



Unleashing education from convention

POLICY STATEMENT ON PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS & INTEGRATION

The concept of parental choice within public education is a longstanding public policy that enjoys widespread support in the state of Minnesota.

In 1991 the Minnesota Legislature enacted the nation's first charter school law as another means of providing school choice within the state's public education system. MN Statute 124.D states that "increase[d] learning opportunities for pupils" and "improve[d] pupil learning" are two of the six purposes of charter schools.

The policy of public school choice is also reflected in MN Rule 3535.0100, which states that any concentration of a protected class of students in a school that is the result of choices by parents or students or both is not segregation. Thus, it is on the basis of parental choice that charter schools have been exempt from Minnesota's Integration Law and Rule.

As Minnesota's population has become ever more diverse, it is clear that there is a need to redefine the concept and practices of integration, while maintaining the principle of parental and student choice in public education.

The Minnesota Association of Charter Schools believes that:

- the definition of integration needs to be broadened beyond race to one that focuses on enabling all students having opportunities to achieve academic success and equipping all young people to be culturally literate and socially competent – which means recognizing the diversity of people within the protected racial categories that are currently stated in law;
- the goal of integration needs to be broadened to enable young people to be inter-culturally literate and socially competent;
- there is a civic and social benefit to young people having opportunities to learn and understand people of diverse races and cultures, but those opportunities should not be limited to only communities that have concentrations of protected populations or adjoining communities - all students in a globally dynamic and ever-changing demographic society need to be culturally literate and socially competent;
- all schools through the state of Minnesota need to address the issue of equipping young people to be culturally literate and socially competent, but schools should have the flexibility to develop and design their own approach using broad goals and criteria to become cultural responsive in accordance with their local populations, challenges and opportunities; and

- the formula for funding culturally responsive activities should include a basic per pupil allotment, which promotes cooperative activities among and between charter schools and school districts, and grant funding for intensive activities that are part of a school or school district plan.

Based on this broader definition and vision, the charter school community's approach to integration encompasses the following:

- A focus on assessing and developing the cultural responsiveness of the local school organization – its policies, practices and environment;
- A focus on developing a curriculum (the intentional and unintentional learning activities and experiences) to address an appropriate scope of culturally responsive activities which reflect the cultural competency needs of the local student population;
- A focus on developing the culturally responsive skills of teachers and staff and on recruiting teachers which reflect the diversity of society;
- A focus on providing opportunities for educators, administrators and boards to share effective curricular and organizational practices, programs and policies regarding cultural responsiveness; and
- A focus on assessing the social and academic impact of the cultural responsiveness initiatives, programs and policies of the local school organization.

This approach will necessitate significant reform of the current Integration Statute and Rule. The Minnesota Association of Charter Schools is committed to being an active participant in the public policy process on how to address the way public schools can do a better job in being culturally responsive to the needs of Minnesota's young people and citizens.