2010 Minnesota Charter Public Schools Essay Writing Contest:
Winning Entries

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In conjunction with
National Charter Schools Week
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- The many educators, family members, and friends who support and encourage these emerging young scholars, artists, and writers.

With gratitude,

Center for School Change staff
GRADES K-2

FIRST PLACE
Donnell Bratton (Concordia Language Academy)

SECOND PLACE
Zackariah Al-saeed (Riverway Learning Community)
Zayda Hernandez Cardoso (Partnership Academy)
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THIRD PLACE
McKayla Olson (Concordia Language Academy)
Evelyn Thell (Seven Hills Classical Academy)
Idea is cool.
I would start your own school. I would change one thing. Change it would be
The book center. I would change it to a library. Because... it would make
are brains super brain,
and teach children, and make
everyone a smarty pants.
It would be cool if
we had a library, it will
make teachers to see
who's being bad at the
library to pick a book.
My teacher would be
excited after lunch. We
have to read a book
from a library and a
special closet in the library. They
will be one hundred or
books. It would be a
computer's in the library.
It would be a some

Donnell Bratton 2nd grade
Read Read I Love to Read
some people think reading
is boring. But reading is
fun. What I would do is
add 50,000 books to
the library. What ever
you do Don't stop reading!!
Chapter book spring book
any book. What I would do
to spread books around
The word that would
make everyone smart
that would be cool.
my teacher Reads to
me every day. Thats
fun.

by Donnell
Riverway Learning Community

Hi, my name is Zack and I go to Riverway Learning Community. I like Riverway because we do lots of art. At school, if we are interested we can learn more, we don’t have to stop. I have Dyslexia, it means I learn to read differently, and I have to have a little extra help. My school always helps me, but not on the weekend.

If I had my own charter school, I would do experiments every day, because I love science. Sometimes I do science experiments at home, but they never work, because I need to learn more about science.

Zackariah Al-Saeed

Riverway Learning Community

2nd Grade
My Own School

This is my idea! If I had my own school, I think teachers and kids mite like to learn Spanish and write Spanish. First they could write easy words then hard stuff. They could say the honorcode in Spanish. So when they go to a other plase in the world they could speak Spanish. They could go to a other state and they could speak more Spanish. In case there is a emergency so if the doctor speak Spanish they don’t have to get a interpreter. For all of these reason teachers and kids could write Spanish and speak Spanish at my school.
Siomara Llanos

2nd Grade

Partnership Academy

GYMNASTICS TEACHER

If I had my own school I would have a gymnastics teacher for kids and adults. Some kids want to be healthy and strong. They would have fun giving 5 excellent exercises for their hearts.

The gymnastics teacher would keep the kids safe. The gymnastics teacher would help the kids feel strong and nice to other people all over the world. So they could learn they all are the same and cool.

The kids would feel excited to go to school. Then listen better and work hard in school because there's a healthy body inside of them. They have a super fun energy to.
By: Mokayla Olson 2nd grade

Mrs. Stafford class

If I could change something in my school there would be. We would have a
bigger library a bigger computer lab. Bigger class rooms. Desks for all the class
rooms. We would have a great school.

Because this school is so great and we
would have celebrations on holidays. We
would celebrate on birthdays. That library
would have a secret door to it and
the computer lab would have like 20
computers. And for a big math center. And
that all classes would have lockers and a
secret case on it that nobody knows.
There would be 100 books of each
kind, and there would be a study and a
homework center. There would be a
big writing center. And a recess
Center. Our school would be so great.
This is why people can learn go to
college and be a good person and
get a job. And that's the thing I would change for my school.

