A TIME FOR CIVILITY IN PUBLIC DISCOURSE

Today, we seem to be in an era where much of what is in the public forum is defined by hyperbolic statements, exaggerated use of adjectives to describe events, the spreading of conspiracies, a mistrust of facts, and an appeal to fears – not really a good combination for a healthy, prosperous, or successful society.

As a central and critical institution of our society, public schools have become one of the institutions where folks are unloading their frustrations, fears, and angst. While school administrators are somewhat familiar with folks unloading on them, for charter school board members who are volunteers, being the target for verbal abuse and threats of a physical nature is both unexpected, and unwarranted.

So, it is not surprising that a growing number of school board members are growing concerned about the atmosphere in which they must work to fulfill their responsibilities, or that some are resigning as a board member rather than dealing with these behaviors.

It is time for leaders of all sectors in our society to remind folks that people can disagree on issues, policies, proposals, and even the veracity of the source of information, but that in a civil society verbal abuse, and threats of a physical nature are not acceptable ways of disagreement.

EP

COVID HEALTH POLICIES
Amid the heated debates about **Masking/Quarantine/Vaccination Policies** – charter school boards need to keep in mind that while reacting to strong rhetoric and passions may give people some emotional satisfaction – a board’s responsibility is to make fact-based rational decisions. That means doing a risk assessment of potential liability for whatever decision is made and checking whether a school’s liability insurance will cover potential willful negligence lawsuits related to COVID. Charter school boards should also have these policies reviewed by competent legal counsel as a means of doing and documenting appropriate due diligence.

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### SCHOOL CALENDARS

Given the changing COVID situation and how young people are being impacted by the Delta variant (as of September 8th –[109,144 of 659,372] 16.5% all COVID cases in Minnesota are young people between the ages of 5 -19), it is important to remember that charter schools, as well as traditional districts, do have the authority - with board approval - to alter the school calendar during the Pandemic.

**Examples:** Delay the start of the school year; stagger the beginning of the school year by grades, readjust vacation periods, etc.

If altering the charter school calendar becomes a need because of the Pandemic, a charter school must remember that **instructional time requirements** for the school year must still be met. *(Charter schools are bound by the number of instructional hours – not the number of school days)*

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### PAID LEAVE - COVID

In one of the Tuesday morning Charter School Administrators calls, there was a discussion about whether schools were going to provide extra paid leave when the requirement to provide paid leave under FFCRA expired. According to the US Department of Labor, that requirement expired on December 31, 2020. The law did provide **that if employers chose** to provide paid sick leave for COVID between January 1, 2021, and September 30, 2021, they could be eligible for an employer tax credit.

So, the requirement for paid sick leave was not extended, unless the Employer chose to extend it for their employees.

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### TRANSPORTATION - SCHOOL BUS DRIVER SHORTAGE

As we are all aware, there is a school bus driver shortage that is causing havoc for thousands of students and families, as well as for schools trying to start this new school year with some semblance of a stable and “normal” routine.

The State is aware of the situation and according to MDE leadership, the MN Department of
Public Safety is exploring ways to address the backlog of people seeking licenses to drive school buses, and the Department of Employment & Economic Development is working to encourage unemployed individuals to explore bus driving as either a job or a career.

Just a reminder that schools can use their ARP funds to increase pay and offer hiring incentives if they have their own busing. However, MDE has heard from the school transportation association that that isn’t even working in recruiting drivers.

It has been suggested that the state provide more funding for school transportation to allow for the use of vans rather than buses, given that licensing is different for vans vs buses. However, this is not a short-term solution either, given the number of drivers that would be needed, and the vans that would be needed to be purchased, etc.

### DECLINING ENROLLMENT REVENUE

MDE expects to notify schools in the next couple of days of the Declining Enrollment Revenue that schools with declining enrollment last year will receive. Given that it is Federal Funding, it is going to be done through the SERVS system.

### MACS GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES

- The MACS Government Affairs Committee has started a conversation about the issue of Weighted Lotteries, which are allowed in some states, as a means of assisting schools in recruiting diverse and inclusive student bodies. The goal is to develop a legislative proposal that would allow Minnesota charters to institute Weighted Lotteries to achieve that goal.
- Tom DeGree, Public Policy Director, is developing sessions on Grassroots Advocacy; Charter School History, Myths and MACS Policy Positions; and Telling Your Story. Watch for more information on when these will be available this fall.
- Eugene Piccolo, Executive Director, and Tom DeGree met last month with the MDE Legislative team and members of the MDE Charter School Team about potential legislative proposals for the 2022 session.

### MINNESOTA’S CHARTER SCHOOL STORY

Last week we began publishing a series - CELEBRATING CHARTERING FOR 30 YEARS – MINNESOTA’S STORY, which will trace the history of chartering from the beginning to the present day over the next year. The first two issues are now available.

- **Vol. 1 – August 31, 2021**
- **Vol. 2 -September 7, 2021**
"Unleashing education from convention" - is more than the MACS motto, it is a reminder of our purpose, our goals and it serves as a clarion Call To Action.

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