

Fax for Lynn Olson

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Lynn

Word from California (not yet double-checked):

The charter schools bill came out of the Assembly committee April 1 on a 13-0 vote. This reflects a major concession the chair made to the CTA, which had threatened to oppose the bill unless teachers were left employees of the district and in the district bargaining unit. It remains to be seen what the CTA will do after April 27 (the deadline for the voucher initiative to get its signatures). Clearly it would have sent a wrong message for the charter bill to have been killed before then.

The CTA presented a list of requests for change also to the Senate author which "would have only the 'intent' section standing", one person said. The senator declined. The bill will come up in his committee April 8. This will produce a more interesting test of who's where on the real issues.

The two authors are different. Eastin is newer to the Legislature. (Can you really chair a major committee there in your second term?) Hart has been there 10 years. Eastin is up for re-election this fall; Hart is not.

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By far the most interesting charter proposal in MN comes to a vote tonight (April 6) in Mounds View. It involves an 'alternative learning center'. These were authorized in 1987; the year the Legislature set up the categorical choice program known as 'graduation incentives' for "kids not doing well": parent, pregnant, behind in age/grade, delinquent, truant, etc. The Mounds View center was one of the earliest. The Department clearly regards it as one of the best.

80% of the kids are over 16. They don't have to go to school. They will come only for they feel is useful. They aren't going to attend an ALC that isn't different from the school they quit before. So the ALC does things differently. But often when it comes to the district for permission the district administrators say "That would set a precedent we can't live with for the district as a whole".

I'd heard from a person around the district last summer that this situation was developing. It came to a head late in the year. The ALC director is a public-sector entrepreneur. Kids can come to the ALC on their own, and it does draw from an area: only about 30% come from Mounds View. Enrollment has gone from 250 (at least part-year) to 500 to 750. It operates in leased space

in a suburban office park. Last winter the superintendent announced plans to transfer the director to some post in central administration. The ALC resisted. The superintendent held firm.

The ALC then proposed to convert to charter status. It says the problem about being different will be eased if the school and the district "live in different houses" (organizations). The ALC made its proposal to the board March 23. The business manager and the personnel director could not find a significant financial or jobs impact on the district. The staff had voted 32-2 for the change, so the president of the union local (MEA affiliate) said "We are not opposed".

The board spent a good part of a special meeting March 30 making a list of 'questions' and 'concerns'. (The list itself is eloquent testimony to what a board really cares about.) April 3 the superintendent announced he would recommend the board (now divided 4-3 against) vote 'no'. The school figures it has nothing to lose, so is trying to overturn his recommendation.

The superintendent is Burt Nygren: 636-3650. The ALC director is John Seday. His deputy (with perhaps the best perspective on the whole dispute) is Dan Daly. The center is 482-8203.

It's a fascinating case, in the context now of the national report about school boards.

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The state MFT and MEA organizations have been urging repeal of the charter law (or, as some people feel, at least a record vote) and when the education omnibus bill came to the House floor April 2 the chair of the education committee, Bob McEachern did make a motion to throw it out. The motion failed. But opponents probably have not given up.

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Here's the Star/Trib coverage of the report about school boards.

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one page follows