Thank you so much!
If I owned a charter school, one thing I would change would be... reading, because I think we will be smarter than right now. I like reading, that is why.
I want to make it longer. If you read a history book you will know more than if you read a Cat In The Hat book.
FIRST PLACE
Nicholas Jackson (Beacon Academy)

SECOND PLACE
Angel Cardenas (Community of Peace Academy)
Firdows Dayib (TIZA)
Chyanne Ly (Concordia Creative Learning Academy)

THIRD PLACE
Daniel Elsner (Beacon Academy)
Alicia Pederson (Glacial Hills Elementary School)
If I started a charter school I would have my students use their own unique talents and interests in the community. Some of the talents they could use would be dancing, singing, science, reading, math, and sports. The mission of the school is teaching students to serve their community.

One of the activities for students who like to read would be reading at the public library to young children. For the students that like math, they could help mentally challenged people use math in every day living situations.

Some of the things that the athletic people could do is help elderly people in summer mow their yard, in fall rake their yard, and in winter shovel their driveway. For people who like to dance, they could dance in retirement homes or hospitals for people that do not get the chance to get out and have young people in their lives very much.

Therefore, my school would have a big impact on the students and people’s lives in the community!

THE END
My Own Charter School

One thing I would do differently at my own school than the school I go to now is letting younger kids do sports too. The school that I go to now only lets 7th graders and up do volleyball and basketball. I think 1st grader through 6th grade should be able to do sports too. In the school that I'm dreaming of everyone is able to do sports.

I want this to happen because not many kids get exercise. Also, a lot of kids play video games when it's a nice day out. Also on t.v., they show programs about playing fewer video games and playing more outside. It should be at home and at school.

This is what I want to do at my own charter school!

By: Angel Cardenas
What I like about my Charter school. And how I will improve.

My Charter school is as important as any other school. My teachers and staff keep me safe. They make sure I'm not harmed. My principal made rules, rules, that tell you to stay safe, rules that tell you to follow the golden rule, and to greet each other in a respectful way.

All students are all the same. White or black. The most important thing is to learn. Education is what us students need.
I think we should get more subjects in school, get more homework done, listen to teachers more and have fun. The one thing I would do in my own school that is the same is to stop bullying. One thing I would do even better would be more learning and less playing.

Firdows
Bagiib
grade 3
Chyanne Ly
3rd Grade

Concordia Creative Learning Academy

If I could start my own charter school, it would be different from my school because I would name it “We All Love Each Other”. My school will be connected to a college. So when a college student is learning how to be a teacher, he or she could just come over to my school to learn how to be a teacher.

If student at my school wants to see how hard college is, they can just go over to the college and see what it is like. We will have field trips that reward students for being good listeners and working hard for the whole year.

We will also have parties on certain days like Christmas, birthdays, Valentine’s Day, and all of the different holidays.
If I could start my own charter school, one thing I would do differently than Beacon Academy is that rather than having regular kids I would teach kids with disabilities like kids that are deaf will be in a class for deaf people, and blind kids will be in a class for blind people, and people with autism in another, etc. Also the teachers would have to be specially trained to teach these kids. And also the classes will be different. Like kids with autism will learn how to interact with each other. And kids that are blind will learn to read braille, do math and play sound games. And deaf kids will do math and read/write and learn how to read sign language. And the reason I want to start a school like this is so that kids with disabilities will make new friends, learn at their own pace and feel like normal kids.
As our school opened in 2007, we have done so much to make it an awesome place to learn. The most important things we do are we are making the environment healthier by having a compost bin, and we also go around the Starbuck Community Park and we pick up trash we find! One way we could change our school would be to open up a farmer’s market.

If we open up a farmer’s market we would become closer to the community. If we sold vegetables and fruits in town, we would use less fossil fuels that can harm the environment! We could also use eco friendly bags! If we had a market, we would spend less money on leading brands.

There are many ways to keep the environment healthier for generations to come and go on this everlasting adventure! Glacial Hills Elementary is making a difference in the world.

