

Students Describe Their Chartered School Experiences

Charter School Student Summit – Saint Paul, Minnesota

Tuesday, December 7, 2004

In small groups, students discussed their chartered school experiences. They submitted notes from their discussions, which are summarized below. We indicated where more than one group shared the same answer.

1. Describe the school you attend, and why you choose to attend this school.

- ❖ Small communities; small size; more attention (x5)
- ❖ Allowed to work independently; able to work at own pace (x4)
- ❖ Sense of family. Close to friends. Parental involvement high. Close relationships with teachers (x3).
- ❖ Been through the other schools, and they weren't working. Some students failing. Didn't like classes. (x3)
- ❖ Sick of traditional public schools. They weren't working. No other options.
- ❖ Behind in credits and needed to catch up. (x2)
- ❖ Ability to be involved in the teaching (x2).
- ❖ Ability to focus on getting into the medical field; music; art. Enjoy project-based and hands-on learning models (x2).
- ❖ Sense that they are making better educational decisions
- ❖ Chartered schools do "real world" things and prepare/help students to "get through"
- ❖ Chartered schools allow students to try something new
- ❖ More tradition
- ❖ Sense that the school is truly a "learning community"
- ❖ Access to virtual classes.
- ❖ A counselor suggested.
- ❖ Opportunity to leave the building.

2. What about your chartered school motivates you to learn?

- ❖ Students. Students motivate. Friends. Classmates. (x4)
- ❖ Teachers. Teachers actually pay attention. Teachers care. Teachers motivate. Working closely with people that care, it's the most important thing in life. Teachers will go out of the way for students. Better student-teacher relationships. (x3)
- ❖ Working at own pace and making own decisions (x3). Ability to self-motivate. Ability to come whenever. Longer time to complete things. Blocked time.
- ❖ Principal.
- ❖ Sense of family.
- ❖ Graduating.
- ❖ Parents.
- ❖ Study what you want to. You can go for what you want.
- ❖ Ability to work and go to school.
- ❖ Validations.
- ❖ Furthers your education.
- ❖ Want to do well as opposed to being expected to learn.
- ❖ Interested in projects and hands-on activities.

- ❖ Have fun at school.
- ❖ Small school community.
- ❖ Works better for student with attention problems.

3. What about your chartered school could be improved?

- ❖ Would like to see more interaction between students and teachers. Would like more teacher involvement (x4). More teachers needed.
- ❖ Would like more students (x3), a gym, and a bigger-sized school (space-wise) (x4); more classes offered.
- ❖ Attendance should improve to make schools better ranked and to better motivate those attending (x3).
- ❖ Would like to see more community interaction from students; getting students together from different schools (sense that some didn't know what other kinds of schools are out there) (x2); getting students from the school involved in a community outside of school.
- ❖ Image of chartered schools should be changed. Chartered schools shouldn't be labeled as schools for underachievers. (x2)
- ❖ Would like less drama and fights (x2)
- ❖ Would like to see chartered schools work with each other to improve
- ❖ More money and support.
- ❖ There should be more opportunity for more students to attend chartered schools.
- ❖ More regular hours.
- ❖ More organization.
- ❖ Need better mediation system.
- ❖ Too many hours required for senior projects in project-based settings.
- ❖ Would like better lunch.
- ❖ Would like to improve reading level in some students.
- ❖ Would like less wasted time.
- ❖ Would like more field trips.
- ❖ More goal oriented to get to graduation.
- ❖ Would like competitive sports with other schools (others disagreed – like that there are no sports.) Others want physical education.
- ❖ Students should run the lunch programs.

4. Do you notice any differences between the school you formerly attended and the school you attend now? If so, what? Do these differences impact your learning?

