center for Research on Education Outcomes at Stanford University found that there is a wide variance in the quality of the nation's charter schools. The report found that, in aggregate, students in charter schools are not faring as well academically as students in traditional public schools. Specifically, the report found that 17 percent of charter schools reported academic gains that were better than traditional public schools, while 37 percent of charter schools showed gains that were worse than their traditional public school counterparts and 46 percent showing no significant difference.



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¹ Minnesota Department of Education, School District Financial Profiles, 2007-8 (most recent available).

² Minnesota Association of Charter Schools, "Frequently Asked Questions About Charter Schools," available at <http://www.mncharterschools.org/page/faqs.jsp>

³ National Assessment of Educational Progress, "A Closer Look at Charter Schools Using Hierarchical Linear Modeling," August 2006, available at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard//pubs/studies/2006460.asp>.