

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 with the enactment of the nation's first charter school law in 1991. **As of January 2017, there are 165 charter schools** in operation in the state. While 70% 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. **In 2015-16 there were over 50,800 students** enrolled in Minnesota's chartered public schools (*about 6% of the state's K-12 public enrollment*).

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 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 Minnesota 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.
- Charter schools have the same financial audits, audit procedures, and audit requirements as traditional public school districts.

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.

AUTHORIZERS

- 18 Authorizers - Colleges/Universities, Non-profits, School Districts, and Single Purpose Authorizers.

CHARTER SCHOOL LEGAL REFERENCES

- Minnesota Statutes 124E (*formerly 124D.10-124D.11*)



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MINNESOTA CHARTER SCHOOL STATISTICS

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION (2015-2016)

- **50,800+ students enrolled** in charter schools (about 6% of the statewide total)
- Compared to state averages, charter schools enroll...
 - **A larger percentage** of students receiving **Free and Reduced Lunch** (55% vs. Statewide average 38%)
 - **A larger percentage** of **Limited English Proficiency** students (20% vs. Statewide average 8%)
 - **A larger percentage** of **Minority Students** (53% vs. Statewide average 29%)
 - **About the same percentage** of **Special Education Students** (13%)
- Since 2004-2005, the number of students enrolled in charter schools has **grown from 17,500 to over 50,800.**

SCHOOLS (OPERATIONAL AND PRE-OPERATIONAL)

- **165** charter schools in operation
- **14** approved for 2017 opening and beyond (as of December, 2016)

GRADE CONFIGURATION OF SCHOOLS (2015-2016)

- | | |
|--------------|---------------|
| • K-8 (32) | • PreK-8 (8) |
| • 9-12 (24) | • 7-12 (7) |
| • K-6 (14) | • K-5 (9) |
| • K-12 (16) | • 5-8 (5) |
| • 6-12 (14) | • PreK-12 (5) |
| • PreK-6 (8) | • K-4 (5) |

Additionally, there are **18** schools with other grade variations (examples: 3-12, K-3, 6-8, K-9 etc.)

24 schools with approved Pre-K Programs

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION (2016-2017)

- **33** schools in **Minneapolis**
- **37** schools in **St. Paul**
- **44** school in the **7-county metro area** (excluding St. Paul and Minneapolis)
- **51** schools located in **Greater Minnesota** (excluding the Twin Cities metro area)

PROGRAM FOCUS

- **Dual Language and Multi-Cultural** (Hmong, Mandarin, Spanish, German, Ojibwe...)
- **Core Knowledge**
- **International Baccalaureate (IB)**
- **Target Populations** (Deaf, Autism, At-Risk)
- **Service Learning**
- **Environmental Education**
- **Montessori**
- **Project Based**
- **Art Focused** (Performing and Visual)
- **Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM)**
- **Technical/Career Education**
- **Classical Education**
- **Service Based Learning**

STAFF COUNT FOR RETIREMENT (2014-2015)

- TRA (Teacher Retirement Association) count: 5,200+ employees in charter schools
- PERA (Public Employees Retirement Association) count: over 2,500+ employees in charter schools

FACILITIES (2014-2015)

- Total Leased Space: over **5.9 million square feet**
- Average Square Footage Leased: **37,000 sq. ft.**
- Average Price Per Square Foot Leased: **\$12.46**

TRANSPORTATION (2015-2016)

- 121 schools provided their own transportation services
- 43 schools used district transportation

Minnesota Association of Charter Schools

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