Alicia Pederson

Grade 5

Glacial Hills Elementary School
FIRST PLACE
Olivia Osterbauer (Minneapolis Academy)

SECOND PLACE
Allison Edwards (Lakes International Language Academy)
Zachary Gilliland (Beacon Preparatory School)
Bobby Head (Eagle Ridge Academy)
Kao Nou Yang (Community School of Excellence)

THIRD PLACE
Justin Amundson (Glacial Hills Elementary School)
Katina Renae Harper (Concordia Creative Learning Academy)
Thomas Vang (Hmong College Prep Academy)
Aqsa Zafar (TIZA)
If I could start my own charter school, some things would be the same as my current school and some things would be different. One thing that wouldn't be changed is having single-sex classes. Studies have proven that doing this aids the concentration and work habits of students. Also, being in single-sex classes is more enjoyable because you are surrounded by classmates that understand and can relate to you. Therefore, the students attending my school would most likely earn higher grades because they would enjoy being around their peers, focus on their work, and, therefore, contribute their best effort.

Something I'd do differently than my current school is have more opportunities for students to participate in helping good causes. Activities such as fundraisers, bake sales, athletic competitions, or performances could be held at which family and friends of students could pay a small fee to attend. This would promote positive recognition of matters that need to be paid greater attention. These matters could include the care of a disease, homeless shelters, orphanages, feeding the hungry, or cleaning up the earth. This would also teach students the importance of giving back to their communities and planet. And it'd be fun!
Allison Edwards
April 8, 2010
Lakes International Language Academy

Charter School

If I could start my own charter school, one thing that I would want to keep the same is that I would want it to be a Language Academy so that the students could learn all the subjects in different lanuages. I would also have some Language Ambassadors from any country that speaks the languages being taught and they would help students learn in their classrooms and for some special classes during school.

One of the things I would add to my charter school is that I would give every classroom a set of different jobs and by the end of the week every classroom that finished their classroom jobs would get a new book for their classroom library.

One thing that I would do differently is that every grade throughout the school would get the last hour for some English work time and if students have any questions about homework or school work they could ask their teacher and get a clarification so they wouldn’t go home confused about the assignment.

I would like to offer more than two languages for students to learn.

Teacher: jnelson@lakesinternational.org
As a seventh grader at Beacon Prep, I feel there's a lot to like about Beacon, especially the strict teachers. On the other hand, there is only one thing that I wish to change about our school—more P.E.!

The feature that I like best about our school is that our teachers are strict. Strict teachers help us in a lot of ways (e.g., focus on schoolwork, fewer distractions in the classroom and prepare us for challenges to come). I feel strict teachers make it easier to learn and keep a good learning process. They also keep students inline and leave little room for them to slack.

If asked, one of the issues that I would like to change about our school is that we do not have recess or P.E. everyday. A recent Ohio State study recommended that on average a 13 year old should exercise a minimum of 30 minutes a day. I agree that we do not get enough exercise time in the school day. Exercise would burn off excess energy, release stress, keep us fit, help us concentrate on our studies, and overall function better. There are a few ways to free-up the time for more recess/P.E. One would be to make lunch thirty minutes longer and when kids get done we go outside and do some sort of physical activity (baseball, basketball, soccer). Another, would be to have the last half hour of reading be recess because it is an hour and thirty minutes long. Another way is take five minutes off of each block which would give us a total of 20 minutes. None of those are very long so we could still add on to that and make it an hour long by taking the extra half hour in reading and add it to the recess/P.E.

I firmly believe Beacon students would perform better if we were to add recess/P.E. to the school day. The strict teachers are doing a fine job of teaching and preparing us for the challenges we will face in high school and ahead. With these strict teachers and the addition of recess/P.E. to every school day we should have a school with even a better learning environment.
Bobby Head
Eagle Ridge Academy
6th grade

My school is Eagle Ridge Academy. This school is six years old and has 300 students. If I could invent a public charter school of my own and keep one thing from this school and change something, I would keep pizza Fridays and add middle school auto shop.

