



The Public Policy Platform is a statement of beliefs and issue positions that serve as the framework for the legislative proposals of the Association as well as a guide for the Association's work with the legislative and executive branches of government.

1] ACADEMIC INNOVATION AND EXCELLENCE

Statement of Beliefs

Given, that academic freedom is a hallmark value of American education, and innovation is a fundamental concept of chartering, centralized control of the content and programming of schools, as well as the teaching methods of teachers, undermines multiple purposes and the unique character of public charter schools.

Therefore we support legislation to:

- Allow an individual charter school or a consortium of charter schools to create and operate an alternative learning center or alternative learning program under MN Statutes 123.05-.08;
- Eliminate the requirement for state approval of project-based learning programs, given that project-based learning is a methodology and delivery system that should not require additional approval;
- Expand the definition of charters to be from "Pre-k – Grade 14" to allow for innovative programming at both ends of the educational spectrum; and
- Facilitate charter schools establishing or participating in inter-district agreements or cooperatives with other charters and or traditional school districts.

2] ASSESSMENT AND MEASUREMENT

Statement of Beliefs

Given, that assessment is a component of every human activity, including the learning process, there are some fundamental questions that need to be asked by educators, parents, and public policy makers regarding student assessments. Questions such as:

- What is the purpose of the assessment?
- What is the test actually assessing?
- Who is being served by the assessment? – Students? Parents? Teachers? Administrators? Politicians, or Testing Companies?
- What are the uses and value of the assessment?

K-12 Assessments should be – 1] aligned with college and career-ready standards and skills, and measure actual real life skills and competencies, not test-taking abilities; 2] designed to serve students, parents and teachers in helping to improve a student’s academic performance and the achievement of their life goals, not political points for politicians; and 3] inclusive of multiple sources of assessments and measurements, not multiple measurements of the same test over and over again.

Therefore, we support legislation to:

- Clarify that the College and Career Readiness Assessments include the graduation standards, and not require high school students to take the MCA’s;
- Create an accountability system for schools that serve significant populations of at-risk *[graduation incentives eligible]* students that is based on multiple sources of assessment and measurement;
- Require that MCA assessment results be provided to students, teachers, and parents in real-time for improvement of teaching and learning;
- Evaluate the state’s assessment for quality, redundancy, coherence, and utilization and streamline and/or eliminate assessments that are redundant, not high quality, or not utilized;
- Review how state testing practices impact students who have chosen online/digital learning options;
- Require that future online state testing can be delivered securely through any smart technology device and allows for more flexibility in testing windows; and
- Require MDE to renegotiate the state contract with ACT to: 1] facilitate online learning programs to become testing sites for testing; 2] allow online/digital students and other students that need flexibility in testing dates to take the ACT at ACT Testing Centers outside of the state administration dates at state expense: and 3] recognize and count the scores of those students who take the ACT at ACT Centers in school and state data results.

3] AUTHORIZING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Statement of Beliefs

One of the fundamental tenets of the public charter school concept is that the state confers certain organizations (authorizers) the power to grant a “public charter” to groups composed of teachers, parents, and community members, giving them the right to operate a public school. The authorizer is required to demonstrate that it has the capacity to approve, oversee, and evaluate the schools that it grants a charter to on behalf of the state. In turn, the authorizer is to have the **authority, not just the responsibility**, to fulfill those functions without being micromanaged by the state.

Therefore we support legislation to:

- Clarify that once an authorizer is approved by the Department of Education it is an approved authorizer until it voluntarily withdraws or the commissioner revokes it approval;
- Require authorizers who voluntarily withdraw as authorizers to give an 18 month notice to the commissioner and the schools it authorizes, and that the decision may only be made by the governing board of the authorizer organization, that the notice be signed by the chair of the

governing body, sent by certified mail, and that all voluntary withdrawals may only be effective on June 30th;

