

**Minnesota District/Charter K-12 Enrollment Trends
2001-2002 – 2011-2012**

A Report from the Center for School Change

June 2012



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Executive Summary

Statewide and metro k-12 charter public school growth in enrollment, and traditional district decline in enrollment, continued in the 2011-12 school year. Moreover, low income; students of color and students representing “families of color” are disproportionately represented in Minnesota charters, according to a new analysis of Minnesota Department of Education data done by the Center for School Change (CSC).

As this is the twentieth anniversary of the nation’s first charter public school law being adopted in Minnesota, the Center for School Change decided to look at k-12 enrollment data from the last decade. In its research, writing and work with schools, the Center consistently has advocated for more effective public schools, whether district or charter.

The Center analyzed data provided to the Minnesota Department of Education from schools and districts as part of the fall, official 2011-2012 student enrollment count. Macalester student Jordan Lim, working with CSC staff members Paj Ntaub Lee and Joe Nathan, examined and compiled k-12 individual charter school data and individual k-12 district data posted on the Minnesota Department of Education website.

Trends over the last decade show:

- Charter public school k-12 enrollment statewide has grown almost 19,000 students from 2001-2002 to 2011-2012 (from 10,162 to 39,129). Meanwhile, district k-12 enrollment has declined by more than 45,000 students (from 831, 535 to 785,729).
- Minneapolis charter public school k-12 enrollment has grown from 1,921 in 2001-2002 to 11,125, while district enrollment has declined from 47,658 to 33,503.
- Minneapolis and Minnesota charters reflect a higher percentage of low income limited English speaking and students of color than the respective comparison groups.
- St. Paul charter public school enrollment has increased by more than 5,000 students, from 3,598 students in 2001-2002 to 9,014 students in 2011-12. Meanwhile St. Paul district k-12 enrollment has declined by more than 6,000, from 43,714 to 37,063 over the same time period.

The report also includes a brief discussion of Minnesota’s charter school performance. The report also includes observations about the key difference between families and students being assigned to and allowed to select among different schools.

Finally, the report discusses possible implications of these trends. To more effectively meet students’ needs, the report recommends:

- Expanding and replicating successful schools.
- Encouraging district/charter collaboration.
- Encouraging continued innovation in district and chartered public schools.

Brief Background

The nation's first charter public school law was adopted by Minnesota legislature in 1991 (Nathan, 1996). The first school to operate as a charter was City Academy in St. Paul. The first school to be approved as a charter was Bluffview Montessori in Winona, Minnesota.

Forty other states have now adopted some form of the charter idea. From fewer than 100 students at City Academy, the charter movement now includes more than two million students enrolled in more than 5,000 schools. (National Alliance)

Several principles have been key to the charter public school movement as it was developed in Minnesota:

- Chartered schools were to be free, non-sectarian public schools, open to all. This was an important distinction between charters and magnet schools, many of which used admissions tests to determine who could enroll. The fact that charters also were public and non-sectarian was a key difference between these schools and the private and parochial schools that would be involved in a voucher project.
- Innovation: The idea was to allow very different kinds of schools to emerge...schools that used emerging research to essentially start over with what made the most sense in terms of promoting learning.
- Increased autonomy over budget, personnel and curriculum in exchange for greater responsibility. The term "charter" meant a contract.
- The idea that there would be more than one organization that could approve and supervise a k-12 public school. As Ted Kolderie wrote in his influential paper, "The State will have to remove the exclusive franchise." (Kolderie) Key to the charter idea was that local school districts and other organizations could give permission to groups of people to create new kinds of public schools. Those "other organizations" could include state boards of education, colleges and universities, cities, social service agencies and other groups.
- The idea of a "sponsor" - later to be called an "authorizer" -- other than the local board was central to the concept that was developed in Minnesota. For decades, districts have had the authority to create new options within the district, and some had done that. However, as American Federation of Teacher president Al Shanker noted in describing innovative teachers who tried to create new schools and schools within schools as part of traditional districts, such teachers "would be treated as traitors or outlaws for daring to move outside the lockstep and do something different. Their initiators had to move heaven and earth to get school officials to authorize them. If they managed that, often they could look forward to insecurity, obscurity or outright hostility." (Shanker)