I would keep pizza Fridays because kids work really hard each week for good grades! Most of us say that is not enough! What we really want is delicious, greasy, delectable pizza on Fridays! We, as kids, need something to cheer us on during the week and that is pizza. We need them and we crave them. That is why I think we need to keep pizza Fridays.

I think a new charter school needs auto shop. The reason for that is because boys, who are as deeply interested in cars as me, know we can express ourselves in vinyl body kits and engine upgrades. A man in a cartoon once said, “A kid with a tool in both hands has no hands for drugs or alcohol.” I also would like to learn the mechanics of cars so I can fix them up.

Those are the things I would add and change from my school, Eagle Ridge Academy, to make my own charter school.
If I could start my own charter school, one thing that I would do differently than my school is to have some more classes for the students. Now that there are some Hmong that just came to the United States and they already know the Hmong culture, I want to have a class that will help them learn more English. I also would have a class for the new students to learn about the mainstream culture. For the students that are born in America, they’ll have to go to the class to learn about Hmong culture. And also they should have a class for the students to learn Hmong language.

The thing that I’ll keep the same is the Hmong culture and language classes. I want to teach my culture to other people. Now that we are in America, we are beginning to lose our culture. Hmong culture is very unique. There are cloths and dances to tell the history of Hmong and the food is very good too. Having a school that teaches Hmong culture and language will help the Hmong people to keep the culture and language for a very long time.
Charter School Essay

4-7-10
Justin Amundson
Special Hills

Today I am going to be answering a couple of questions. One has to do about what I would change if I had my own school, and the other is about what I would keep the same. So now I will begin.

What Would You Change?
One thing I would change in my school is that we would start school at 9:00 A.M. The reason is because I don’t like getting up early. It would also give me more time to get ready for school. Another thing I would change is the lunch time. I can eat my entire meal in about ten minutes. I don’t like waiting for other people to dump their trays. I could be having about twenty minutes of extra recess.

What Would You Keep the Same?
I would definitely keep our recess supplies because we have a variety of things to play with. We have four-square, a basketball court, a big playground set, and a lot of room to run around. I would also have the Audubon Trip because it really shows wildlife at its best in Minnesota. You never know what you will see. You learn a lot about animals, environmental things, survival, and a lot more. I also think it’s cool that some of the workers at the Audubon are from different countries. It’s fun to learn about their culture. The Audubon’s food is great too. My very last thing that I would keep the same as GHES is how environmental it is. I like how we are reusing things. I’m very anxious to start planting a garden at our school. It’s going to be so much fun! It would be cool to eat food that we actually planted. GHES Rocks!
My Charter School Essay

By: Katina Renae Harper

If I started my own charter school, the one thing I would keep the same is how much help they give us at my school. All the teachers at my current school offer to stay after to help the students with their homework and any class work they have. If a student didn’t get what the teacher was talking about, they want you to raise your hand and say “I don’t get this” so they take it slow and help you even more. I’m shy so I don’t raise my hand, and my teachers know that. Later on in the day, they come and ask you “do you get this?” That’s the most thing I would keep the same because there’s not a lot of kids in the world that get that much attention in school like our school. Most of the students at my school get one-on-one time with the teachers. Last year I was very below grade level in all my classes, but now I’m on grade level with math and I’m at least two grade levels on reading. That’s something that all students deserve in life. The only thing I would want different is no uniforms. I know it prevents teasing and fights. I like uniforms but I think we kids should have the choice. My charter school will have the option to wear uniforms, and if they do want to wear them, they will be nice, bright colors. I think I will want a library too, it’s important for kid’s education.

from CCL A
8th Grade
Thomas Vang
3/26/10
8th Grade
Hmong College Prep. Academy

My school that I’m attending is Hmong College Prep Academy in St. Paul. If I could start my own charter or public school I would have a Power Day just like my school right now. Power Day is once a month at my school. All we do that day is have fun, teacher and students. Each home room class has to pick their own college to represent their class. Each class learns about their own college and represents it. We compete with other classes and have fun. It is great that my school has Power Day, and we don’t have regular classes on this day.

