

**Testimony as Prepared for Senate Education Committee Hearing  
Wednesday, February 18, 2015**

Good Morning Mr. Chair and Members.

My name is Eugene Piccolo, Executive Director of the Minnesota Association of Charter Schools.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak this morning on the Senate File 164 – which is an accountability bill.

This legislation seeks to address two of the original purposes of chartering schools, *“to measure learning outcomes and create different and innovative forms of measuring outcomes”* and *“to establish new forms of accountability for schools.”*

While it is not unfair to state that these two goals of the charter law have not been in the spotlight through the years, the questions of how to measure outcomes in different and innovative ways, and creating new forms of accountability have been the center of discussion and debate among charter school leaders for years, especially leaders of charter schools that serve significant populations of at-risk/graduation incentives students.

The scope of that discussion and debate expanded over the last several years as the role and responsibility of authorizers was better defined, and authorizers, like schools, found that the current methods of measuring outcomes and school accountability to be inadequate to provide consistent and reliable information on how well they are serving at-risk students, as well as provide sufficient and quantifiable data to make judgments on how successfully these schools perform overtime.

So three years ago - the Association gathered school directors and authorizers to move the discussion and debate to a level of action. A work group was created that surveyed what schools were doing in terms of measuring outcomes in different ways, and what data they were collecting around different outcomes. The group also looked at what other states were doing to address measuring outcomes and accountability for schools serving at-risk populations.

We found that a handful of states, like Colorado, California, had already developed and were implementing innovative outcome measures and accountability systems for schools that primarily serve at-risk students. Based on the survey and the research of other states systems the group developed a report and proposal, essentially the proposal that is the basis of this legislation.

So let me briefly highlight the major elements of the legislation.

*Overview of the legislation.*

We believe that this legislation will fulfill the goals/purposes of the charter law to create innovative framework for measuring learning outcomes for charter schools that serve significant populations of at-risk/graduation incentives students, and;

Create a sustainable framework of accountability for these schools with their authorizers by providing documentable measures to determine the success or lack of success in serving at-risk/graduation incentives students.

This legislation is but the first step, the real work for both schools and authorizers would begin once this is enacted. I am happy to report, however, that there are authorizers and schools who have already begun the real work of figuring out different outcome measures, how schools will document progress toward achieving goals based on those outcome measures, and then how authorizers will assess the achievement of the agreed upon measures and goals for contract renewal decisions.

There is a critical need to have a recognized accountability system for schools serving significant populations of at-risk students so that decisions about whether these schools are successful are not based on inadequate information and insufficient data – nor on anecdotal stories.

The at-risk students who attend these charter schools deserve our best effort to provide them with information on which schools are successfully serving students like themselves. Anything less is a disservice to these young people who already have significant barriers to overcome in being successful learners, economic players and for some, even being successful citizens.

With that – I would like to introduce Darius Husain, Director of Face to Face Academy, St. Paul to speak about how the current state outcome measures and accountability system are inadequate and why schools need an alternative accountability system, and David Greenberg, Director of Charter School Authorizing for the Audubon Center of the North Woods, the largest authorizer in the state, speak how authorizers need better outcome measures and data to make decisions about schools that serve significant populations of at-risk students.