- As with any new idea, some charters would not be effective or well run. Ineffective charters should be closed, as stipulated in the contract between the school and its sponsor/authorizer.
- There is no single curriculum educational philosophy or method of organizing individual chartered schools. (Kolderie, Nathan, 1996)

A recently published book by one of the Minnesota legislation's chief authors provides details of events that led to this idea being translated into a law. (Reichgott-Junge)

The charter movement also has gained widespread public support. A Gallup poll done in cooperation with the national education group Phi Delta Kappa asked this question for its poll published in 2011. "As you may know, charter schools operate under a charter or contract that frees them from many of the state regulations on public schools and permits them to operate independently. Do you favor or oppose the idea of charter schools?"

| | |
|--------------------|-----|
| Favor | 70% |
| Oppose | 27% |
| Don't know/refused | 3% |

As the authors of the poll noted, "This year's poll shows an approval rating of 70%, the highest recorded rating since the question was first asked 10 years ago. Charter school support has increased steadily over that period." (Bushaw and Lopez, p. 21)

"Americans increasingly support choice – allowing students and parents to choose which public schools to attend in their community regardless of where they live – and this support is consistent across age differences and political affiliation. But vouchers received the lowest approval rating in the past 10 years – only one of three Americans favored allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend with public dollars." (Bushaw and Lopez, p. 21)

Part of the rationale for chartering public schools comes from a remarkable 1968 *Harvard Education Review* article, "Alternative Public School Systems," by African American psychologist Kenneth Clark. Professor Clark's famous "doll study" was cited by the US Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Clark described "obstacles...to effective education" including "such fetishes as the inviolability of the neighborhood school concept." Clark urged "Alternative Public School Systems... financed by states, operated **outside traditional districts**, that are created by colleges, universities, labor unions, business, industry...." (CSC emphasis).

Perhaps it is worth noting that Civil Rights Legend Rosa Parks spent part of the last decade of her life trying to help create charter schools in Detroit. As a *New York Times* article noted, this was something to which she devoted considerable effort. (Abdullah). She, like others, was not ready to say the only approach to improving education must be to work with existing district public schools.

What are trends in Minnesota and metro area charter enrollment?

Three charts of K-12 enrollment data are presented in this section. They represent a Center for School Change analysis of Minnesota Department of Education data done initially by Jordan Lim, a Macalester College student with assistance from Paj Ntaub Lee, CSC Outreach Coordinator. Lim served as a CSC intern in spring, 2012. Lee and Lim talked with several Minnesota Department of Education staff to insure that we were looking at the correct charts. One school year (2010-11) is omitted due to limitations of time. This data was reviewed by Joe Nathan, CSC Director.