If I have my own public or charter school, I would want to have bikes for the school. It would be great because usually gym is only an indoor activity. So instead of just soccer, football, and basketball student can ride bikes together outdoors and have fun. This would be a great exercise for students. This will make student want to come to school more.
My Charter School

There are many things I appreciate about my charter school. However, the things that I’m going to write about are things that other schools need. I’m going to show you what a day in TIZA is like.

The thing you notice when you enter TIZA is that the building isn’t as big or fancy as other schools. You start to wonder how a school like this is in the top 5 best schools. Not to mention that most kids are foreign students. After you visit the classrooms you realize that the students are determined and hard-working.

Another thing you notice is that the kids have uniforms on. I think uniform is a pretty good idea, because that way, students don’t get distracted by new clothes and focus more on academics. That is, in my opinion a reason why our student’s scores are so high on the MCA tests.

If I had a charter school I would also require students to wear uniforms too. But something different I would do is to improve the school building. I would host many fundraisers until our school is also as big and fancy as other schools. Our school deserves that for our hard work!

By: Aqsa Zafar

8th Grade
**Special Award**

Merle Vander Weyst (BlueSky Online School)

**FIRST PLACE**

Whitney Weatherly (River Heights Charter School)

**SECOND PLACE**

Peter Dienger (Riverway Learning Community)

Kimberly Dietrich (BlueSky Online School)

Brooke Powell (Riverway Learning Community)

**THIRD PLACE**

Ashley Jahner (Spectrum High School)

Cady Johnston (Rochester Off-Campus Charter High School)

Emily Owens (Spectrum High School)
Attending BlueSky Charter School has been a great experience for me. It has allowed me to continue my education in a safe and relaxed setting in my own home. Attending school at home allows me to be free of many distractions, I have more control of what I am doing, and it involves a lot of flexibility. I can work on most subjects at my own pace; I can work on lessons early in the morning, or at night. I can print papers out and bring them with me different places to work on. If I learn better from listening to a lesson, they often have videos or recordings to watch and listen to, not just text.

Instead of rushing through an assignment during a class hour, I can read something until I understand it and actually learn it. I am not wasting time running between classes or taking time out of anyone’s schedule to be allowed to use the restroom; another class is just a few clicks away and I will not get in trouble for taking a break to use the restroom or have a snack. I work better at night, so I can work on assignments in the middle of the night if I wanted, and I am able to schedule lessons around work or another activity. Flexibility is what makes an online charter school work and it has a great advantage over a tradition brick and mortar school.

I attended a regular public school from preschool until seventh grade. During that time I was severally bullied on many levels, not only by students, but also by teachers. I had one teacher that was verbally abusive to myself and others. When I contacted the school board we
were told that he would be fired. To this day that teacher still works there. My education also suffered at this public school; when I was struggling with a math class and asked the instructor for help, I was informed that if I could not learn the way he taught it, then that was my problem and I was on my own.

I was never popular at school. Because of bullying I suffered from social anxiety and depression, I often had suicidal thoughts. In my own home, I didn’t have other students telling me how I needed to act. I did not have anyone pressuring me to try drugs. No one told me that the brand of clothing I was wearing was inadequate. I was able to experience my own personal growth as a person without any pressure to be who I did not want to be. I was able to develop my own set of strong morals and ethics, within parental reasoning.

Because of BlueSky Charter’s flexible schedule I was able to take care of my mother after hospitalization. I was able to be there for her in her time of need because I was in my own home, and not away for eight hours of the day. I was able to attend the births of many of my animals and help guide new life into this world. I was able to hold a seasonal job during regular daytime work hours and able to contribute to my family more, while still learning what a person in today’s world requires, if not more.

