
Celebrating Chartering @ 30 – MINNESOTA'S STORY

THE FOUR PROBLEMS FACING THE SIX CHARTERS IN 1994

So, what were the problems that the six charter schools were facing in 1994? The MN House Research Report found four problems:

TRANSPORTATION, FACILITIES, SPECIAL EDUCATION, and RELATIONSHIPS WITH SPONSORS.

Transportation

The report stated that the transportation arrangement in law can cause problems for both the charter and the sponsoring district. *"The charter schools are frustrated because they must coordinate their calendars and starting times in order to fit the district's transportation schedule. This makes it difficult to structure anything but a traditional schedule."* On the other hand, *"The districts are frustrated because of poor communication from some charter schools on the number and location of pupils that will require transportation and requests from far corners of the district for transportation to the charter schools."* Districts pointed out that transporting students from all over the district to the charter could be very expensive.

The report pointed out the unique transportation issues of special education students who attend Metro Deaf stating, *"This problem is symptomatic of the transportation problems most districts face when transporting special education students – it is not solely a charter school issue."*

Facilities

The report noted that there were a number of problems with facilities. First, *"Charters have no access to bonding for buildings or other levies to meet district's ongoing facilities needs."* Second, *"... the charters have searched, with varying degrees of success, for inexpensive and suitable space."* Third, while a couple of charters lease old school buildings no longer used by districts for relatively "negligible rent", schools must find funds to pay for repairs, handicap accessibility, and ensuring the building is up to code. Fourth, because schools have a hard time finding facilities, one school is exploring the idea of constructing a new facility.

Special Education

The report starts out by stating, "School districts throughout the state are facing significant, unreimbursed costs for special education." It then points out that charter schools face two problems. The first problem was that "Many are unfamiliar with the special education funding process, and they were unprepared to provide the assessments and services needed." The second issue was that "Some charters simply assumed that the resident district would provide any services they required."

Relationship with Sponsor

The report states that "This appears to be one of the most problematic areas for both the charter school and the sponsoring district." The report pointed out that sponsoring districts were unsure of their role in terms of both accountability and responsibility to provide services to the schools. Charters on the other hand felt like they were "being tolerated at best and at worst unwanted". The report goes on to state, "Nowhere in law, rule, or past practice is there a formal process for charter schools to interact with their sponsoring district." It points out that both the sponsor and charter need to define their roles and build a relationship and that each situation is unique.

COMMENT: The interesting thing is that 30 years later these are still issues in both similar and somewhat different ways.

NEXT WEEK: THE EARLY YEARS OF THE CHARTER SCHOOL LAW – 1991-1994



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