

Evaluating Chartering

A Case for Assessing *Separately*
the *Institutional* Innovation

*The latest in a series of reports on the
changing face of public education*

October 2003



*A joint venture of the Center for
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ABOUT THIS REPORT

Hardly a week goes by, it seems, without some researcher or public agency or media outlet releasing a report that claims to answer the question "How are chartered schools doing?" Sometimes, the reports say charters are doing well; other times, not so well.

A lot of these reports try to be "balanced," reporting mixed results, in effect, that "some chartered schools are doing better than others." Many of the studies that have more definitive results are produced and used by charter school partisans -- on both sides.

Policymakers and journalists who are the audience for much of this research are, with some justification, both frustrated and confused. How are they to decide whether to support and expand this innovation? Or, as some critics argue, should they limit its spread?

The authors of this report are frustrated, as well, but for a different set of reasons. More than a dozen years since Minnesota first authorized chartered schools, they feel we've been -- more often than not -- *asking the wrong set of questions*.

Evaluation, they argue, should be done on the *institutional innovation of chartering* -- not just on the schools that result from the chartering process. For example: Is the opportunity for individuals and organizations other than districts to create new public schools accomplishing the original objectives behind these laws? Are significant numbers of new schools actually being created? Are at least some of these new schools using fundamentally different models for teaching and learning, with significant potential to improve student achievement? Are different organizational arrangements appearing, with significant potential to help break out of the economically-unsustainable model of "school" that now characterizes the district sector? Are new dynamics being introduced that give the districts reasons to change and improve their operations and the schools they administer?

This report helps launch a significant and broader initiative to encourage states, authorizers, academics, the media and others to fundamentally change how they evaluate chartering -- and how they decide whether the laws, the sponsors, the schools and other elements of the charter sector are working as intended. If properly designed, such evaluations should also help guide policy makers in making changes in charter laws and other aspects of the legal and administrative environments in which chartering takes place.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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A graduate of Carleton College and of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public Affairs at Princeton University, Ted was previously executive director of the Citizens League in the Twin Cities area, a reporter and editorial writer for the Minneapolis Star and Tribune, and a senior fellow at the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota.

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GETTING THE TERMS RIGHT FOR THIS STATE-INITIATED CHANGE

With the charter laws the states made a dramatic system-change in public education. Chartering was an unexpected development in state policy. It was radical. It was, and remains, controversial. It continues to puzzle people. What is it? Why are we doing it? Is it working? How do we know?

At the moment the country is not thinking clearly about these questions. The confusion is visible as people struggle for some term to distinguish the system-change from the schools created . . . often failing, and using ‘charter schools’ for both these quite different things.

Sorting-out the confusion begins with getting the terms right. This is easy. Let’s bury ‘charter schools’. Let’s say chartered schools when we refer to the schools. And say chartering when we mean the new state strategy.

Any sensible effort to evaluate the strategy starts by understanding: Chartering is an institutional innovation. It is the state moving beyond the effort to transform existing schools; moving to create quality schools new. To do this the state lets someone other than the superintendent start and run a public school; lets someone other than the local board offer public education.

Most evaluations have not examined chartering as an institutional innovation, as a system-change. Most simply looked at the schools created; asked about their character-

istics and about the students and their scores. Simple description is not enough. We need to know whether chartering is helping state policy leadership out of its – probably-hopeless – effort simply to change existing schools.

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It is hard to change existing schools within the traditional regulated-public-utility arrangement. With their students required by law to attend and holding an exclusive franchise on public education within their boundaries, the districts could – as Albert Shanker said in Minnesota in 1988 – “take their customers for granted”. This made K-12 an inert institution. And made ‘improvement’ an effort to push-in changes from the outside.

So we have been treating public education like a patient in intensive care, supported by ropes and pulleys, with tubes and wires flowing-in nourishment and stimulus. When policymakers grew impatient they forced in the standards, measurement and consequences the inert institution did not introduce itself. In 2001 they commanded the institution to improve. Unhappily, it does not work to order people to do what in fact they cannot do.

