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OUTCOME-BASED CHARTER SCHOOLS

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The outcome-based charter schools ~~bill~~ allows Minnesota teachers, with innovative ideas to improve learning, to form and operate an independent public school. In order to provide real choice for learners, genuine differences in philosophy, methods, and structure are necessary. Since school reform is often slow in already existing systems, the 1991 legislature has provided a means for teachers to demonstrate new models of education unrestrained by many statutes and rules now governing local school districts.

PURPOSES

The purpose of charter schools is to: improve individual learning; increase learning opportunities for learners; use different and innovative teaching methods; measure learning outcomes using different and innovative forms of measurement; establish new forms of accountability for schools; or create new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be responsible for a learning program at the school site.

ORGANIZATION AND FUNDING

Each charter school is in charge of its own destiny. A school is to be organized and operated as a cooperative or a nonprofit organization, offering a nonsectarian educational program. The school's board of directors will determine all aspects of the learner-centered, results-oriented educational program and be responsible for its management and administration. General education revenue, capital expenditure equipment revenue, special education aid, and other aid, grants and revenue for which no levy is required, will flow directly from the state to the charter schools.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

A board of directors will be elected by parents of students enrolled and the staff employed by a school. Teachers employed by the school must make up the majority of members on the board. The board of directors is responsible for hiring and dismissing staff, budgeting, contracting for services, curriculum, and other operating procedures. The board of directors can sue and be sued, but may not levy taxes or issue bonds.

ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS

A charter school may determine the age or grade levels to be served by the school, the philosophical approach, the focus of the curriculum, the teaching/learning methods, and may target a specific population. The school must accept an eligible learner who submits a timely application as long as there is space available.

GETTING AUTHORIZATION TO BECOME A CHARTER SCHOOL

In 1991 the Minnesota legislature enacted a law that permits the creation of up to eight charter schools in the state. A local public school board may authorize one or more licensed teachers to form and operate an outcome-based school after receiving approval from the State Board of Education. A school board can authorize a maximum of two charter schools. Teachers may seek sponsorship outside the district in which the school will be located.

SPONSORSHIP AND AUTHORIZATION

The group of teachers and others interested in forming a charter school must write a 3-5 page letter of intent to the prospective sponsoring district school board. This letter of intent should include: a description of the program which carries out one or more of the purposes in the legislation; the age/grade levels of the student body and length of school year; an overview of the learning outcomes and how they will be measured; the plan for managing and administering the school; methods to be used for financial and student accounting; and the types and amount of insurance coverage.

When the school board decides to support the charter school, a notarized letter indicating the terms and conditions under which it would sponsor the school and a copy of the signed minutes of the school board meeting in which the approval was given are sent with the school's letter of intent to the State Board of Education for approval. Approval authorizes the school board to enter into a contract with the board of directors of the charter school. A school board may not authorize the formation of a charter school without State Board approval.

CREATING THE SCHOOL

Persons forming a charter school must be or become a cooperative or non-profit corporation under the laws of Minnesota. A provisional or temporary board of directors may act until such time as the by-laws of the organization indicate the procedure for electing the permanent board of directors. The temporary board has the authority to write the contract, hire the staff, and perform other duties necessary to establish the school.

The sponsoring school board may authorize an approved school before the applicant has secured its space, equipment, facilities, and personnel if authority is necessary to raise working capital.

A school district must accept a teacher's written request for an extended leave of absence to teach in a charter school. Further extensions must be granted. Teachers may continue to aggregate benefits and credits in the teachers' retirement association by paying both the employer and employee contributions.