

AMSD Position on Charter Schools

The Association of Metropolitan School Districts believes that students and families are best served when charter schools are held to the same high standards applied to traditional public schools. AMSD further believes that the Minnesota Department of Education should be charged with identifying best practices in charter schools that have proven successful in raising student achievement and sharing that information with traditional school districts and policymakers.

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.
- Charter schools should be 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. This is true despite the fact that charter schools receive an average of \$233 per pupil more in operating funds than traditional public schools¹.
- The goals for racial integration spelled out in state statute and rules should be applied to charter schools. If racial integration is an important state policy goal, charter schools should not be exempt from desegregation laws and rules.
- The State should assume responsibility for financing transportation costs for charter school students. School districts are required to provide transportation for charter school students but the state does not fully reimburse school districts for this expense

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 However, the state has not collected best practices data from charter schools and shared this information with school districts or state policymakers. 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 2001-2002 to 2010-11 school years, the proportion of students attending charter schools grew from 1.2% to 4.7%.

Recent research indicates that, on average, 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 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, 2008-9 (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>.