Statewide Trends

| Year | Fall Enrollment | Free & Reduced Meal | % Free and Reduced Meal | Limited English Proficiency (LEP) | % LEP | Special Education (SpEd) | % SpEd | Total Minority | % Minority |
|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------|--------------------------|--------|----------------|------------|
| 2001-2002 | | | | | | | | | |
| Charter Schools | 10,162 | 5,644 | 1 | 1,298 | 0 | 1,212 | 0 | 5,292 | 1 |
| Statewide | 831,535 | 218,369 | 0 | 46,665 | 0 | 99,418 | 0 | 147,977 | 0 |
| 2002-2003 | | | | | | | | | |
| Charter Schools | 12,131 | 6,634 | 54.68% | 157 | 12.99% | 1,473 | 12.14% | 6,149 | 50.69% |
| Statewide | 824,723 | 223,588 | 27.11% | 49,699 | 6.03% | 100,450 | 12.18% | 153,751 | 18.64% |
| 2003-2004 | | | | | | | | | |
| Charter Schools | 14,246 | 8,097 | 56.84% | 2,227 | 15.63% | 1,715 | 12.04% | 7,484 | 52.53% |
| Statewide | 817,793 | 228,500 | 27.94% | 51,280 | 6.27% | 101,237 | 12.38% | 159,493 | 19.50% |
| 2004-2005 | | | | | | | | | |
| Charter Schools | 17,544 | 9,515 | 54.23% | 2,828 | 16.12% | 2,205 | 12.57% | 9,177 | 52.30% |
| Statewide | 809,787 | 236,123 | 29.15% | 54,001 | 6.67% | 101,311 | 12.51% | 164,234 | 20.00% |
| 2005-2006 | | | | | | | | | |
| Charter Schools | 20,616 | 11,436 | 55.47% | 4,030 | 19.55% | 2,550 | 12.37% | 10,804 | 52.41% |
| Statewide | 818,381 | 240,384 | 29.37% | 53,635 | 6.55% | 101,361 | 12.39% | 171,423 | 20.95% |
| 2006-2007 | | | | | | | | | |
| Charter Schools | 23,689 | 12,649 | 53.90% | 5,055 | 21.34% | 2,880 | 12.16% | 12,368 | 52.21% |
| Statewide | 804,557 | 244,544 | 30.39% | 56,654 | 7.04% | 102,456 | 12.73% | 176,220 | 21.90% |
| 2007-2008 | | | | | | | | | |
| Charter Schools | 28,026 | 15,123 | 53.90% | 5,861 | 20.91% | 3,324 | 11.86% | 15,059 | 53.73% |
| Statewide | 796,757 | 246,933 | 30.99% | 56,765 | 7.12% | 103,313 | 12.97% | 179,239 | 22.50% |
| 2008-2009 | | | | | | | | | |
| Charter Schools | 32,776 | 17,538 | 53.51% | 6,148 | 18.76% | 3,913 | 11.94% | 16,861 | 51.44% |
| Statewide | 789,642 | 252,709 | 32.00% | 57,046 | 7.22% | 103,255 | 13.08% | 186,647 | 23.64% |
| 2009-2010 | | | | | | | | | |
| Charter Schools | 35,375 | 19,529 | 55.21% | 7,002 | 19.79% | 4,401 | 12.44% | 17,694 | 50.02% |
| Statewide | 787,327 | 293,062 | 37.22% | 61,164 | 7.77% | 108,286 | 13.75% | 205,066 | 25.05% |
| 2011-2012 | | | | | | | | | |
| Charter Schools | 39,129 | 21,868 | 55.89% | 7,066 | 18.06% | 5,100 | 13.03% | 19,978 | 51.06% |
| Statewide | 785,715 | 307,527 | 37.28% | 63,984 | 7.76% | 110,567 | 13.40% | 216,477 | 26.24% |

CSC Analysis of Minnesota Department of Education Data

The first trend to note is the increase in k-12 charter enrollment over this period. Charter public school k-12 enrollment statewide has grown almost 19,000 students from 2001-2002 to 2011-2012 (from 10,162 to 39,129). Meanwhile, district k-12 enrollment has declined by more than 45,000 students, from 831, 535 to 785,729.

A second trend involves demographics of charter and district public school students. Statewide, charters consistently have enrolled a higher percentage of low income, limited English Speaking, and students of color than district public schools. Charters and district schools have roughly the same percentages of students with some form of disability.

For the last decade, more than half of students in Minnesota's chartered public schools have come from families receiving free or reduced cost lunches. For the 2011-2012 figure, 55.89% of charter students statewide were in one of the low-income categories. Meanwhile, the district schools' percentage of such students has increased over the last decade. But even this year, the average district school enrolls 37.28% from low-income families. , more than 18% lower than the percentage in charter schools.

Similar trends can be noted in the percentages of "students of color". In 2011-12, as in every year for the last decade, more than half of students in Minnesota charters represent students of color. Once again, the percentage of students of color in district public schools has increased (from 17.79% to 26.24%). Nevertheless, charters k-12 enrollment of students of color (at 51.06% in 2011-12) is more than 20 percentage points higher than district k-12 averages.