If I was to start my own charter school, flexibility and user amiability would be the cornerstones of the foundation. I feel that these two important things in addition to a state approved and qualified school will form a good reputation and be a recipe for success. I feel that BlueSky Online Charter School has these qualities and will go far. If I was to change anything about attending an online school, I would make it more personal and decrease the anonymity between students.
Ultimately, I believe that an online charter school is a great opportunity for a student to receive an education through a different perspective. It can be challenging and is sometimes hard. It does take responsibility and dedication, but it can definitely work and a student can succeed. An online charter school is not for everyone, but neither is traditional school. Each person is different and has different needs. It is always best to explore a little bit in life to find out what you want and what will work for you.
Charter School Essay.

If I had the chance to make my own charter school, it would be similar to the charter school I'm currently going to, River Heights. What I like about my charter school is the project based learning. The opportunity to be able to spend half of a school day choosing what you learn is amazing. It gives you a head start in what career you would like to have in the future. For example, I really enjoy science and I want to do something in the medical career with my life. I have the opportunity to research that topic and be more prepared and educated when I start taking college classes for this.

Another thing I enjoy about River Heights is that this school gives students the opportunity to be able to work at your own pace. Some students aren't able to learn as quickly as others. Being at this school makes those students feel like they can still achieve like everyone else. Our small class sizes and caring teachers make students feel welcomed to come to class. This is also a great school for those who want to be able to do extra work, and attempt to do P.S.E.O. This advantage is why I am here. Currently I am a tenth grader at River Heights, attending my second year, but my credits equal up to those of an eleventh grader. I am hoping that if I work hard enough, and keep up with the extra work, I will be able to enroll in P.S.E.O the beginning of next year and start my career early! These are the things I would keep if I had my own charter school.

As much as I like River Heights, every school needs improvement. If I had my own Charter School, I would make four day weeks, instead of five. I believe that five days of school in a row is too stressful, ending with exhausted students in the middle of the week. Two days out of a seven day week to yourself isn't much time. During those two days, many students here have jobs, family issues, and feel like they don't have enough time to relax and rejuvenate themselves. I think there should be no school every Wednesday of the week. This way, students go to school for two days, rejuvenate themselves, and go back for two days. Then they have the weekend to live their lives and not catch up on things they were too tired to do in the middle of the week. This is something I believe all schools should think about doing, not just what I would do with my own school. If having a four day week would makes students feel like they will work harder at school, then I think it's something that should be greatly considered to improve our education and be successful in life.
Riverway Learning Community

I am currently attending Riverway Learning Community and have been for the past three years now. I started here in ninth grade, my freshmen year. I enjoy the way I’m taught here, I plan to proudly graduate from Riverway Learning Community.

If I had the opportunity to open my own charter school, I would have a great time doing it. It would be projected based learning. I’ve found it works well for most students. That would be the main thing that would remain the same as Riverway Learning Community. The name of my school would be EFTF. The EFTF stands for Education for the Future. The lunch system would be the same as Riverway Learning Community. We try to get 50% of our food to be locally grown. We also try to grow a lot of it ourselves.

Something that frustrates me at Riverway Learning Community is that we have two grades per class. If it was my school I would get a teacher for each grade. That way the students would be closer to kids their own age. I would also raise money so we could have new computers and take more field trips. Right now at Riverway Learning Community our computers are old and don’t work very well. Those are the only two things I don’t like about Riverway Learning Community. Riverway Learning Community has improved a lot over the last few years.

Riverway Learning Community is a great school to go to. It would be cool if I could change a few things about Riverway Learning Community and make it into my own school. I would have each grade separated. Also get all new computers. I would keep a few things the same as Riverway Learning Community no matter what. One of those things is the way we are taught. Which is projected based learning. Also, we have a great lunch program is. They get the food locally grown, that’s how I would love my own school to be like.
Kimberley Dietrich
Age 19
BlueSky Online School

The Sky is Blue

There are many reasons why teenagers drop out of public high school. Some reasons may include; not being able to keep up with the class, being bullied, being shy, and not enjoying the social drama of everyday high school, peer pressure, poor teachers, being easily distracted, falling behind due to illness, or just too many missed days and tardies.