Clearly it is ridiculous to be trying to push improvement into an institution while leaving it structured to resist

change. Good sense suggests changing arrangements so the inert institution becomes a *self-improving* institution, in which organizations do improvement themselves - on their own initiative, in their own interest, from their own resources - and in which ‘consequences’ are imposed without political action.

In the 1990s the charter idea showed the states that they need not be captive to the public-utility arrangement; that they are not limited to changing the schools we have. Public education exists in state law; the state can change its ‘arrangements’.

Governors and legislators probably would not explain their actions this way. But it is impossible to account for the chartering laws – enacted without strong outside support and always against the opposition of powerful interests – except in terms of the frustration of state policy leadership with the inability or unwillingness of the districts to educate students and to control their costs. And in terms of an instinctive sense that the state moving to “get somebody else who will” would introduce a useful dynamic.

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A commissioner of education preparing to evaluate chartering might ask:

1. Is chartering replicating good models and good practice?

Districts and schools must change traditional practices radically for *all* students to learn. But radical change is usually defeated by the culture and values of organizations, as Clayton Christensen showed in *The Innovator’s Dilemma*. So, as Paul Houston of AASA says, “If you are a superintendent you *are* in the ‘incremental’ business”.

More-than-incremental changes, needed quickly, can be introduced faster into K-12 if built into schools started new. And not every new school needs to be innovative:

Chartering is partly about replication. Evaluation should ask how far proven pedagogical, personnel, financial and other practices are appearing; in what kinds of schools, operating under what provisions-of-law.

2. Is chartering generating new models and new practices?

Some new schools *will* be innovative. A charter is essentially an opportunity to try new things. So chartering is partly a research-and-development program, producing new models for learning, governance, management. Teacher professional partnerships is one example.

Evaluation must factor-in this character of chartering as a trial-and-error program. No sensible business would evaluate its R&D process by the no-defects standard it sets for the proven models it uses in its production processes. Some experiments will not work well in their early years. Some will not work at all. But a failed experiment does not mean a failed program. We learn from failure. Chartering can be succeeding even though not all the schools chartered are succeeding.

3. Are the chartered schools succeeding with student learning?

Learning is one measure of chartering’s success. But evaluation must be cautious about talking as if chartered schools are all the same, as people do when they ask: Do ‘they’ work? What students do ‘they’ enroll? How are ‘their’ students scoring?”

The institutional innovation does make the schools alike in one sense: This sector is organized on principles different from those in the district sector. Its schools have boards removed from electoral politics. The schools have authority to decide how to teach; they select their own personnel, handle their own finances. They are to be accountable for performance, not for ‘compliance’. This autonomy is important.

But the differences are enormous, among schools within a state and between states – especially in terms of what directly affects learning. The learning model is a school-level decision. Some schools will use a proven model; some will try a new model. Some have teachers talking to kids in groups; some use project-based learning. Some are high-technology; some low-technology. Some are small; some are not small. In some kids dress as they choose; in others they wear uniforms. Some staff-up on the ‘bureau’ model used in districts; some contract for services. Some have principals; some are run by teacher-partnerships. Some are free-standing organizations; some belong to a managed group. Some are new schools; some are conversions. Some are non-profit; some commercial. On and on.

So studies that generalize about “charter schools” are almost always inconclusive; usually report “the evidence is mixed” – as of course it would be. Studies of this sort are an embarrassment to the research community. Generalizing about ‘charter schools’ is about as useful as generalizing about ‘vehicles’.

The tendency to generalize is driven partly by the policy and political controversy about opening public education to schools other than those owned and run by the local board of education. Some people like this idea. Others hate it . . . because it offends their ideology or because they feel their interests threatened by it.

The intensity of the debate puts advocates - on both sides - under intense pressure. So the advocates too often argue simply in terms of ‘public (district) schools’ and private schools’ and ‘voucher schools’ and, unfortunately, ‘charter schools’.

Evaluation should look beneath the label; look to identify, then compare, the different kinds of schools. The schools chartered differ; the differences make a difference. We want evaluation to show which differences make what

difference. In schools *of what sort* do particular students do better? In schools *of what sort* do they do less well?