Minneapolis Trends

| Year | Fall Enrollment | Free & Reduced Meal | % Free & Reduced Meal | Limited English Proficiency (LEP) | % LEP | Special Education (SpEd) | % SpEd | Total Minority | % Minority |
|-----------|-----------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|--------|--------------------------|--------|----------------|------------|
| 2001-2002 | | | | | | | | | |
| Charter | 1,921 | 1,579 | 82.20% | 356 | 18.53% | 187 | 9.73% | 1,726 | 89.85% |
| District | 47,658 | 31,919 | 66.98% | 11,563 | 24.26% | 6,177 | 12.96% | 35,054 | 73.55% |
| 2002-2003 | | | | | | | | | |
| Charter | 2,681 | 2,071 | 1 | 400 | 0 | 225 | 0 | 2,400 | 1 |
| District | 45,551 | 30,825 | 1 | 11,094 | 0 | 5,970 | 0 | 33,888 | 1 |
| 2003-2004 | | | | | | | | | |
| Charter | 3,412 | 2,718 | 79.66% | 759 | 22.25% | 284 | 8.32% | 2,983 | 87.43% |
| District | 42,909 | 29,208 | 68.07% | 9,839 | 24.36% | 5,703 | 13.29% | 31,624 | 73.70% |
| 2004-2005 | | | | | | | | | |
| Charter | 4,177 | 3,333 | 79.79% | 1,166 | 27.91% | 376 | 9.00% | 3,692 | 88.39% |
| District | 39,902 | 27,256 | 68.31% | 9,286 | 23.27% | 5,467 | 13.70% | 29,365 | 73.59% |
| 2005-2006 | | | | | | | | | |
| Charter | 5,555 | 4,652 | 83.74% | 2,064 | 37.16% | 547 | 9.85% | 5,067 | 91.22% |
| District | 37,930 | 25,333 | 66.79% | 8,909 | 23.49% | 5,307 | 13.99% | 27,280 | 71.92% |
| 2006-2007 | | | | | | | | | |
| Charter | 6,460 | 5,206 | 80.59% | 2,491 | 38.56% | 594 | 22.03% | 5,444 | 65.35% |
| District | 36,337 | 23,879 | 68.31% | 8,495 | 73.55% | 5,242 | 66.98% | 26,020 | 71.61% |
| 2007-2008 | | | | | | | | | |
| Charter | 7,755 | 6,145 | 79.24% | 2,619 | 33.77% | 674 | 9.85% | 6,408 | 82.63% |
| District | 34,314 | 21,909 | 63.85% | 7,797 | 22.72% | 5,170 | 15.07% | 24,043 | 70.07% |
| 2008-2009 | | | | | | | | | |
| Charter | 9,351 | 6,874 | 73.51% | 2,435 | 26.04% | 812 | 8.68% | 6,944 | 74.26% |
| District | 33,886 | 21,621 | 15.07% | 7,495 | 22.12% | 5,199 | 15.34% | 24,187 | 73.70% |
| 2009-2010 | | | | | | | | | |
| Charter | 10,909 | 9,647 | 88.43% | 4,014 | 36.80% | 1,513 | 13.87% | 9,471 | 86.82% |
| District | 33,555 | 21,791 | 64.94% | 7,391 | 22.03% | 5,444 | 16.22% | 23,218 | 69.19% |
| 2011-2012 | | | | | | | | | |
| Charter | 11,125 | 8,480 | 76.22% | 2,815 | 25.30% | 1,296 | 11.65% | 8,458 | 76.03% |
| District | 33,503 | 21,922 | 59.73% | 7,575 | 22.61% | 5,517 | 16.47% | 21,893 | 65.35% |

Enrollment of k-12 students in chartered schools located in Minneapolis has grown from 1,921 in 2001-2002 to 11,125 in 2011-12. This is an increase of more than 9,000 students. Meanwhile district enrollment k-12 enrollment has declined from 47,658 to 33,503. This is a decrease of more than 14,000 k-12 students.

Charters in Minneapolis have a somewhat different demographic average than do Minneapolis district public schools. As is true statewide, Minneapolis charters enroll a higher percentage of low-income, limited English speaking and students of color than do the Minneapolis district public schools. Minneapolis district schools enroll a somewhat higher percentage of students with special needs.

