

A PRIMER ON MINNESOTA CHARTER SCHOOLS

OVERVIEW

Minnesota charter schools are tuition-free, independent public schools that are open to and welcome all students, no matter ability or need, and are governed and operated jointly by licensed teachers, parents and community members.

Minnesota was the birthplace of the charter movement in 1991. As of September 2011, there are 148 charter schools in operation in the state. While over 60% of charters are located in the greater Twin Cities metropolitan area, there are charters in communities across the state from Grand Marais to Echo and from Bemidji to La Crescent. *There were 38,000 students enrolled in Minnesota charter schools (about 4% of the state's K-12 enrollment population) in 2010-11.*

MINNESOTA CHARTER SCHOOL FACTS

BASICS

- Charter schools are **public schools**.
- Charter schools are **tuition free**.
- Charter schools **may not require entrance exams or requirements**.
- Charter schools may not limit the admission of pupils on the basis of intellectual ability, measures of achievement or aptitude, or athletic ability.
- Charter schools must accept all students up to capacity. If there are more students than slots, the school must conduct a lottery.
- Charter schools have the same financial audits, audit procedures, and audit requirements as traditional public school districts.
- Charter schools are subject to the Human Rights Law, Pupil Fair Dismissal Act, Public School Fee Law, Data Practices Law, General Employment Law, federal, state and local health and safety laws, state testing requirements, etc.
- Charter schools must follow the same federal and state requirements to provide special education services as other public school districts.
- Charter schools receive less per pupil funding than traditional public schools. Charters may not levy property taxes, and receive no funding from local property taxes.

OPERATIONS

- Charter schools are formed and operate as non-profit corporations.
- Charter school boards are composed of parents, licensed teachers and community members.
- Charter school boards are elected by parents and school staff, and boards are subject to Minnesota's Open Meeting Law.
- Charter schools boards enter into a legally binding charter contract with an authorizer.
- Charter schools have an authorizer (college or university, a nonprofit organization, or a traditional school district) that is the authorizing authority and oversight body of the school.
- Charter school teachers must hold a valid Minnesota teaching license.

PROGRAMS

- Charter schools have specific program focuses such as language immersion, project-based learning, environmental education, arts education, expeditionary learning, online learning, etc.
- Charter schools are normally smaller in size than traditional public schools and usually have smaller class sizes.
- Charter schools are more diverse in enrollment than state averages.