- ❖ In chartered schools, there are no big cliques. So there is less rivalry. You know everyone. (x5)
- ❖ In chartered schools, class sizes are smaller so students get the personal attention that they need. Overall size is smaller. Easier to learn in small environment (x5).
- ❖ Students get more choices in chartered schools, like how fast you learn or what you learn. Students get to work at their own pace instead of getting pushed to do something (x4).
- ❖ Students have better relationships with other students in chartered schools. More teamwork. Get along well. (x3)

- ❖ Students have better relationships with staff members and teachers in chartered schools (x2).
- ❖ In traditional schools, students change from class to class as opposed to having their own space.
- ❖ Relationships are more open in general. There were more arguments in traditional settings.
- ❖ Teachers are one-on-one in chartered schools.
- ❖ In traditional schools, teachers are biased.
- ❖ Management (the issue is unclear).
- ❖ Traditional schools have mass standards for everyone (did not like).
- ❖ In chartered schools, teachers will give you a chance.
- ❖ In chartered schools, enrollment levels are less.
- ❖ In chartered schools, there are less fights and better attendance. Some students said they went from being surrounded by disruptive students in traditional settings to a chartered setting, where there are no disruptive students.
- ❖ At some chartered schools, students can keep their full time jobs.
- ❖ At chartered schools, students have a chance to learn.
- ❖ In chartered schools, students can have more individuality.
- ❖ Students go from not being able to be heard to always being able to be involved with positive attention.
- ❖ In chartered schools, students are able to interact with younger students (K-12).

5. What are your observations about your teachers?

- ❖ One-on-one relationships; more personal (x4). Teachers are there for you. Teachers are more like friends (x2).
- ❖ The teachers make the school work and they care about the school and students. They are dedicated. They are more laid back and caring (x2).
- ❖ Teachers offer more guidance and are more helpful (x2). Teachers keep you on track.
- ❖ Teachers enjoy what they do. They are not the same teachers as in traditional settings—they have good personalities.
- ❖ The staff is a lot younger which makes them willing to try more things.
- ❖ Chartered school teachers know students as more than a GPA. It's hard for teachers at traditional schools to treat kids as more than numbers.
- ❖ There is a greater variety of teachers that bring different things to the table
- ❖ Can always look toward teachers for help.
- ❖ No favoritism.
- ❖ Teachers are more experienced.
- ❖ Teachers are critics.
- ❖ Teachers listen.
- ❖ Teachers set goals for you because they get to know you as a person and what level you are at.
- ❖ Teachers motivate.
- ❖ Teachers are strict.

6. Is your school for everyone? Why or why not?

- ❖ No school is for everyone. There are different learning styles.
- ❖ Not for everyone.
- ❖ It is for everyone. If you are ahead or behind, the school will accommodate you.
- ❖ It is for everyone if you want it to work out and you try.
- ❖ It is for everyone who likes to work in small groups.
- ❖ It is for anybody who is independent. You need motivation.
- ❖ Everyone is welcome. The schools promote diversity.
- ❖ Could be for everyone.
- ❖ Not for everyone. Some people need proms, dances, and cliques.

7. What do your friends think about you attending this school?

- ❖ They are critics; don't like the idea. Some friends don't want them to go to chartered schools. They think chartered schools are slacker schools for kids with drug problems. Chartered schools have a bad image. (x3)
- ❖ They want to attend but can't. They wish they went to my school. (x3)
- ❖ They like it.
- ❖ Older friends wish they would have had this change.
- ❖ They think it's weird. Stupid.
- ❖ They don't understand.
- ❖ They don't care.
- ❖ Most friends go to the school or dislike it.
- ❖ They want me to be happy and are cool with my choices.
- ❖ A lot of them looked into the school and now attend it.

8. What do your parents think about you attending this school?

- ❖ Some parents make students go (x2).
- ❖ Some parents support students.
- ❖ Parents love being involved.
- ❖ Parents think the school was a good decision with good results. They are supportive.
- ❖ Parents think it's a good fit.
- ❖ Parents trust my decision. Don't have much to say. They're happy if I'm happy.
- ❖ Parents didn't like it at first until they saw student doing better.
- ❖ Parents are worried student is not being challenged enough.
- ❖ No problems. Like the school.
- ❖ Some students don't live with parents anymore.