St. Paul Trends

| Year | Fall Enrollment | Free & Reduced Meal | % Free and Reduced Meal | Limited English Proficiency (LEP) | % LEP | Special Education (SpEd) | % SpEd | Total Minority | % Minority |
|-----------|-----------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------|--------------------------|--------|----------------|------------|
| 2001-2002 | | | | | | | | | |
| Charter | 3,598 | 2,683 | 69.53% | 942 | 24.41% | 346 | 8.97% | 2,993 | 77.56% |
| District | 43,714 | 28,524 | 65.25% | 14,319 | 32.76% | 6,187 | 14.15% | 30,102 | 68.86% |
| 2002-2003 | | | | | | | | | |
| Charter | 4,087 | 2,799 | 68.49% | 1,135 | 27.77% | 434 | 10.62% | 3,119 | 76.32% |
| District | 43,413 | 28,259 | 65.09% | 14,865 | 34.24% | 6,434 | 14.82% | 30,400 | 70.03% |
| 2003-2004 | | | | | | | | | |
| Charter | 4,521 | 3,073 | 67.97% | 1,272 | 28.14% | 464 | 10.26% | 3,412 | 75.47% |
| District | 41,933 | 27,559 | 65.72% | 14,257 | 34.00% | 6,731 | 16.05% | 30,033 | 71.62% |
| 2004-2005 | | | | | | | | | |
| Charter | 4,788 | 3,152 | 65.83% | 1,277 | 26.67% | 589 | 12.30% | 3,542 | 73.98% |
| District | 40,554 | 28,046 | 69.16% | 15,201 | 37.48% | 6,789 | 16.74% | 29,530 | 72.82% |
| 2005-2006 | | | | | | | | | |
| Charter | 5,085 | 3,283 | 64.56% | 1,574 | 30.95% | 959 | 11.70% | 3,599 | 70.78% |
| District | 40,647 | 28,845 | 70.96% | 14,494 | 35.66% | 6,309 | 15.52% | 29,904 | 73.57% |
| 2006-2007 | | | | | | | | | |
| Charter | 5,578 | 3,424 | 61.38% | 1,720 | 30.84% | 634 | 11.37% | 3,882 | 69.59% |
| District | 40,034 | 27,848 | 69.56% | 16,101 | 40.22% | 6,330 | 15.81% | 29,664 | 74.10% |
| 2007-2008 | | | | | | | | | |
| Charter | 6,137 | 3,622 | 59.02% | 1,588 | 25.88% | 759 | 12.37% | 3,968 | 64.66% |
| District | 39,050 | 27,615 | 70.72% | 14,618 | 37.43% | 6,193 | 15.86% | 29,209 | 74.80% |
| 2008-2009 | | | | | | | | | |
| Charter | 8,051 | 4,725 | 58.69% | 1,789 | 22.22% | 1,160 | 14.41% | 4,999 | 62.09% |
| District | 38,560 | 26,627 | 69.05% | 15,478 | 40.14% | 6,046 | 15.68% | 28,934 | 75.04% |
| 2009-2010 | | | | | | | | | |
| Charter | 9,092 | 5,319 | 58.50% | 1,926 | 21.18% | 1,171 | 12.88% | 5,511 | 60.61% |
| District | 37,324 | 27,494 | 73.66% | 13,641 | 36.55% | 5,860 | 15.70% | 28,172 | 75.48% |
| 2011-2012 | | | | | | | | | |
| Charter | 9,014 | 6,138 | 68.09% | 2,744 | 30.44% | 1,041 | 11.55% | 6,415 | 71.17% |
| District | 37,063 | 27,145 | 73.24% | 13,514 | 36.46% | 5,874 | 15.85% | 28,200 | 76.09% |

Looking at the top left, K-12 enrollment in St. Paul chartered public schools was 3,598 in the school year 2001-2002. That grew to 9,014 in the school year 2011-2012. (This figure can be found on the left hand, bottom portion of the chart). This was a growth of more than 5,000 students.

