

Charter Schools

Update to 2008 Evaluation Report

Problems Identified

- **Inconsistent Oversight of Charter Schools.** Both the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) and charter school authorizers (organizations that authorize the formation of a charter school) oversee charter schools. However, this structure has led to gaps in oversight in some areas and duplication of effort in other areas.
- **Unclear Expectations for Charter School Authorizers.** Authorizers varied greatly in their oversight of charter schools, and many authorizers do not think their role is clear. Additionally, MDE's role in overseeing authorizers is not clearly defined in law.
- **Insufficient Conflict of Interest Laws for Charter School Boards.** Minnesota's conflict of interest law for charter school boards does not adequately address potential conflicts of interest with nonprofit organizations, close relatives, or sponsors. Additionally, Minnesota's requirement that teachers comprise a majority of charter school board members leads to a potential conflict of interest.

Changes Implemented

- **Roles Clarified for Charter School Authorizers and MDE.** The 2009 Legislature amended *Minnesota Statutes*, 124D.10, to require MDE to approve authorizers (based on criteria outlined in law) before they are eligible to authorize charter schools. MDE must review each authorizer's performance at least every five years. MDE has published an application and criteria for the new-authorizer approval process.
- **Training Required for Charter School Authorizers and School Board Members.** The 2009 Legislature amended *Minnesota Statutes*, 124D.10, to require charter school authorizers and board members to complete department-approved training. MDE has issued a request for proposals for individuals or organizations to become certified to train charter school board members.
- **Conflict of Interest Laws Strengthened for Charter School Boards.** The 2009 Legislature amended *Minnesota Statutes*, 124D.10, subd. 4, to address potential conflicts of interest for charter school board members. The 2009 Legislature also changed the requirement regarding teacher representation on charter school boards. Minnesota statutes no longer require that teachers comprise a majority of the board members. Instead, the Legislature requires that the five charter school board members include at least one licensed teacher providing instruction at the charter school, one parent, and one community member.

Action Needed

- **Implement Training for Charter School Authorizers.** MDE should develop or approve training for charter school authorizers.

Charter Schools is available at <http://www.auditor.leg.state.mn.us>.

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