- Require an authorizer who withdraws as an approved authorizer or whose authority has been withdrawn by the commissioner to refund any and all authorizer surplus fees that exist on the effective date of withdrawal to the schools it authorized on a pro-rated basis;
- Provide a “safety harbor” for up to one-year for charters schools when the commissioner revokes the authority of an approved authorizer to authorize schools;
- Clarify that final decisions regarding grade expansions, school mergers, additional campuses, and transfer of schools between authorizers are the purview of authorizers, and that the role of the Department of Education in these decisions is review and comment;
- Restructure the rate authorizers can charge a school for authorizing oversight to recognize the restructuring of the general education formula and the costs related to the processing of supplementary affidavits;
- Clarify that authorizers do not have any role or responsibility after the end of charter contract between the nonprofit charter school corporation and the authorizer; and
- Clarify that any potential contract, lease or purchase of service by a school from their authorizer, requires the authorizer to document that the terms of the transaction were competitive in relation to the market and that the authorizer makes the same terms available to schools that it does not.

We oppose legislation that would:

- Undermine the decision-making authority of authorizers about charter contract renewals through automatic closure triggers, or a requirement that authorizers justify a decision not to close a charter school.

4] FACILITIES

Statement of Beliefs

Given that a school facility can enhance or detract from the ability to learn, all children, including children who attend public charter schools, have a right to expect that the school facility they attend is safe, healthy, and conducive to learning.

Since 1991, when the charter school law was enacted, the public policy of the state of Minnesota has been that charter schools may not directly own school facilities using public funds. While the state has provided charter schools with lease aid, lease costs must be supplemented by funding from a school’s general fund.

As a result of these policies, some charter schools have created non-profit affiliated building companies to purchase or build a facility, while other schools are often housed in facilities, while safe, are often not the most conducive to the learning program or the needs of students. Neither of these arrangements are the best deal for either students or the state.

Therefore, we support legislation to:

- Establish a direct ownership option for charter schools that have met appropriate criteria, including a record of effective governance, sound financial management, effective business practices, and a plan for a sustainable future;
- Establish a Minnesota Charter School Facilities Authority empowered to issue bonds for qualifying charter schools to purchase, purchase and renovate, or construct a facility directly owned by the school;
- Transfer the ownership of school facilities currently held by a school’s non-profit affiliated building company to the school non-profit corporation when the mortgage or bonds of that affiliated company are either renegotiated or redeemed, so that if a school closes after that point, the facility is deemed school property and a public asset;
- Reconstitute “Lease Aid” revenue to be “Facilities Aid” revenue with a differentiated rate for “Facility Lease Aid” for all schools that lease or have a mortgage, and “Facility Asset Preservation Aid” for schools that own a building without any debt on the facility;
- Allow facility related health and safety facility requirements as allowable expenses in the definition of Facilities Lease Aid and Facility Asset Preservation;
- Limit the amount a school district or other public entity may charge for leasing a facility to a charter school to the “Facility Asset Preservation Aid” revenue rate if the public facility is without debt;
- Provide leverage to charter schools in negotiating leases by allowing charter schools to include health and safety requirements in lease costs eligible under Facilities Aid Revenue, given that charter schools must comply with all federal, state and local health and safety laws and regulations, but do not possess the ability to levy for Health and Safety as traditional districts.

5] FINANCES AND FUNDING

Statement of Beliefs

The Minnesota Constitution gives the legislature the responsibility and duty to establish a general and uniform system of public schools, and the power of taxation to secure a comprehensive and efficient system of schools. Over the last decade the gap in funding between students who attend public charter schools compared to students in traditional districts has grown as a result of a number of state policies. The growing inequity in funding requires an urgent examination of state education funding policies, to ensure that all public school students, no matter which public school they chose to attend, are treated with equity. **We believe that a high priority of state school finance policy should be to restore funding equity for students who attend public charter schools.**

As the education needs of individual students are unique and varied, and public school choice is a value and benefit for both students and the public education system of our state, it is imperative that all public funding (federal, state and local) follow the individual student to the public school of the student’s and/or parent’s choice.

