

Charter School Sponsorship Annual Report Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Academic and Student Affairs October, 2005

Introduction

This report was prepared to meet the requirements of Board Policy 3.28 Charter School Sponsorship using information submitted by each institution within the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System that is a sponsor of one or more charter school. The information it contains describes charter school activities and performance during 2003-2004, the most recent year for which complete charter school reports are available.

Background

Charter schools are public schools established under Minnesota Statute 124D.10 as either a cooperative or a non-profit corporation. The first charter school in Minnesota, and in the nation, was approved in 1991 and became operational in 1992. Each charter school must have an elected board of directors, which is responsible for the school's education program, management, and administration, and a sponsor, which can be a school district, a public or private postsecondary institution, or a nonprofit organization. Operating and reporting requirements for charter schools are articulated in MS 124D.10 and in rules and regulations promulgated by the Minnesota Department of Education. Sponsorship contracts set forth responsibilities of and requirements for charter school boards and sponsors. Minnesota Statute also sets forth the means by which a sponsor may terminate or not renew its sponsorship contract.

General Trends and Issues

The 2003-2004 academic year was a relatively quiet year in Minnesota for charter schools. While significant challenges to the charter school movement are underway in several other states, no major issues or problems regarding charter schools were raised in Minnesota. This may indicate a growing maturity after more than a decade of charter school operations in the state. By Spring 2005, 104 Minnesota charter schools were serving more than 17,500 students.

The E-12 Omnibus Bill, which was approved during the special session, included a number of provisions regarding charter school operations. Those pertaining to sponsors included:

- Requiring a charter school sponsor to file an affidavit with the education commissioner that states among its terms how the sponsor will oversee the fiscal and student performance of the charter school;
- Requiring the education commissioner to approve or disapprove a charter school sponsor's proposed authorization within 90 days;
- Requiring that the contract between a charter school sponsor and charter school include a process and criteria for monitoring and evaluating the fiscal and student performance of the charter school;
- Requiring that a charter school sponsor, before renewing the charter school contract, submit timely information that permits the Minnesota Department of Education to review and comment on the performance of a charter school; and
- Allowing the education commissioner to approve a different eligible sponsor if either a sponsor or charter school board of directors wants to voluntarily terminate a contract at the end of the contract term and setting forth other requirements involving termination.

Charter Sponsors in the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities

Six colleges and universities within the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System sponsored a total of eight charter schools during the 2003-2004 academic year. This represents the same number of sponsors and an increase of one school (Ubah Medical Academy, sponsored by Century College) compared to those reported in the 2003 Charter School Sponsorship Annual Report. Metropolitan State University ended its sponsorship of the Four Winds Charter School at the end of the 2003-2004 year, and next year's report will note that Saint Paul College ended its sponsorship of the Minnesota Academy of Technology as of June 30, 2005.

Institutional Report Summaries

Sponsor: Alexandria Technical College

School: Lakes Area Charter School

Location: Osakis, MN

Status of Sponsorship: Continuing

Sponsor Comments: "The highlight of last year was the graduation of 44 seniors in May 2004. Many of these students had either previously dropped out or were displaying serious academic problems when they first came to the Lakes Area Charter School. Most would not have likely graduated in the traditional high school environment. This graduation number represents those similar to mid-sized, rural school districts in our area. Individual student goals are set through a team effort of faculty, staff, students and parents. Mandatory parent/teacher/student conferences during the first week of school are utilized for goal setting, graduation progress review and overall communication."

School Mission and Programs : The Lakes Area Charter School was established to meet the needs of students not successful in traditional school settings through hands-on learning in one-on-one or small group teaching situations. Academic and transitional (to work or postsecondary education) needs are both given a high priority. The school's program includes Customized Education, Project-based Learning, and Business and Technology.

Enrollment : Lakes Area Charter School (LACS) has seen a significant increase in enrollment, with end-of-year enrollments growing from 15 in 2001-2002 to 80 in 2003-2004, including 54 males, 33 females, and 25 special education students. At the present time, no racial/ethnic minorities are enrolled in the school. The school is currently operating at capacity with a waiting list.

Staff: 5 teachers and one administrator (who also teaches in the school), all licensed.

Board of Directors: The elected board consists of two teachers, two parents, and the school's principal.

Academic Progress: LACS has adopted as its academic goals to display student progress toward graduation by passing the state basic standards tests in reading, writing, and mathematics. A high percentage of students taking the BSTs have passed these tests, but the data reported make it difficult to determine what overall percentages of students have passed the BSTs in each of these three areas. The school has found that its biggest challenge is in addressing the very low level of academic skills that students demonstrate upon arrival at the school. Significant time is devoted to identifying and addressing areas of academic need. Good progress was also noted toward achieving the school's non-academic goals of improving attendance, providing appropriate space for all instruction, and building parent involvement and community support.

