



MN Association of  
Charter Schools

**TO:** House Fraud Prevention and Agency Oversight Chair and Committee Members

**FROM:** Minnesota Association of Charter Schools (MACS)

**RE:** Chartered Public Schools Presentation

**DATE:** April 13, 2026

My name is Joey Cienian, Executive Director of the Minnesota Association of Charter Schools, we serve approximately 170 chartered public schools and over 70,000 students across the state.

Charter schools are public schools that are free, fair, and open to all. Charters have no enrollment barriers to any family who wants to enroll their children, including all students with IEPs, and once they are full they have a randomized lottery. Charters are subject to the human rights law - the pupil fair dismissal act - the data practices law - and open meeting law.

Charters are subject to the same federal and state requirements to provide special education services and are subject to the same financial audits, audit procedures, and audit requirements as traditional public school districts. Charters are held in compliance by time bound legal contracts with authorizers who in turn are held accountable by MDE. If they do not fulfill their contract, they can be closed and sometimes are.

Charters are designed to meet community needs of students and families with innovative and personalized programs across the state with community boards that only have publicly elected local parents, teachers, and community members serving. Most Minnesota charters are small operations and many have teacher powered leadership structures. Many of our schools are among the highest-performing in the state, and many are [beat the odds schools](#). Compared to state averages, chartered public schools enroll:

- o A larger percentage of English Language Learner students (more than double - 25% vs. 10% statewide)
- o A larger percentage of Students of Color and Indigenous students (66% vs. 40% statewide)
- o A larger percentage of students that qualify for Free or Reduced Lunch (60% vs. 40% statewide)

To serve these diverse groups of students many of our schools have unique missions, from credit recovery and reengagement, to language immersion, to special education focused programs, demonstrating that quality can take many forms when it is grounded in student need.

Charter schools - just like any other types of public schools or government entities - sometimes have individuals who make mistakes or break the law. Let me be emphatically clear: Any conflict



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of interest, fraud, or diversion of resources away from students is unacceptable. Our organization and our sector strongly condemn any unacceptable behavior or misuse of public funds. Individuals who engage in that behavior must be held accountable and prosecuted vigorously.

We expect authorizers and the Minnesota Department of Education to continue to enforce the law and hold schools accountable when issues arise. Charter schools are public schools, and we take seriously our responsibility to protect both students and public funds.

It is also important to recognize that Minnesota's charter sector has not stood still. Over the past three bienniums, we have worked in partnership with MDE, authorizers, and community partners to pass dozens of extensive and multifaceted bipartisan accountability and transparency reforms that are now being implemented statewide.

These include strengthened training requirements and conflict of interest provisions for boards and authorizers, gift bans for all board members and directors, nepotism policy requirements for boards and contracts, strengthened procurement requirements for purchases using state funding, new Affiliated Building Company guardrails around building ownership and conflict of interest, enhanced training and qualification requirements for school leaders, and strengthened clearer accountability for authorizers through the MDE evaluation process.

We have also established new protections related to contracts with commercial interests; Charter Management Organizations (CMOs) and Education Management Organizations (EMOs), strengthened board-level financial oversight requirements, and have given authorizers new authority to require additional financial expertise when schools face fiscal challenges and are under corrective action.

In addition, schools must now demonstrate clear market need and demand to start a new program or expand an existing one.

Finally, transparency is extremely important in our sector: we've passed laws requiring all charter contracts, school performance evaluations, notices of intervention, deficiency, concern, correction action, probationary status, or notices of intent to terminate to be available to the public and school communities in real time on authorizers' and schools' websites. Schools must also now distribute to the public and local parents - notices of interventions, correction actions, and probationary status from authorizer requests.

These reforms are already helping identify and address issues in real time.

Our sector has consistently responded to challenges with stronger systems, greater transparency and accountability, and a continued focus on students. My organization would be glad to go further in depth explaining any of these new reforms and we continue to build out new accountability legislation each year to address any new issues that arise.

We remain committed to protecting family public school choice and ensuring access to innovative, high-quality public school options across Minnesota. Thank you.



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In partnership,

Joey Cienian - Executive Director MN Association of Charter Schools