During this period, k-12 enrollment in the St. Paul Public School district declined from 43,714 to 37,063, a decline of more than 6,500 students.

The majority of students, on average, attending both St Paul district and charter public schools are from low-income families, and represent communities of color. More than 30% of both district and charter students, on average, speak a language other than English in their home. However, unlike the Minneapolis and Minnesota pattern, St. Paul charters on average, enroll a slightly lower percentage of low income, limited English speaking and students of color than do the St. Paul Public Schools. District schools also enroll a somewhat higher percentage of students with special needs.

Many of Minnesota's highest performing schools serving large percentages of low-income students are charters

In May 2012, the Minnesota Department of Education released a new analysis of data from the 2009-10 and 2010-11 Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments. Minnesota Public Schools were given a numerical ranking based on overall proficiency, increased achievement of students, ability to close the achievement gap between their students and Minnesota's average, and (in the case of high schools) graduation rates. A new analysis of this data by Charter School Partners found that nine of the top ten public schools serving at least 85% low-income students were charters (Charter School Partners). Most of these schools were serving predominantly one race or ethnic group. The only school on the list that was not a charter was a Minneapolis contract alternative school, Heritage Science and Tech. This school serves predominantly East African students.

Minnesota's largest daily newspaper, the *Star Tribune*, has found for the last two years that the vast majority of Minneapolis-St Paul area public schools that are identified as "beating the odds" are charter public schools. In September 2011, a graphic appeared in the *Star Tribune*. It listed the 10 public schools with the highest percentages of low-income students who were proficient in reading or math on the official statewide examinations. (*Star Tribune*, September 14, 2011)

The top eight of the ten schools listed in math were charter public schools. The top nine of ten schools listed in reading were charter public schools. These were schools that "showed the highest percentage of students scoring at grade level or better, despite having a high number of students living in poverty." To be eligible to be on the list, a school had to enroll at least 85% students from low-income families.

The vast majority of these high-ranking charter public schools enrolled 80% or more students of color. Many of the "beat the odds" schools enrolled 90% or more from one race. Higher Ground Academy has appeared consistently on this list. *US News and World Report* also has listed Higher Ground Academy as one of the nation's finest high schools.

Some have criticized Minnesota and other charters as segregated, which is to say that they are all, or predominantly students of one race or ethnicity. An example was posted

on-line earlier this year. One author asserted, "...Any achievement by a group of students at a charter school that is predominantly of one race is 'hollow'." (Scott)

Former Minnesota Commissioner of Human Rights Bill Wilson responded several years ago at the Minnesota legislature to the charge that charter schools such as the one he founded were "segregated." Wilson also was the first African American who was elected City Council chair in St. Paul, Minnesota. He founded and is Executive Director of Higher Ground Academy (a school in which CSC has co-located). Higher Ground appears regularly on "Beat the Odds" lists.

In his legislative testimony and in a subsequent column based on this testimony, Wilson differentiated between schools like the school he founded, Higher Ground Academy, and the segregated public school he was forced to attend in Indiana: "We had no choice," he recalled. "I was forced to attend an inferior school, farther from home than nearby, better-funded 'whites-only' schools. Higher Ground is open to all. No one is forced to attend. Quite a difference." (Wilson)

Denying the value of these schools, as some do, reminds us of what Ralph Ellison wrote about in the civil rights classic, *Invisible Man* (Ellison). Ellison wrote, in part, "I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me."

Wilson also has commented at greater length on this issue: "Slavery and segregation excluded black people from attending schools and colleges. Even so, abolitionists and other people of good will set forth a process for the building of educational institutions that would provide education to blacks as was being provided to the white population. Over time, many start-up institutions built a rich tradition and evolved into what are now known today as historically black colleges and universities.

"Today, by choice, many black and white students alike attend and graduate from these institutions. The valuable contributions historically black colleges and universities have and continue to make to the education of young men and women in America are unquestionable. Without these great educational institutions, generations of black and other persons of color will have gone without a meaningful education. Likewise, public charter schools of choice are at the beginning stages of serving as a viable conduit and pathway through which children of different backgrounds are able to access high quality education."