Jeff Henig at Teachers College/Columbia has been stressing the need to disaggregate in order to draw meaningful conclusions. In looking at charter-ed schools in the District of Columbia his team identified essentially ‘mission-oriented’ non-profits and schools run by ‘market-oriented’ groups; then inquired how the two differed in terms of school size and autonomy. This proved useful.

Finally: Evaluation should respect the different dimensions – and measures – of success. Academics are important, but the public also wants schools to be safe, orderly and responsive, and to develop life skills, physical fitness, good character and the motivation for lifelong learning.

Testing well on content is not the only measure of student learning, and the level of scores may be a poorer measure of school success than the rate of gain. Schools pressed to show high scores may respond like CEOs pressed to show high quarterly earnings; training their employees in the tricks of scoring-high, *reducing* what students truly know and are able to do.

4. How do the two strategies compare?

The prevailing theory is that existing schools will be transformed - caterpillars turned into butterflies - as ‘leaders’ (administrators) who mean well and get resources act decisively to train their teachers how to do-better. The suggestion implicit in chartering is that different/better schools will be developed faster by creating them new.

Neither theory will work perfectly: Evaluation should compare the two; tell us whether chartering does some things that cannot be done as well in ‘regular’ school, or does them more quickly. We are getting some evaluation of this sort now as people compare the two approaches to

creating quality high schools: by breaking down large existing schools and by creating small schools new, often through chartering.

Policymakers will be especially curious whether districts change faster when chartered schools appear; whether districts pick up improvements and innovations that appear in the chartered sector. But this is tricky: The ‘ripple’ analogy is false.

Chartered schools do not, can not, change district schools. Their presence impacts the district’s enrollment, perhaps the district’s pride. But evaluation must understand: Only the district can change district schools. Evaluation should look for responses; where they appear, should ask which boards or superintendents decided to respond and which did not, and why.

Chartering will need to be evaluated over time. Nobody gets everything right on the first try. Most things improve; evolve. This applies both to the schools and to the laws, the state policies supporting chartering. Perhaps as the chartered sector grows the districts will change more rapidly.

Finally: Evaluation should draw conclusions; make recommendations. It should be diagnostic, as testing is diagnostic, telling us what is going well and what is not, and what to adjust. With chartering we want to know which pedagogical, governance and management practices succeed – and what provisions of law are responsible – so policy can do more of what works better.

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An appropriately sophisticated and dispassionate evaluation of chartering will be immensely important in answering what is now the critical question in the country’s effort at improvement.

Up to now the notion has been that we would – and could – get the schools we need just by changing the schools we have. Probably this will not work; has not worked. It is an astonishing risk - imprudent – to be leaving all the chips bet on districts doing what districts have never been able to do. We are not compelled to take that risk, since we can now generate quality schools new. So the risk is really not an acceptable one for policy leadership to be taking . . . with other people’s children.

We can reduce this risk by adding a major effort now to create schools new. In most every field we do balance re-building and new-building. This country needs, now, an effort at new-school-creation comparable in scale to the effort through standards-based reform to transform existing schools. Given the rigidities change K-12 education is likely to change and improve more through creating new schools than through re-forming old ones; more by replacing schools than by transforming them.

WHAT QUESTIONS DO WE ASK TO EVALUATE CHARTERING?

A reasonable evaluation of chartering as an institutional innovation would fall into three parts.

- First, it would describe fully – make findings about – the new sector and the new and different features appearing in its schools.

- Second, it would make some judgments, come to some conclusions, about which elements within the new sector seem most useful in generating different and better kinds of schools and in replicating models proven successful there or elsewhere.

- Third, it would recommend adjustments in the program – in the underlying law if necessary – that would cause the program to work better and would remove what is causing it not to work well.

Let's take the three in order. It is impossible to stress too strongly that this will be an evaluation of the law and of the state's administration of the law as much as it will be an evaluation of the schools created under the law.

FINDINGS

What is happening in this new sector?

Creating new schools is not optional for the states. New and different schools have become, quite simply, necessary.

An adequate evaluation will address and answer four key questions.

