

The Quality Charter School Act of 2012

A Charter School Partners Policy Initiative

CharterSchool
PARTNERS

Nurture and Grow High Quality School

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OVERVIEW –

The Challenge. The Opportunity.

Two decades after it gave birth to the nation's first charter school, Minnesota now has another opportunity for national leadership by removing the remaining barriers to launch and grow high-quality charter schools.

Across the nation, dozens and dozens of high performing charter schools are proving that every child can learn and are successfully fulfilling that promise for tens of thousands of students every day. In Minnesota, we have a small, but growing number of charter schools who are utilizing the flexibility of the charter model (greater autonomy for greater accountability) to deliver both innovation and high achievement results for their students – particularly for students in poverty.

“In city after city, the charter school model has proven to be successful and effective in increasing academic performance and closing the achievement gap. In the Twin Cities, 8 of the top 10 Beating the Odds public schools are charters; in New Orleans, 13 of the top 15 public schools are charters; in Denver, 7 of the top 10 public schools are charters. The charter model offers greater autonomy and flexibility than traditional school models to close the gap. But the charter model only works if there is also high accountability. “

- Al Fan

Yet, in a number of ways, Minnesota has fallen far behind other states in both growing and replicating some of the most successful school models. To address this challenge, **Charters 2.0: The Quality Charter School Act of 2012**, contains the following provisions. The Act will encourage:

- 1** Financing the creation and growth of a new generation of high-performing charter schools, particularly serving high populations of poverty.
- 2** Improving the leadership/teacher talent pipeline for charter schools serving high populations of poverty.
- 3** Increasing accountability and transparency of charter authorizers and boards to improve academic performance and, if necessary, close down chronically low-performing charter schools.
- 4** Removing governance barriers that will help attract the nation's most innovative and successful schools and school leaders particularly serving high populations of poverty.
- 5** The creation of digital and blended-learning models of education in the charter sector.

CHARTERS 2.0: THE QUALITY CHARTER SCHOOL ACT OF 2012

1. FINANCING THE CREATION AND GROWTH OF A NEW GENERATION OF HIGH-PERFORMING CHARTER SCHOOLS, PARTICULARLY SERVING HIGH POPULATIONS OF POVERTY.

■ **Ensuring adequate start-up funding:**

Allocate Start-Up Funds for new charter schools: \$200,000.00 per school in its pre-operational year after MDE granted-affidavit.

■ **Encouraging organizational viability of new charters for the first three years:** All new charters, including new schools within a single charter, will maintain a 90/10 funding formula for its first three years of operation.

■ **Incentivizing and rewarding high-performing charter schools (existing schools past their third year of operation):** All charter schools that exceed the state's average Proficiency (see ** footnote) and Growth (see *** footnote) in both Math and Reading as measured by Minnesota's standardized tests for three consecutive years or charter schools that serve over 50% students in poverty who score above the state's average in Proficiency or Growth in Math and Reading for three consecutive years will maintain a 90/10 holdback formula.

■ **CSP also supports legislation that will:**

- Address the state's holdback by providing charters with access to low interest guaranteed loans.
- Allow district operating levies to follow the child to a charter school, if the student lives within the district of the levy.

2. IMPROVING THE LEADERSHIP/TEACHER TALENT PIPELINE FOR CHARTER SCHOOLS SERVING HIGH POPULATIONS OF POVERTY.

Discussion: Charter schools in Minnesota serve twice as many minority students as districts, nearly twice as many students in poverty and three times as many students who speak English as a second language. The intent of this provision is for high FRL charter schools to be able to utilize teachers from other states who have had successful experience in teaching low-income populations.

■ In addition to the alternative teacher certification law passed in 2011 which allows for teachers who have successfully completed an alternative teacher preparation program in another state to be given a teacher's license in Minnesota, new charter schools serving at least 50% low-income children, and existing charter schools serving at least 50% low-income children will have the flexibility to hire:

- a teacher who is licensed as a teacher in another state, or,
- has completed any alternative teacher certification program and has taught for two years in schools that serve at least 50% population of poverty.

The teacher must also pass the Minnesota Teacher Licensure Examination (MTLE).

3. INCREASING ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY OF CHARTER AUTHORIZERS AND BOARDS TO IMPROVE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND, IF NECESSARY, CLOSE DOWN CHRONICALLY LOW-PERFORMING CHARTER SCHOOLS.

■ **Transparency and Accountability:**

By November 1 of each year, all Minnesota charter authorizers will be required to post on their websites the annual reports of each of their authorized schools, indicating current, longitudinal, and disaggregated student performance on state tests and any national assessments (such as NWEA-MAP and ACT EPAS results), as well as a chart listing the student performance results for each school.

■ **Closing chronically low-performing charters:** Notwithstanding any renewal, non-renewal or revocation language within contracts between charter authorizers and their schools, an authorizer must revoke a charter school's contract if the school's state assessment scores fall below 35% for Proficiency and less than the state average for 'on track' for success Growth (see *** footnote) for three consecutive years. Credit recovery high school programs and schools with Special Education populations over 50% are exempted from this provision.