Drop outs usually get a bad reputation as being low-lifes and worthless kids. People usually assume drop outs are lazy, dumb, and the classic behavior problem student. That is not true. Every person is unique, we all learn differently. Traditional public schools try to fit every kid into the cookie-cutter mold to learn. Some people are outgoing while others are shy.

My name is Kimberley Dietrich. I am 19 years old, and currently attending Blue Sky Charter School, I am a senior and will be graduating this year.

I dropped out of public school in 11th grade due to the emotional stress of peer pressure and being harassed by your typical mean girls. When I fought back to defend myself, the Principal punished me and threatened to kick me out of school. When a girl started yelling and punching me the next time I didn't fight back. It was really humiliating. I went to the Principal and was given in school suspension, because i didn’t for-see this attack and tell him ahead of time. My parents were very supportive of me and felt that the school was not in the right. The school was punishing me for being a victim and not doing anything to keep me safe at school.
Kimberley Dietrich  
Age 19  
BlueSky Online School

With my parents’ permission, and their desire to keep me safe, and their concern for my emotional well being, I dropped out of public school. I had planned to get my GED, but after passing four of the five pre tests to get the age waiver I chickened out, because I am just too shy. I didn’t feel good about myself.

One of my best friends Michaela, graduated last year as a student of Blue Sky Charter School. She told me about her success with Blue Sky, so my parents and I contacted the school, and I enrolled.

Blue Sky has literally changed my life. I can get online any time of the day or night. My schedule is much more flexible so that I can work part time, do school, and still have time for my family and friends.

My parents are happy because the teachers call often, and keep us updated with my progress. They are more available to help me and a lot more cheerful than my public school teachers ever were. I feel much more motivated. The student, parent, teacher communication is so much better. My "books" are always home or wherever I have internet access, not left in my locker at school. My grades are great. No drama, no mean girls, and I have teachers that care.

If I started my own online charter school, the one thing I would change or add to it would be that Charter School kids could participate in team sports at the school of their choice.

My brother also joined Blue Sky this year, and had to give up wrestling. Although he was disappointed, he is doing so much better attending an online school.

All in all Blue Sky Charter School has changed my life, and I would recommend it to anyone!
2010 Charter Essay Contest:

Hello, my name is Brooke Powell. I’m currently attending ninth grade at a small charter school called, Riverway Learning Community. Riverway has about 110 students attending. I transferred to Riverway during the middle of my eight grade year. It was a really big change for me, but I like it a lot! Riverway is classified as a public charter school and its project based. It's located in Minnesota City, MN and is sponsored by the Audubon Center of the North Woods.

There are so many things Riverway does well, it was really hard for me to limit all my choices down to one. The one I would include in my charter school is the food program. The kitchen staffs make all our meals homemade, in the Riverway kitchen. The food is very healthy and also organic. The breakfast and lunches may not taste as good, but at least you know that, you’re eating healthy. Every year, each class helps in the garden. This fresh produce is included in some of our meals. We also raise our own chickens. Some students even help raise these chickens. We also do composting at Riverway. All the food students don’t finish, besides meat and fish, go into a bin. This bin gets dumped in our compost pile after everyone is done eating. We use this compost in our garden. Even though my school does many things well, there are also things I would change for my charter school.
If, I were to start my own charter school, I’d switch up a few different things. One thing I would change is the classes. At Riverway we don't have many electives. We have our main classes like math, language arts, science and social studies. Then we have a couple extra ones such as phy-ed and art. I'm interested in taking a second language and other students might be just as well. I would also add other electives that my students are interested in, to my charter school.