1. Are schools - with the characteristics contemplated - being created as a result of the chartering law?
2. Are some of the schools in this new, innovative sector of public education a different model of schooling – teaching and learning – with significant potential to improve student performance (including but not limited to scores-on-tests)?
3. Are different organizational arrangements appearing in this innovative sector, with significant potential to help break out of the economically-unsustainable model of school that now characterizes the district sector?
4. Are dynamics being introduced by chartering that give the district reasons to change and improve itself and its administered schools?

Note that the evaluation will have to deal separately with the two different chartering programs created by most laws. One program exists within the district sector – at least to the extent that local boards are willing to charter

schools or are able under the law of the state to do so. (Massachusetts and New Jersey make chartering purely a state function.) The second program exists outside the district – at least where a law provides for an 'alternate sponsor' able to sponsor/authorize new schools.

It will be interesting and important for research to discover which of the two programs is the more effective. Also, to know how far the appearance of a chartered sector within the district depends on the existence of a chartered sector created outside it, by the alternate sponsors.

What follows elaborates on the four central questions.

1. Are schools being created?

Where, geographically, and for whom, are these schools being created?

- In what states are schools being chartered? Which laws are live? Which are 'dead'?
- Where within the state are schools appearing? A key here is to see if they are or are not bringing educational choices to the most educationally-needy students.
- Do the innovations last: Are the schools having their charters renewed?
- Are weak or ineffective schools closing; being terminated?
- Is the sector as a whole growing in the number of schools operating?
- Is it declining?
- Are more authorizers appearing, willing to sponsor? Which types of authorizers are they?
- Is the chartering law itself changing . . . improving? What provisions are being added and/or removed?

2. Do some models show significant potential to improve learning?

Different chartered schools will try different ways to get students to learn. Some will try new ways. Research needs first to identify these pedagogical innovations, then to see which are most successful in improving school and student performance.

Research would then be focusing on the differences among chartered schools in their program of learning. Chartered schools may be similar in being small and in being autonomous and in being accountable through contract (though considerable variation exists in these characteristics too). But to the extent student learning is what we want to know-about and to improve, then it is the learning program that needs to be the focus of the research.

This was explicit in Robert Slavin's DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Lecture in 2002. He uses different terms at different points – "learning program" . . . "basic principles of practice" . . . "treatment" (when running the parallel with scientific medicine) . . . "educational innovations" – but throughout he is clearly talking about research focused on the learning activity organized for students.

The evaluation needs to ask questions like these:

- How far are the practices in use the same as or different from those in use in the local district schools? If different, how? What is it that teachers do? What do the students do?
- Are some learning programs in fact truly innovative? If so, how? An example would be the project-based approach in a number of the schools in Minnesota. Not all the schools created need to be innovative in this sense, but some ought to be. At the moment research is probably not picking this up.
- Is there an effort to improve student learning by first improving students' motivation? Is this visible in a

different culture in the school . . . in the way adults and students treat each other?

- Have schools in this sector developed new forms of assessment for student learning, additional to those required by the state?

At this point evaluators will want to look especially for the extent to which innovations in the charter sector are beginning to incorporate electronic technology: partly using courses-on-disk but especially using the internet and the web as learning resources. People are only beginning to sense their potential to give students vastly greater access to information than could ever be made available in the school in its library or with even the the best-informed teachers.

The technology makes it possible, by individualizing learning, to give students the flexibility they want, to move at their own pace and to pursue their individual interests. This can in turn increase their motivation to learn, which can in turn increase their achievement.

3. Are different, more productive, organizational models appearing?

The states want innovation beyond the learning program itself. They also need an institution that is both effective and efficient; productive. So evaluation should ask:

- What organizational forms are appearing different from the traditional public bureau? Some differences are inherent: Schools in this sector are on contract to a sponsor; accountable for performance. But some will be specific to the school: some form of governance or management. Can these be grouped into a limited number of types?
- Contracting authority is available to the school. What use are the schools making of this opportunity? What services are they in fact deciding to buy: learning programs? management? And: from whom? What new forms of contract-management are appearing?

- The schools may also test new forms of leadership.

What changes or innovations are visible? One example is teacher-ownership: the arrangement in some states by which teachers take responsibility for a school (or department, or program) through a professional partnership. In this arrangement they can if they wish be the professional leaders and have the administrators working for them.

