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Innovative charter schools are running into opposition

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Minnesota's charter schools were supposed to free teachers and parents of school bureaucracy.

But the bureaucracy isn't willing to let go.

After fairly speedy local and state approval for the state's first two charter schools, in Winona and Toivola-Meadowlands, proposals for other schools are running into varying degrees of resistance.

In Northfield, the school board defeated a proposal for a chartered middle school last month. The teachers' union in Winona is fighting the already approved school in that city. The St. Cloud school board is still discussing a charter proposal that it first heard about almost four months ago. And in Rapidan, a group seeking a charter for a soon-to-be-closed elementary school was rejected twice by area school boards before finding a sponsor in a district 40 miles away.

"There have been some great examples of what I hoped would happen:

that school boards would open up the system to give children more choices," said state Rep. Becky Kelso, DFL-Shakopee, a sponsor of the charter school law. "But there are also examples of resistance... that demonstrates lack of faith in teachers' ability to run things and in parents' ability to choose for their children.

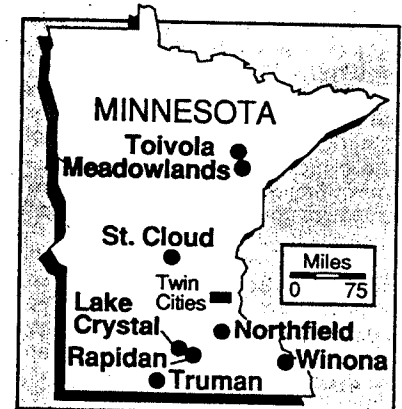
"I'm afraid there is a trend developing here."

Minnesota is the first state in the nation to allow the charters, which

are supposed to be innovative schools run by teachers. Although free of most state rules and regulations, they receive the same per-pupil payments that public schools get.

Although supporters initially wanted the State Board of Education to award charters, political compromise led to a law that requires the sponsorship of a school district. As some had predicted, that's where most of the problems have developed.

Charter supporters say the purest charter proposal was in Northfield,



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but the school board voted it down last month, 5 to 2.

A group of six people had proposed a 100-student middle school centered on the idea that students can work to

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