Brooke Powell
Riverway Learning Community
If I were to start my own charter school, there are many options I would partake in. I would do a few things that my current school does to keep it successful. I would have a board of directors; some of which would be teachers and some parents of students. Another would be a wide selection of classes. I would like to have various Advanced Placement (AP) classes as well as College in School (CIS) classes, for students that need to be academically challenged. One main goal I would work towards is making each and every student feel welcome. The whole facility should feel more of a big family that works together at their goals and achieves at them, rather than having separations by cliques; not only between students, but faculty as well. My current school does a wonderful job of achieving all of this.

Although I believe my charter school does a wonderful job of being successful, there are a few things I would like to foresee differently on my own. For starters, I would invest in building a gymnasium and small weight room for the students to have a chance to be active before or after school. I would stress the goal of making sure we have enough staff to foresee all of our students’ needs. I would limit a class size to no more than fifteen kids. Because the smaller the class size, the higher the success rate will be. With a smaller class size, we would be able to exceed the normal curriculum. It is important that our students have all of the assistance they need to succeed and with smaller class sizes we will be able to make this happen. After all, is that not what a ‘charter school’ is all about?

Ashley Jahner
Spectrum High School
CSC Essay Contest

What I would do if I Could Start My Own Charter School...

If I were to make my own Charter School I would make it a place where kids can be hands-on with their assignments. One thing that I like about the school I attend right now [Rochester Off Campus] is that the school is a big family. Nobody judges anyone because of where they came from or who they are, and that is one of the things I would keep the same.

The one thing that I would change about my school is all of the rumors and drama with the media on charter schools. People don’t know about ROC so they just assume, “oh that school’s for bad kids, that school isn’t going anywhere.” Deep down it really hurts when people just assume that our school is bad. At my other school I got into fights, I got into trouble, and I didn’t do what I was told. I don’t know why other students attend ROC, but I came here because it’s a smaller environment, I know everybody, and everybody respects and helps each other.

What I bring to ROC is that I don’t judge anyone by how they live. I treat everyone equally even if I don’t know who they are. You can see how respectful everybody is. It’s kind of weird, because at other schools you don’t feel that respect.

Students can also go on trips to the boundary waters or to Quetico in Canada for our Natural Resource Class. I just feel more free when I attend ROC like everybody is on the same level.

I think a student would gain respect, develop manners, and figure out who they are as a person.

I wouldn’t change anything if I had my own charter school. Everything is perfect for me and I get enough help to where I am motivated, and learn.

Written by: Cady Johnston
Grade 11
Rochester Off Campus Charter H.S.
Small School Making a Big Difference

If I were to start my own charter school one day, there are some things I would keep, and some things I would change with regard to my current school. One thing I would keep the same as my current school is the service-learning requirements. One thing that I would have differently is the size of facility.

At Spectrum High School, my current school, there is a requirement for each student to complete at least five hours of community service per quarter. In addition to these hours, each student is also involved in a service-learning group that targets the key interests and talents of students. These requirements are important for three key reasons. The first is that serving others teaches students something that a teacher cannot. It causes students to go outside of their comfort zone, and when they do, they experience the joy of serving others. Secondly, when people serve, they are using their own unique gifts and talents to the benefit of others. This shows students how to put their gifts to their full potential anytime in life. Lastly, the service-learning groups allow students to be in a group that targets their key interests, hobbies, and possible future careers.

Although there are many positive things about Spectrum High School, there is one thing I would want to do differently with my own charter school. That one thing would be size. Spectrum is a school of about 200 students, which gives each student the benefit of small class sizes and a “family feel” at school. However, because of the size of our facility, we cannot do some of the things that other high schools can. For instance, many students would want to participate in more electives such as woodwork, home economics, or mechanics. At Spectrum, we cannot have these classes because there is not enough room to do so.
The size of Spectrum is only a small downside, and if I were to run a charter school when I am older, it would be very similar to Spectrum. I would love to have the ability to teach other students what I myself have learned from serving in this school. Here at Spectrum High School, we know that we are a small school, but we believe in being a part of something bigger than we are, and that is serving others.