Therefore, we support legislation to:

- Provide equitable small charter schools with “small school revenue”;
- Bolster the basic education formula and reduce reliance on local operating levies;
- Require that local operating levies include charter school students who reside in that district in the per capita request for operating levies, and that their per capita share of the levy follow the student to the public charter school;
- Provide charter schools with direct funding for extended year school programming;
- Provide charter schools with funding to meet the requirement of health and safety legal requirements equal to *SAFE SCHOOL* funding that districts can levy;
- Allow charter schools whose *special education enrolled population is 90% or more* to:
 - Be funded as a 100% special education school by annually verifying enrollment with MDE;
 - Be funded on an amount equal to 90% of the projected total annual school budget amount anticipated from the State, if the school submits its annual budget to MDE before June 15 and a revised budget before January 31, instead of on a reimbursement basis;
 - Receive 75% of the 10% annual holdback on July 15th and the other 25% on October 30;
- Expand the Minnesota education tax deduction and tax credit to include a broader definition of allowable and eligible technologies; and
- Expand the Minnesota education tax deduction and tax credit to include financial gifts to public schools to provide academic program supports for low-income and at-risk students that attend public schools.

6] GOVERNANCE, MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS

Statement of Beliefs

The chartering concept is rooted in a fundamental bargain of “***Autonomy (freedom from unnecessary regulation and freedom to innovate) for Accountability (rule compliance and academic performance)***”. Over the years, the autonomy part of the bargain has slowly been overtaken, not so much by a focus on accountability, but on the belief that accountability must be narrowed, standardized, and bureaucratized. The result has been more regulation, less innovation, and putting charter schools back into little square boxes - boxes that they were designed to be allowed to break-out of.

There are necessary regulations to protect student health and safety, and academic and financial integrity, while maintaining the public trust. The challenge is always to ensure that the necessary regulations do not undermine the fundamental bargain (*autonomy for innovation and accountability*), create unnecessary bureaucracy, allow for the imposition of fictitious regulations, or result in phony accountability.

Therefore, we support legislation to:

- Establish a legal process for the merger of charter schools with authority for approval of the merger residing with the charter school boards and authorizers and that the role of the Department of Education in merger decisions is review and comment;
- Establish a mechanism to ensure that there are reserve funds to cover the costs related to school closures;

- Clarify that the term “governance structure” in statute refers to the balance of power among the three categories of board members; and
- Address the requirement that charter schools carry an additional \$3 million liability insurance coverage relating to the release of threatened release of hazardous substances.

We oppose any legislation that:

- Changes the fundamental principle of “organically developed and locally (teacher, parent and community member) controlled” charter schools or gives a preference to “corporately controlled or managed” schools; and
- Limits the autonomy of charter school boards to make local decisions, or which imposes costly unfunded mandates, or which undermines the established purposes of Minnesota charter schools as defined in law.

<p>7] ONLINE/DITIGAL LEARNING AND TECHNOLOGY</p>

Statement of Beliefs

The ever changing and pervasive utilization of technologies provides public education with an opportunity to meet the diverse learning needs and goals of students through flexible scheduling and secure learning environments, personalized curriculum and assessments, increased student engagement, motivation and learning options, and improved ways of documenting and recognizing student growth and achievements.

Online/digital learning provides the means to reach beyond traditional geographic boundaries and the limitations of place based learning through a wide range of technologies and instructional models. While online/digital learning has incredible potential to create and provide new and innovative learning opportunities, it also has a responsibility to ensure that those learning opportunities are of quality.

Today, access to those technologies is both a necessity and requirement if students are going to have equal educational opportunities. This provides both a challenge and opportunity for families, education, and society.

Therefore, we support legislation to:

- Ensure that all of Minnesota’s students have equal opportunities to access the technologies and educational experiences that online/digital education can provide;
- Provide parents and students with comprehensive information about online/digital learning opportunities, within and outside of the school;
- Eliminate the requirement for annual state approval of online programs and replace it with a multi-year program approval process;
- Create and implement a differentiated approach to approving and evaluating online/digital programming recognizing the full range of online instructional models; and
- Require transparency in staffing ratios, including a consistent method of calculating online teacher workloads.