Audit Summary : The audit report, prepared by Gary W. Paulson, CPA, noted an inability to audit general fixed assets since the school does not maintain fixed assets records which provide complete accounting control over the quantities and cost of its general fixed assets. With the

exception of the effects of any adjustments that might have been determined necessary had they audited the general fixed asset account group, the auditor issued his opinion that the general purpose financial statements present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of the school and the results of its operations.

Sponsor: Century College

School: Twin Cities International Elementary School (TIES)

Location: 277 12th Avenue North, Minneapolis, MN

Status of Sponsorship: Continuing

Sponsor Comments: “Century College continues to be the proud sponsor of three exceptional schools...The schools have an East African focus and are serving predominately immigrant communities. Their success with educating immigrant communities has received local, state, national and international recognition...In short, we are honored to sponsor these three exceptional schools.”

School Mission and Programs : TIES was established to maximize opportunities for immigrant children through educational innovations and specialized programming to ensure their educational and emotional development. The program was designed to provide specialized language training, cultural adaptation, help alleviate personal traumas, and provide a supportive family learning community. TIES continues to use the Success for All Reading Program and restructured its math program.

Enrollment : Enrollment at TIES totaled 343 students in June 2004. The school has found enrollment growth both a sign of strong community support and a challenge as they seek to integrate new students into the school community.

Staff: TIES employed 24 homeroom teachers, as well as a reading coordinator and technology coordinator. Staff development has focused on reading instruction, ESL best practice, and the EnVOY nonverbal classroom management system.

Board of Directors: The board consists of nine elected members, including three licensed teachers and three community members. In addition, there are three ex-officio members, including the two co-directors and a Century College representative.

Academic Progress: TIES did not achieve the state’s mandatory annual yearly progress, or AYP, goals during the 2003-2004 academic year and has conducted an extensive analysis of test scores to identify and address the cause of deficiencies. The analysis found that newly arrived students were the primary cause of low test scores; students who had attended the school for two or three years generally received acceptable test scores. In addition, the school has increased reading instructional time from 90 minutes to two hours per day.

Audit Summary : The auditor, Larson Allen, issued a “clean” audit report. The school has a strong fund balance and received three grants during the 2003-2004 school year, which helped fund a voluntary desegregation exchange with a suburban school; purchase curriculum materials and staff training for the Core Knowledge curriculum; and develop family literacy materials.

Sponsor: Century College

School: Minnesota International Middle School (MIMS)

Location: 277 12th Avenue North, Minneapolis, MN

Status of Sponsorship: Continuing

Sponsor Comments: See above

School Mission and Programs : The mission of MIMS is “to focus on the unique needs of newly arrived immigrants.” Like TIES, it uses a wide variety of approaches to meet these needs, including involving students actively in their communities, focusing on internal relations,

emphasizing fostering peace among people and nations, using out-of-school learning projects, and connecting students in the school with students throughout the world.

Enrollment: Enrollment at MIMS continues to grow. In June 2004, the school ended its year with 134 student in grades 5-8.

Staff: MIMS has expanded its teaching force from six to twelve teachers. Staff development has focused on helping new teachers understand the school's mission and to develop skills specifically in the areas of reading, ESL, and nonverbal classroom management (using the EnVOY system). Teachers are also assisted by a reading coordinator and a technology coordinator.

Board of Directors: The board consists of nine members, including seven community members and two teachers. The board also includes the same three ex-officio members serving on the TIES board.

Academic Progress: MIMS did not meet the state's adequate yearly progress, or AYP, goals in 2003-2004. With changes in the schools' test-taking curriculum and after school/Saturday program, the school is confident that fifth grade students will make AYP in 2004-2005.

However, very low-level reading skills of new seventh grade students will continue to challenge the ability of the school to get them to skills levels required for AYP. One strategy used to address this challenge was a complete restructuring of the seventh and eighth grade programs; another was an increase in the rigor of academic programs through adoption of a more typical middle school schedule and hiring of teachers with majors in key disciplines.

Audit Summary: The auditor, Larson Allen, issued a "clean" audit report, noting one material weakness (involving a lack of segregation of duties, a common finding for a small organization) and a concern about insuring or securing deposits, which is being monitored by the school to determine future options.

