

POLICY STATEMENT ON COMPREHENSIVE BACKGROUND REVIEWS OF CHARTER SCHOOL DEVELOPERS

The granting of a charter, which is basically a “public franchise” to open and operate a public school, is a matter that involves the public trust. All those (school developers) involved in seeking a charter need to recognize and understand that undertaking the chartering process and operating a public school is serious business - it is not about “playing school.”

Given the serious nature of being granted a charter to open and operate a public school, it is critical that everyone involved in the process have trust in the competence, character, and experience of the school developers. Authorizers have the responsibility under the law to determine the fitness, honesty, integrity and judgment of school developers to be able to successfully open and operate a public charter school. Upon making a judgment in the affirmative and agreeing to authorize the school, the authorizer has the additional responsibility to attesting to that judgment in an affidavit to the Minnesota Commissioner of Education.

Thus it is critically important that comprehensive reviews of the background, experience and character of school developers be undertaken as part of due diligence authorizers conduct in making the decision about initial authorization.

While the number of people with problematic backgrounds has been small over the course of time, their impact on the success of individual schools and the charter school movement has been enormous. The incompetence, lack of judgment and, in rare cases, dishonesty of those school developers has created and reinforced a perception that charters are incompetent or fraudulently run - a perception that is not only negative, but grossly unfair to the countless folks who are competent, honest and credible.

The Minnesota Association of Charter Schools therefore recommends that:

- all authorizers as a matter of policy and practice conduct comprehensive background reviews of potential school developers as part of their due diligence decision making process on whether to authorize the proposed school;
- reviews include criminal background and reference checks; and
- authorizers request information from school developers on their participation in other charter school development projects and their experience in starting and running any organization or business and then verify it in the review process.

The Minnesota Association of Charter Schools recognizes that the implementation of these recommendations will take time and resources. The Association is committed to assisting authorizers in finding and developing the human and financial resources to conduct comprehensive background reviews of school developers. The cost to the charter school movement in terms of the public perception requires that the entire charter school community work together to ensure the public’s ongoing trust.