



Celebrating Chartering @ 30 – MINNESOTA'S STORY

While the findings in the 2008 Office of Legislative Auditor (OLA) Report on charter schools covered academic performance and school finances, the recommendations of the report focused entirely on oversight issues. The recommendations were summed up by a phrase in the report: *"Accountability and oversight for charter schools and their sponsors should be strengthened."*

THE RECOMMENDATIONS

MDE and Sponsor Roles

- With respect to oversight, the Legislature should clarify the roles of both the MN Department of Education and sponsors. For the legislature, the OLA laid out three options, including the benefits and drawbacks of each.

Option 1: Increase Sponsor Authority – would require sponsors to be approved and demonstrate capacity to do oversight.

Option 2: Create an Independent Board of Charter School Authorizing – would eliminate sponsors and have one authorizer that sponsors and evaluates all charter schools.

Option 3: Eliminate Sponsors – MDE would become a sponsor and conduct oversight of all charters.

The Report further states that if the Legislature chooses Option 1, "The Minnesota Department of Education should implement standards for charter school sponsors and provide additional training to ensure that sponsors have the capacity to meet them. Additionally, the Minnesota Department of Education should periodically verify that charter school sponsors meet the department's standards."

Charter School Board Governance

- The Minnesota Department of Education should provide financial management training tailored to board members of established charter schools. Additionally, the Legislature should require all new charter school board members to attend financial management training within one year of being elected.
- The Legislature should amend the charter school law to remove the requirement that teachers must comprise a majority of charter school board members

Conflict of Interests

To improve and clarify Minnesota’s conflict of interest laws for charter schools, the Legislature should:

1. Expand Minnesota’s charter school conflict of interest laws to match federal requirements;
2. Expand Minnesota’s charter school conflict of interest laws to address sponsor conflicts; and
3. Remove requirements that charter schools follow school district conflict of interest laws.

In the closing of the Report, the OLA again reminded the Legislature that it had recommended that it should address whether charter schools could own their own buildings.

NEXT WEEK: Minnesota’s 2nd Generation Law Takes Shape - 2009



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