- What patterns of resource-use are visible? These schools are, as the University of Wisconsin's Allan Odden has pointed out, the country's principal experiment with school-based decision-making and finance. Are there different patterns of expenditure visible in the schools in this sector? What are those different patterns? What proportion of the budget is allocated to learning? to teachers? to administration? If indeed, as Denver-based school finance consultant John Myers says, patterns of expenditure turn out to be more important than levels of expenditure, the policy implications could be profound.

In researching the changes in this area, too, it will be important to look for new uses of electronic technology. Where it makes the teacher less a provider-of-instruction and more an adviser and 'guide' to learning there could be a significant gain in productivity: a combination of different – less expensive – staffing requirements for the school and higher motivation and performance on the part of the students.

This kind of research cannot be done entirely with questionnaires. Chartered schools are too overwhelmed with questionnaires to answer them thoroughly. Investigators will have to go into the schools, looking.

4. What dynamics are introduced for the districts?

The key purpose of chartering is to transform a static institution into one in which the organizations regularly alter their practices, both as to student learning and as to the use of resources. So the evaluation needs to see how

well chartering – the strategy of creating an open sector within public education – is working, both to challenge the districts with different and better schools and to stimulate the districts to respond.

The first step is to identify the principal dynamics being created.

- Where are students moving from the district to the chartered sector?
- Where is money moving from the district to the chartered sector? Money-moving clearly represents 'a reason' for the district to change.
- Are good teachers and principals moving? From where? To where?

Then the evaluation needs to ask how, visibly, the district sector is responding.

- Does the response take the form simply of trying to block the creation of new schools and to amend the charter law or to frustrate its administration?
- How far, and in what ways, does the response take the form of the district adapting its own schools and their learning programs?

People do want to know whether the appearance of the charter laws and chartered schools is having "systemic effects" . . . second-order effects. But this is tricky. The evaluators need to beware the easy assumption that the chartered schools themselves do – or should, or could – cause change in the districts. (The notion that chartered schools actually have an obligation to share what they learn has been promoted by . . . is an article of faith particularly with . . . the American Federation of Teachers.)

Clearly the decision lies entirely with the district whether there is or is not a district response. The presence of the chartered schools, and especially their success, provides a reason for the district to act. The law gives the district an opportunity to act. The chartered school cannot make the district act. So there is no natural "ripple effect" . . . as there is none when a pebble dropped over a pool lands on ice.

The district response – or lack of response – is important to note and to describe, however, for policymakers. What-happens is a component of the evaluation of the chartering program in a state. And it becomes important when the evaluation gets to recommendations, as we will see in a moment.

CONCLUSIONS

How well is chartering succeeding?

Once the evaluation comes to understand what's happening in chartering the next question will be judgmental: How effective is chartering – the new strategy – in creating the self-improving institution the state needs?

In evaluating chartering we are looking at the process, the mechanism for designing and producing quality public schools new. At this point it is important to emphasize again that this evaluation needs to be mainly about the mechanism. Which means: about the entities that sponsor schools and the entities that oversee schools (and sponsors) at the state level *and about the provisions of the law itself*. Does the law encourage or discourage the creation of new schools and the development of the Open Sector? Does the law make the work of schools and sponsors relatively easier harder? How is the law evolving over time?

An issue at this point is whether to set, in advance, some “passing score” for the new sector with respect to the four questions being asked.

For example, is there some rate of new-school-creation that would let us call the law a success or a failure; some number of innovations being produced - in learning-methods, or in governance and management? Or should the evaluation essentially describe the sector and report changes-over-time and let its ‘clients’ in state policy leadership come to their own judgments about the acceptable rate-of-progress after examining the evidence?

For present purposes at least we will not, here, set an arbitrary number as the test of ‘enough’.

1. Is the new sector growing and evolving sufficiently?

A key question is whether the innovations . . . the schools, the dynamics that stimulate K-12 to become a self-improving institution . . . are getting better over time. No cross-section in time will be enough to evaluate chartering adequately. New schools, new kinds of schools, new dynamics will develop gradually. They will need to be followed over a period of years. Progress – if there is progress – may not be uniform across the board. It may not be steady from year to year.

