

WRITTEN TESTIMONY

**Fraud Prevention and State Agency Oversight Policy Committee
Minnesota House of Representatives**

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Agenda Item: Continued Discussion – Charter Schools

Submitted by:

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Chair Robbins and Members of the Committee:

I submit this testimony in connection with your continued discussion of charter schools to provide a family-level perspective on why alternative educational pathways are not only necessary, but essential to a functioning system.

My family chose an alternative educational model not because of expulsion, truancy, or academic failure, but because we were seeking alignment (i.e., academic, structural, and developmental) for our children within a system that was not meeting those needs.

We are a Roman Catholic, first generation German-Cameroonian American blended family, and preserving our values, traditions and expectations, for our children's development is central to our decision-making as a family. However, our choice to pursue an alternative educational path was not based solely on cultural considerations.

It was also shaped by a broader reality: not all schools are created equal, even when operating within the same district.

In our experience, variability in instructional quality, responsiveness to families, and overall school climate have had a direct impact on our children's educational environment. These differences have not been theoretical or experienced in abstract—they were lived, cumulative, and consequential.

Over time, it became clear that the educational system available to us was not designed to adapt to our children's needs, nor to meaningfully incorporate the role of engaged parents seeking partnership. When variability of this kind exists within a single district, it raises not only educational concerns, but questions of consistency, access, and accountability.

We also encountered a recurring concern related to transparency. In situations where questions arose or concerns were raised, the response often appeared structured in a way that prioritized institutional protection rather than open, balanced engagement with families.

This created an environment where it was difficult to fully understand decision-making processes, challenge outcomes, or participate as equal partners in our children's education. The result was not simply frustration, but a breakdown in trust. In an educational system, transparency is not an added feature; it is foundational to accountability. When it is limited, families are left to navigate uncertainty without meaningful recourse, which can ultimately contribute to the decision to exit the system altogether.

We made the decision to leave before our children were pushed out by discipline or failure. That distinction is important to highlight: our exit was not reactive, it was preventative. And it was disruptive in its own way, requiring significant sacrifice and restructuring as a family.

Parental Liberty Interests and Educational Authority

Our decision was also grounded in a principle long recognized in American jurisprudence: that parents have a fundamental liberty interest in directing the upbringing and education of their children.

This includes not only academic instruction, but the transmission of cultural values, moral frameworks, and identity.

For our family, the issue was not disagreement with public education as a concept. It was the absence of a meaningful pathway within the system that allowed us to remain fully engaged without compromising our ability to raise our children in accordance with our values and expressive identity as a German-Cameroonian American family. At the core, we view education as a vehicle for contributing to the common good through the development of informed, capable, and responsible individuals.

When that alignment is not available, families are effectively placed in a position where participation requires compromise of core liberties or exit from the system altogether.

Charter-based models, particularly those that support flexible or online learning, can reduce that tension by allowing families to remain within a publicly accountable framework while still exercising their rights to direct their children's development. A great deal of formation happens at school, especially as our children spend the majority of their time with school personnel. A significant portion of children's development occurs within school environments, where values, expectations, and social frameworks are reinforced. When those environments operate without sufficient transparency or alignment with family expectations, it can create tension for families seeking to remain actively engaged in their children's development.

Alternative Educational Model: Structure and Outcomes

We transitioned to homeschooling through an online charter school model. Like many families, we experienced the challenges of online learning during the pandemic, but unlike many, we had already been navigating and refining this model for years.

We have now been in this structure for over seven years.

During that time:

- Our family developed a level of closeness and engagement that would not have been possible in a more fragmented system
- Our children were able to learn in an environment aligned with both academic expectations and family values
- We were able to reduce exposure to risks that are increasingly part of the modern school experience, including cyber-related harms and school safety concerns, while still ensuring rigorous education

Demonstrated Academic Outcomes

Our eldest child's trajectory reflects both rigor and successful preparation, even though his educational path did not follow a traditional, uninterrupted model.

He was academically advanced and engaged in a demanding course load, including:

- Advanced Placement (AP) coursework
- Four years of French language study
- Early progression into Algebra beginning in 8th grade
- Participation in Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO), accessing college-level instruction and earning college credit

He graduated in the top three of his high school class of approximately 1,000 students, reflecting sustained academic excellence within a large and competitive cohort.

While his path ultimately diverged from that traditional setting, the foundation built through our chosen educational approach allowed him to be successfully launched into postsecondary opportunity.

He was admitted to his first-choice institution, Hamline University, where he received the Presidential Scholarship award.

This outcome was not incidental. It reflects what is possible when students are supported in environments that align with their academic pace, family structure, and developmental needs.

Implications for Charter School Policy Design

Charter schools are often framed as options for students who are struggling academically, behaviorally, or systemically.

That framing is incomplete.

There are families like mine:

- Engaged
- High-functioning
- Proactively involved in their children's development

Who are not seeking remediation, but alignment, flexibility, and the ability to remain within the public system without sacrificing academic rigor, family safety, core values, or parental authority over decisions that shape their long-term development.

When those options are not available, families exit entirely or are forced into compliance structures that do not reflect their lived reality; thereby limiting future opportunities and constraining the development of resilience. This is especially true for children from recently immigrated families and those who are from a cultural background that is not considered to be the “majority”.

Charter schools, particularly those that support online and hybrid models, can serve as a bridge. They allow families to remain within a publicly accountable system with access to academically rigorous and meaningful opportunities, while accessing the flexibility necessary for their children to succeed. Whether it’s a family that is pooling resources for a child training for the Olympics, a child who is a professional actor, or a child whose inner light is dimmed to fit into a system that, in practice, can prioritize institutional stability over responsiveness to students and families that can, in practice, be reduced to statistical inputs within funding-driven systems.

Oversight, Transparency, and System Function

This committee’s focus on oversight is critical. Oversight must ensure not only that systems prevent fraud, but that they function as intended for the people they serve.

When families who are stable, engaged, and invested must leave the traditional system to meet their children’s needs, that is not a marginal issue. It is a signal.

It reflects:

- Structural limitations in educational delivery
- A lack of flexible, responsive pathways within public systems
- A misalignment between policy design and the civil liberties families are entitled to exercise

Closing

Charter schools are not only a safety net; they are also a mechanism through which the state can respect both accountability and the fundamental role of families in shaping their children’s education—a core American value.

A system that preserves both is not weaker. It is more responsive, more durable, and more consistent with the principles it is meant to uphold.

Thank you for your time and consideration in reviewing my written testimony.