

OTHER OPINIONS

Charter schools

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In an effort to make what it considers to be improvements in public education, the 1991 Minnesota Legislature approved a law that allows for the establishment of an alternative type of public school called charter schools.

Charter schools use the out-come-based method of teaching and are run by teachers. The schools receive regular school aid — \$3,050 per pupil per year — yet they operate independently of local school districts and are exempt from all local and state regulations except health and safety rules.

The schools are eligible for other state money, amounting to about \$65 per student, for capital expenses such as computers and other equipment.

Charter schools can be started only by licensed teachers who get permission from a local school district — not necessarily the one in which the charter school is located — and the State Board of Education, and then negotiate a contract for up to three years with the sponsoring district.

Charters are being sought in school districts for existing elementary schools in Rapidan and Emily after the local school boards rejected those proposals. A charter was rejected last February for a school in Northfield that would have emphasized peace and justice.

Proposals are pending in Minneapolis, St. Paul, Rochester, St. Cloud and Mounds View.

While state and national legislators had good intentions in crafting the charter school law, it's an idea whose time has not yet come. The premise is that our current educational system is inadequate and that change can only be effected by radically altering the structure.

There are several reasons for opposing charter schools. The funding that will be directed to charter schools will decrease the level of funding and services that go to public schools. Charter schools will take valuable resources away from public education just for the sake of experimentation. Also, the law will create an elite system of education that will not be accountable to the public, even though the public is paying the cost.

There is nothing wrong with giving teachers the opportunity to try new methods of teaching. We should be encouraging teachers and school districts to find different methods to make education as challenging as possible for our young people. But if education is to be improved, it should not be done by creating private schools. Improvements should be made that will benefit everyone.