

MEA Advocate

'91 session wrap-up

## Charter schools given go-ahead

Charter schools, long opposed by supporters of public education in Minnesota, were approved in this session's education omnibus bill. The MEA lobbied heavily against the proposal as these schools would operate free of most state regulations and quality safeguards. The association also believes that chartered schools may help pave the road to private school vouchers and more public funding for private education, a belief shared by Representatives. Bob McEachern (DFL-Maple Lake) and Alice Johnson (DFL-Spring Lake Park).

McEachern said he and Rep. Jerry Bauerly (DFL-Sauk Rapids) were the only members of the conference committee to vote against charter schools. "I've been against charter schools for years, and I'll work to get this provision removed during the next legislative session. But I'll need help. There are some interests who like this and now they have their foot in the door."

McEachern said only licensed teachers will be allowed to open charter schools, but that this legislation "may help pave the way" for unlicensed teachers to become involved.

With education funding tighter this year than ever, chartered schools will tap directly into revenue

sources that are needed for public education. Association leaders and other public school advocates fear the creation of elite academies for the few and second-rate schools for the rest -- a multi-tiered system with no guarantee of equity in facilities or curriculum.

Rep. Johnson also opposed charter schools saying, "I don't support public funding for private schools. I don't know how we will be able to stop this idea from growing. It's a step toward vouchers."

MEA Chief Lobbyist Cheryl Furrer said the association focused intensely on this issue throughout the legislative session and put its full efforts behind defeating the measure. MEA lobby groups who visited the capitol were briefed on its importance and urged to lobby legislators against it.

The bill will also allow public money to follow some students at risk of not graduating to non-public, non-sectarian schools. Though McEachern opposed charter schools he said he favored this provision as it allows at-risk students more opportunities. "There just are not enough alternative schools for these kids, and there are waiting lists for those that do exist." Students must be at least 16 years of age in order to participate in the program.