The judgmental question will be: Is the new sector evolving satisfactorily . . . at sufficient scale? Do there continue to be new models designed and developed? Do the innovations and the dynamics last? Do they spread? Are there prospects for further gains?

As time moves along the key test will become not so much the sector's ability to generate innovative schools as its ability to replicate the innovative models that have proven successful. So this open sector – chartering – ought to demonstrate a superior capability not only for innovation but also for replication -- ought to be the preferred method for shifting public education gradually toward the proven, successful learning methods. Research needs to ask:

2. Are there enough ‘breakthrough’ learning models?

Not every chartered school needs to be innovative. And not every innovative chartered school needs to succeed for chartering – the strategy of opening-up public education to innovation – to be successful. It is enough that a few truly different and successful approaches are discovered and developed.

Certainly this has been true in other fields. There were various efforts 100 years ago to develop heavier-than-air craft . . . “flying machines”. Lots of experimental models failed before Orville and Wilbur got it right. Early programs on television used to show old films of weird contraptions shaking and bouncing and crashing. But it would have been wrong to conclude that because so many efforts failed the whole effort failed. It didn’t. The Wrights learned; their design succeeded. Rapidly it improved. Other designers followed, making still better aircraft. The industry evolved; became a self-improving institution. In 25 years Lindbergh had flown across the Atlantic.

It may not be easy to spot these breakthroughs when they first appear. The first successful models may emerge from unexpected sources. And early successes may not look very significant. When news of the first flight was telegraphed to the newspaper in Dayton OH the editor on duty spiked the story: Who cares about flying 129 yards?

At times the breakthrough innovations may be discovered only when we see their effects. Evaluation visiting the school can look for things-happening . . . for different behaviors . . . and ask: What is causing that? Perhaps student-discipline is no longer a problem. Why? Perhaps the attendance rate rises. Why? If scores are up, why? Perhaps student-motivation has improved. Why? This may turn up an innovation.

3. Is it generating useful ideas about better use of resources?

The evaluators need to look for, to measure, the effects of the new and different, or innovative, organizational and managerial features of the schools appearing. The states need education to make better use of resources. If chartering is producing organizations that do this, that is important.

- How productively are resources being used?
- How important are the results of smaller size?

- How significant are the effects of the new arrangements for leadership?

- What are the effects of having virtually all decisions made at the school level? o What, and how important, are the effects of changed patterns of expenditure?

- What are the visible effects, respectively, where services – including management – are secured through contract rather than ‘produced’ internally?

4. How far is K-12 becoming a self-improving institution?

The evaluation will observe what is happening in the new sector and will observe what is happening in the district sector by way of response. The question then will be to determine how far the dynamics appearing are likely to drive improvement on a continuing basis. In both cases the evaluator should try to identify causes. . . . should ask: What appears to be responsible for the new models and practices in the sector?

- Is it due to certain characteristics of those running the school?
- Is it due to some special effort by the sponsors/authorizers?
- Does it result from support from other/community institutions?
- Is it attributable to certain features of the law?

At this point evaluators will need to make an important judgment for state policy.

One possibility is that the district sector seems likely within a reasonable time to respond positively to the appearance of the charter laws and charter schools . . . to use the law to create new schools itself, believing that schools it does not own and run are still ‘its’ schools. If so then evaluators should urge state policy to create even larger opportunities for the districts to adapt.

The other possibility is that the district sector will become increasingly resistant. In this case evaluators

should urge state policy to continue to build the new schools outside the district sector . . . expanding further the non-district ‘open sector’ thus heavying-up the ‘reasons’ for the districts to reconsider their position.

RECOMMENDATIONS

How to improve the strategy

The purpose of the evaluation – certainly for state policy leadership – is to reveal what in the chartering program is not working well enough and the reasons why this-or-that is not working well enough. This means those conducting the evaluation should – based on their findings and conclusions – suggest the actions governors and legislators might take. And, since the strategy involves both generating new schools and causing the districts to respond, the evaluation should make recommendations not only for improving the process of new-school-creation but also for speeding-up the districts’ response.