■ **Greater authorizer/board alignment**

with intent of law: In order to better align the legislative intent of the authorizer's role (accountability/oversight not service provider/vendor), shift authorizer fee allocation responsibility to MDE, rather than the charter school. The department will deduct the fee due the authorizer from the school's general education program revenue and send this portion to the authorizer.

4. REMOVING GOVERNANCE BARRIERS THAT WILL HELP ATTRACT THE NATION'S MOST INNOVATIVE AND SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL LEADERS PARTICULARLY SERVING HIGH POPULATIONS OF POVERTY.

■ **Allowing a charter school board to oversee multiple schools linked under a single contract**

with independent and academic accountability for each school and allow for any new school within the charter to receive federal and state Start-Up aid.

■ **Option to eliminate charter board election.**

Current law states that by its third year of operation, Minnesota charter school boards must be elected by staff and parents. This requirement would be made optional, with the added requirement that there be a parent/teacher advisory council advising the board of directors, with one representative of the council serving on the school's board.

Discussion: The board election was part of the original teacher majority boards, which was eliminated in 2009. Minnesota is the only state with the board election requirement, and many believe that this policy is inconsistent with sound nonprofit governance principles relating to conflict of interest. There is no documented correlation between charter board elections and student achievement and it remains a barrier for some of the nation's top education-reform foundations and funders to invest in Minnesota as well as an obstacle for some of the nation's top charter leaders and organizations to come to Minnesota.

5. ENCOURAGE THE CREATION OF DIGITAL AND BLENDED-LEARNING MODELS OF EDUCATION IN THE CHARTER SECTOR.

"Blended learning combines online delivery of educational content with the best features of classroom interaction and live instruction to personalize learning, allow thoughtful reflection, and differentiate instruction from student to student across a diverse group of learners" ("Blended Learning: The Convergence of Online and Face to Face Education", NACOL (now iNACOL), 2008, P. 4 (North American Council for Online Learning, now the International Association of Online Learning)

Discussion: Blended learning is distinct from existing on-line learning programs in that instruction takes place in a school building within the confines of a classroom. This provision would recognize that today's classroom – with its on-line, digital, and blended-learning character -- requires a different paradigm in delivering teaching to students. A blended model, combines traditional classroom teaching with individualized instruction using tutors and online technology to meet the specific needs of every student. It relegates some skill instruction to computer-based curricula, enabling teachers to have more time to improve the quality of their core instruction, while also enabling one-on-one time or small group tutorials to facilitate individualized learning. Instructional aides can supervise and troubleshoot as needed.

The charter model, with its charge to encourages innovation, is uniquely positioned to lead Minnesota in the blended-learning revolution.

- Allow greater flexibility for a teacher to supervise delivery of instruction to online learning students but is not required to be physically present. Flexibility around non-licensed staff supervising students working computer curriculum, without necessarily the direct supervision of the licensed teacher of record.

****PROFICIENCY:** The percentage of students who meet or exceed state Math or Reading academic standards for their grade level as measured by the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs).

*****GROWTH:** Utilizing MDE's "on track" for success formula, the combined percentage of proficient students scoring 'medium' or 'high' growth and non-proficient students making 'high growth' towards knowing and understanding the content of academic standards for their grade level as per the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) growth model.

See Charter School Partner "MAPS" for 2010 MCA test scores showing Proficiency and Growth charts for all charter schools in the state. (<http://charterschoolpartners.org/maps.aspx>). The Minnesota Department of Education has yet to release the 2011 school Growth scores for Minnesota schools.

ABOUT CHARTER SCHOOL PARTNERS

Charter School Partners is a non-profit charter school support group founded in 2009 whose mission is to increase the number of high-performing charter schools in Minnesota, increase the number of low-income students being served by high-performing charter schools, and close the state's egregious achievement gap.

To achieve this goal, Charter School Partners, now a nationally recognized charter incubator and advocacy group, focuses on

- **Minneapolis** -- to assist in the opening of 20 new high-performing, high-achieving site-based charter-like schools in a focused geographic area within five years. We believe that these high-performing schools will show that it is possible to prepare all students to be successful in college and life and be the catalyst to compel all public schools in the Twin Cities and the state to fulfill its promise of quality education regardless of race, income or zip code.
- **Twin Cities** -- to continue to build a new **Community of Charter School Excellence** made up of the state's highest performing charter schools, and,
- **Statewide** to advocate for state education- and charter-reform policies via legislative, coalition-building, media outreach, and grassroots parental-empowerment initiatives.



"Charters 2.0 is about the charter community moving beyond simply offering 'innovation and choice' for its own sake, to one that demands the creation and replication of successful high-performing schools, while never losing the connection to innovation and choice that was so much a part of charter schools original intent."

- Al Fan, Executive Director

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