Sponsor: Century College

School: Ubah Medical Academy (UMA)

Location: 277 12th Avenue North, Minneapolis, MN

Status of Sponsorship: New

Sponsor Comments: See above

School Mission and Programs: The mission of Ubah Medical Academy is to provide immigrant and refugee students with a rigorous, academic high school that will prepare them for college and the pursuit of medical or other meaningful careers in the community.

Enrollment: Average daily membership in the school in 2003-2004 was 120 students, the majority of whom were ninth graders. Students range from pre-literate 18-year-olds to 14-year-olds reading at the college level. Many students previously attended other Minnesota schools where they were not academically successful, while nearly one third are having their first educational experience in the United States at UMA. Ninety-five percent of the schools' students are East African.

Staff: UMA currently employs 7 teachers and two additional teaching staff. Because teachers were hired primarily on the basis of their general teaching ability, many have invested significant time and energy focused on being effective in a primarily ESL environment.

Board of Directors: The board is made up of eight elected members, including three teachers, three community members/parents, and two school staff.

Academic Progress: In its first year of operation, UMA focused on ability-based courses in language arts, social studies, mathematics, Arabic, science, and health science; the school offers no electives at the present time. Graduation requirements include 4 credits each in language arts, mathematics, and science. Testing using state-mandated instruments, the NQWEA/NAL tests in

language and math and the Woodcock-Munoz Language Battery will be combined with curriculum-based measures to form a baseline to measure future student progress.

Audit Summary: The auditor, Larson Allen, issued a “clean” audit report for 2003-2004. The only reported material weakness involved segregation of duties, a common challenge for a small entity.

Sponsor: Metropolitan State University

School: Four Directions Charter School

Location: Minneapolis, MN

Status of Sponsorship: Metropolitan State University ended its sponsorship on June 30, 2004.

Sponsor Comments: Due to differences in expectations and direction, Metropolitan State University and Four Directions Charter School reached a mutual decision to end their relationship as of the end of the 2003-2004 school year.

School Mission and Programs: The Four Directions Charter School was established in 1999 to address the educational needs of American Indian students. Utilizing a culturally based educational curriculum which includes American Indian history, language, culture, basic skills, computer skills and experiential learning through media arts, Four Directions’ goals are to improve student attendance, test scores, special education assessment, and graduation rates.

Enrollment: Enrollment has remained constant, with 76 students enrolled during both the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 academic years. Once again, all of the schools’ 17 seniors graduated.

Staff: Six licensed teachers and a school social worker.

Board of Directors: Seven members, including two licensed teachers in the school, a nonacademic instructor at the school, the school social worker, two parents, and one community member.

Academic Progress: During the 2003-2004 school year, all seniors completed and passed the Minnesota Basic Skills Tests (BSTs) in reading and mathematics. Among other students who took BSTs, 57% of sophomores and 75% of juniors passed the writing test and 16% of students passed the math test. Students were also tested using the California Achievement Tests (CATs), standardized tests that measure reading and mathematics skills. Of the 38 students who completed Pre- and Post-CATs, achievement levels increased by an average of 1.8 grade levels.

Audit Summary: The audit, prepared by Chuck Rinkey, Ltd., CPA, identified no reportable conditions and expressed the opinion that the general purpose financial statements present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of the school and its operations.

Sponsor: Rochester Community and Technical College

School: Rochester Off Campus (ROC) Charter School

Location: Rochester, MN

Status of Sponsorship: Continuing

Sponsor Comments: “Rochester Community and Technical College continues to enjoy its sponsorship of Rochester Off Campus. ROC is very well managed, provides excellent education to its population base, and prepares their graduates for their future careers and for their duties as citizens.”

School Mission and Programs: Rochester Off Campus was established “to assist young people in developing the life, work, and academic skills necessary for transition to adulthood and the workplace.” It seeks to provide a safe and healthy learning community that nurtures educational rigor and engages students, parents, and the community in a partnership to that end. Intended to serve as a transition to larger, more traditional schools, ROC has instead found that students wish

to stay and that the school can better help students meet their goals with a more stable, less transient student population.

Enrollment: The school currently serves 125 students in grades 9 through 12. Forty percent of the school's population receives special education services.

Staff: Eleven licensed teachers, one para-professional, one business manager, and one administrator.

Board of Directors: The school has a nine-member board, made up of five teachers, one parent, one postsecondary representative, and three community members. There are also four ex-officio members, representing RCTC, students, and administration (business manager and administrator).