As the strategy plays out over time a new concept of ‘change’ for the districts is likely to emerge. We have thought, until now, of ‘school changing’ in the sense of an existing place somehow becoming different . . . people in the school changing its culture and their practices, like a caterpillar ‘transforming itself’ into a butterfly.

Realistically there may not be much of that. More likely change will take the form of the district board and leadership gradually introducing new and better schools, while gradually scaling down the number and size of traditional schools. Which is of course the way most institutions change: automobile companies gradually replacing carriage-makers, computer-makers gradually replacing typewriter-manufacturers – though in the private sector these decisions are ‘made’ not by a central authority but by the aggregate decisions of a large number of consumers.

The recommendations should address each of the major elements of the evaluation:

1. What adjustments in the program could help increase the rate at which new schools – both new models and schools replicating known/proven models – are created?
2. What adjustments, in what elements of the program or the law, could help ensure that the schools created incorporate the best learning programs in their designs?
3. What further should be done with the law and/or its administration to ensure the schools incorporate the best governance and managerial arrangements?
4. What could and should be done to strengthen the dynamics needed to produce a self-improving system . . . to increase either the dynamics created for the districts or the districts’ ability and willingness to respond to them?

Recommendations could appropriately be addressed especially to those authorized to sponsor new schools (who might usefully become more proactive in their role) . . . to those in charge of the district sector (to increase its responsiveness) . . . to the state department of education (or whatever state-level entity has jurisdiction over the new chartered-school sector) . . . to the Legislature, for adjustments in the law.

ABOUT EDUCATION|EVOLVING

Millions of America's students headed off to school this fall, sporting brightly colored backpacks and determined to make this their "best school year yet." At the same time, federal and state policymakers are making tough new demands that our schools change and improve – so that "All students learn at high levels." New standards, tests, timelines and consequences are all being put in place to make sure that "No child is left behind."

Yet, all across the country, many policymakers, journalists, teachers, parents and students themselves are troubled by a haunting feeling that all this effort may not really produce the degree of change and improvement that we need. At a minimum, we are now taking a series of risks that are neither wise nor necessary to be making with other people's children. These are, after all, demands and results well-beyond what we've ever expected of American public education – all at a time of severe budgetary pressures on states, districts and individual public schools.

That, at least is the serious concern of a small group of Minnesota-based public policy veterans who have come together as Education|Evolving... a joint venture of the Center for Policy Studies and Hamline University. The individuals behind this initiative believe...

... it's an unwise and unnecessary risk for the state and nation to be trying to get the results we need solely by changing the schools we now have...

... the issues about teachers and teaching should not be debated only in the old employer/worker framework...

... the solution to maintaining financially viable public education in rural areas may not lie in the three old 'solutions' of excess levies, consolidation and state aid...

... today's schools should not go on largely failing to take advantage of new electronic technologies and other substantially different ways of teaching and learning...

... and the critical discussion about the future of K-12 education in Minnesota and nationally must not proceed solely as a discussion among adults, with students largely left on the outside looking in.

Education|Evolving is undertaking a number of initiatives over the coming year. They include a national initiative to convince policy makers, education reform leaders, journalists and others that *creating new schools* should be an essential element in achieving needed changes and improvements in teaching and learning – at least equal in importance to *changing the schools we now have*.

One focus of this initiative is to introduce the concept of an "*Open Sector*" – to help create the kind of legal and political environment in which new schools can be created and succeed. Another – launched by this report – is aimed at state policymakers and the national research community – to fundamentally reconfigure the premises used in asking the critical question, "How are chartered schools doing?" Other ongoing Education|Evolving projects focus on promoting the concept of "Teachers as Owners" and on strengthening and enhancing the role of the agencies and organizations that sponsor chartered schools.

Education|Evolving's leadership is provided by two Minnesota public policy veterans: Ted Kolderie, senior associate at the Center for Policy Studies, and Joe Graba, a senior policy fellow at Hamline University. Its coordinator is Jon Schroeder, former director of Charter Friends National Network.

Education|Evolving's activities are regularly updated on the initiative's new and unique web site – www.educationevolving.org. To receive print and electronic updates of Education|Evolving initiatives, contact info@educationevolving.org.