8] STUDENT AND PARENTAL CHOICE

Statement of Beliefs

Minnesota's policy supporting public school choice pre-dates charter schools, and as such, charter schools are a means of allowing parents and students to utilize the choice they have under the law. Public school choice allows students to find an academic program or educational setting that addresses their interests, needs, and goals. It also creates the possibility of greater motivation for learning, and ownership of the learning process and the learning environment.

Therefore we support legislation to:

- Allow a Charter school student to participate in High School League governed activities in his/her resident district if the Charter School he/she attends does not offer the activity or have a Cooperative Agreement with another district or school for that activity;
- Clarify that the enrollment preference for a pre-school or pre- kindergarten student for kindergarten or first grade is for students who attend either free or through state paid scholarships and not based on the entire program being free; and
- Allow a charter school to establish an optional preference for low-income students if the percentage of students in the school is below the statewide average, and the state allows information to be requested prior to enrollment which will allow for the implementation of the preference, and provides immunity from potential lawsuits arising from the implementation of that preference.

Therefore we oppose legislation that would:

- Define parental or student choice within the public school sector as segregation or require parents or students to give up the right to choose the public school that addresses their educational needs or achievement goals.

9] TEACHING AND LICENSING

Statement of Beliefs

For almost two hundred years the teaching profession, like education in general, has been the subject of reform after reform agenda. The reform agendas have focused on questions of who can be a teacher, what preparation is needed to be a teacher, what is the role of a teacher, what type of employment security should a teacher have, what constitutes professionalism, and how to judge the performance of a teacher.

Today, the teaching profession continues to face these same questions in an era of heightened expectations, a demand for standardization, and greater political oversight. The challenges are how to recruit a more diverse teacher workforce, how to prepare teachers so that they hold all kids to high expectations, how to motivate teachers to stay in the profession, how to compensate teachers in a way

that respects the profession and rewards performance, innovation, and responsibility, and how to assess performance that is reflective of the multiple realities of the teacher’s role and responsibilities.

We support legislation to:

- Recognize teaching licenses from other states with equivalent standards for teaching licenses in areas where Minnesota experiences labor shortages (*e.g. special education, math and science, foreign languages*);
- Revamp and modernize the Teaching Re-licensure process and procedures;
- Create a New Teacher License based on the role of the teacher as a “**Learning Facilitator/Manager**” for programs that utilize inter-disciplinary or project-based learning methodologies;
- Require Teacher Preparation programs to provide perspective teachers with Online/Digital Learning teaching methodologies;
- Establishing programs to recruit, prepare, and support a more diverse teaching workforce; and
- Provide schools with both ongoing technical and financial resources to develop and refine performance assessment systems that reflect the full scope of a teacher’s responsibilities, not just how students score on state tests.

We oppose legislation that would:

- Mandate that charter school administrative personnel be required to be licensed;
- Require a specific license for teaching online or an endorsement for teaching in an online/digital learning environment.

10] TRANSPORTATION

Statement of Beliefs

Today, we live in an era that focuses on energy costs and recognizes there are environmental consequences to our transportation habits. Minnesota’s student transportation system is based on a historic geographically-based school system from an era before the state enacted a series of policy decisions that created educational options for students (open-enrollment, PSEO, charter schools, etc.).

These realities pose different challenges and opportunities for student transportation systems across the state. In addition, transportation funding has been flat for a couple of decades, requiring schools to use an ever greater amount out of general fund revenue to subsidize transportation. The result is that the student transportation system is neither innovative in design and delivery, nor cost efficient.

Therefore, we support legislation to:

- Provide incentives to assist traditional school districts and charters to work together in developing regional student transportation systems that effectively facilitate the school choice of students in a cost efficient manner;

- Increase the per pupil transportation allowance to reflect the actual cost of student transportation; and
- Raise the reimbursement rate for parents who transport their children to schools to the annual IRS rate for business from the long standing policy of .15 cents a mile.

Therefore, we oppose legislation that would:

- Require charter schools to reimburse traditional school districts for the differential between state transportation aid and costs, until charter school students receive equal educational funding.

Final Note: *As issues arise through the legislative session additional policy issues and positions may be added to the Public Policy Platform by formal action of the Board of Directors.*