Academic Progress: ROC focuses on four primary academic benchmarks – the Adult Basic Learning Examination, the Minnesota Basic Skills Tests, the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment, and attendance. During the 2003-2004 school year, Adult Basic Learning Examination results showed improved grade equivalency scores in both number operations (from 3.8 in Fall 2003 to 5.6 in Spring 2004) and reading comprehension (from 4.0 in Fall 2003 to 5.8 in Spring 2004). On the Minnesota Basic Skills Tests (BSTs), improvement was seen in reading (with a pass rate in 2003 of 49% increasing to 57% in 2004) and writing (with a pass rate in 2003 of 69% increasing to 83% in 2004), while math scores declined (from a pass rate of 48% in 2003 to 36% in 2004). In the area of attendance, ROC compared the attendance rate of students in the year prior to attending ROC against the student's first year at ROC. The average number of dates missed per student in the year prior to enrollment at ROC was 24 days, while the per student average at ROC was 9 days.

Audit Summary: The audit report prepared by Larson Allen noted two reportable conditions: limited segregation of duties, which is a common problem for small organizations, and a lack of sufficient check writing controls. The audit provided recommended improvements for check writing.

Sponsor: St. Cloud State University

School: Fraser Academy

Location: 1601 Laurel Avenue, Minneapolis

Status of Sponsorship: Continuing; opened Fall 2004

Sponsor Comments: Fraser Academy has a strong board of community members, a skilled director, and a very active parent committee. Committees are actively working in the areas of personnel, curriculum accountability, financial, facilities, recruitment, parent involvement, and special education. Faculty members from the St. Cloud State University College of Education (sponsoring agency) are a part of the accountability and special education planning committees. As it looked ahead to the 2004-2005 school year, SCSU is concerned that initial enrollment was below projections and about the high percentage of students with special needs.

School Mission and Programs: Fraser Academy is an inclusive public elementary school (beginning with K-2 in 2004 and adding a grade each subsequent year) providing an individualized learning program to meet the unique needs of each student. While maintaining a high standard of academics, Fraser Academy cultivates a sense of respect, responsibility, and community. The comprehensive elementary program meets the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of a diverse range of students. The program promotes learning through individualized curricula and small, multi-age communities that support students, families, and teachers. Features of Fraser Academy include an inclusive, developmentally appropriate environment in which the individual needs of all children are met in partnership with teacher and family support; increased learning opportunities for children through relatively low pupil-to-

teacher ratios, small class size, and a flexible curriculum that is geared to meet each student's needs through Individual Learning Plans; and a partnership with St. Cloud State University to help develop and maintain the school's teaching methodologies, unique resources, knowledge base, and support network.

Enrollment: NA (school opened in Fall 2004)

Staff: Full-time director, office manager, special education coordinator, and occupational therapists (2); part-time nurse and school psychologist; teaching force consisting of special education teachers (4), elementary teachers (3.2), speech language (1.6), adaptive physical education teacher (.8); and 15 special education paraprofessionals

Board of Directors: Twelve members, including leaders in education and in the community

Academic Progress: Data retreats are planned to review student data. Monitoring of academic progress consists of Individual Learning Plans and student portfolios that look at identified benchmark skills in reading, written language, and mathematics on a bi-weekly basis.

Audit Summary: Auditors LarsonAllen issued a "clean" audit report and noted several minor problems that are "typically only a first year problem" which they expect will be corrected as the school becomes fully functional.

Sponsor: Saint Paul College

School: Minnesota Academy of Technology

Location: St. Paul, MN

Status of Sponsorship: Saint Paul College ended its sponsorship on June 30, 2005.

Sponsor Comments: Transitions Charter School, Minnesota Academy of Technology, and the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) had a tentative agreement to a change of sponsorship, through which Transitions would essentially have acquired a Saint Paul location for their school and thus absorbed MAT, assuming responsibility for the school's sponsorship. This was a complex undertaking involving numerous meetings with MDE staff on how best to accomplish this under the current charter school law. Ultimately, the transfer was not approved by MDE and the school closed in June 2005.

School Mission and Programs: The Minnesota Academy of Technology has as its mission to seamlessly integrate technology into the full high school curriculum. Its curriculum is designed to fully integrate the use of wireless laptops in the instructional delivery process and to use project-based learning and internships as means to better prepare students for either postsecondary education or employment.

Enrollment: Fall 2003 enrollment was 63, and the average daily membership for the year was 56. Both fell below the school's planned enrollment of 100 students. The school is developing an aggressive marketing plan to encourage parents considering private schools to add MAT to their array of options.

Staff: Seven licensed teachers and a licensed superintendent

Board of Directors: The school has a nine-member board made up of parents, teachers, technology industry representatives, and ex-officio members.

Academic Progress: No academic progress information was provided to complete this item.

Audit Summary: The audit report prepared by Larson Allen noted one reportable condition: limited segregation of duties, which is a common problem for small organizations.