"Higher Ground Academy as well as some other public charter schools are doing an exceptional job of educating children of color. The success of these charter schools can be attributed to setting high student expectations and also holding teachers accountable. At the end of the day, public charter schools will ultimately serve to raise the bar for America's K - 12 education system by demonstrating that all children, regardless of race or color, can and will learn."

"Imposed separation because of or on the basis of race or color is the classic definition of segregation. People choosing of their own free will to attend a public school is the exercise of liberty. The right to assemble and exercising freedom of choice is guaranteed

in the Bill of Rights. How then is choosing which charter school to attend not consistent with the right of assembly? Unlike imposed segregation, charter schools include all who apply or wish to come. Unlike segregated schools of the 1950's and 1960's, these schools most certainly do not exclude anyone because of their race or color of skin." (Wilson)

The statistics cited earlier show that a growing number of Minnesotans, and a growing number of people of color, are selecting charters. While overall, the majority of Minnesotans still select district public schools, the trend is clear.

Any fair analysis of Minnesota's charters should acknowledge both successes and shortcomings. In 2008, Minnesota's respected Office of Legislative Auditor discussed the performance of the state's charters. It concluded, in part:

In 2007, a greater percentage of Minnesota charter schools than district schools failed to make "Adequate Yearly Progress," and students in charter schools generally did not perform as well on standardized academic measures as students in district schools. However, after accounting for relevant demographic factors and student mobility rates, the differences in student performance were minimal. (Office of Legislative Auditor)

The Auditor's report recommended changes in the way that charters are supervised. Many of these recommendations were adopted by the Minnesota legislature. Clearly, performance must be a key issue for all public schools, whether district or charter.

Possible Implications of these Enrollment Trends

Before beginning this section, it's important to note that the Center for School Change has been a consistent advocate for more effective district and chartered public schools. In a variety of columns, we've urged educators, policy-makers and others to learn from the most effective public schools, whether district or charter (See Nathan, 2008, Nathan, 2009)

There are many ways to interpret these trends. In this section we offer a few observations.

- Part of the recent charter public school trend over the last five years has been to expand or replicate successful charters. Three Minnesota examples are Harvest Prep, Hiawatha, and Minnesota New Country School. Harvest and Hiawatha have appeared on Minneapolis/St. Paul area "Beating the Odds Schools" lists. The U.S. Department of Education has cited Minnesota New Country School as an example of a school that is closing the achievement gap (U.S. Department of Education).
- Local and national foundations (including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation) have provided assistance to help expand or replicate these schools. Part of the idea of the charter movement was to identify what will help some students reach greater success. Replication of success seems *wise* and *warranted*.
- Some school districts have developed new partnerships with charters. The Minneapolis and Forest Lake districts have asked to work more closely with

successful local charters. In 2012, the Minnesota Legislature adopted legislation designed to help promote this collaboration. The St. Paul district has met with Harvest Prep officials to learn more about how the schools operate. These steps seem like potentially valuable collaborations.

- Part of the idea of the charter movement was to encourage a search for new, innovative and potentially more effective ways of reaching some students. Success of some charters with low income, limited English speaking and students of color suggests that this goal is, in some cases, being met.
- However, just as in the broader society, innovation is needed and necessary. New research on the brain, and emerging technology provide opportunities for educators to rethink how to promote learning.
- We need only look at technological advances in computers and telephones to see how new approaches have provided opportunities unheard of even twenty years ago. Fortunately, society was not satisfied with huge computers that required telephone line connections. Fortunately, neither the broader society nor government bodies were satisfied with rotary telephones, even though they did represent progress.
- Replication, collaboration and a need for continued innovation suggest that policy-makers and funders should continue a two-prong focus. First, we should attempt to use “lessons learned” and “best practices” to improve existing schools.
- Second, just as there have been opportunities to rethink, reimagine and create new approaches to computers and telephones, policy-makers ought to not only allow, but also encourage innovators to rethink and redesign programs to promote learning. These opportunities should be available both for those in the district and charter public school sectors.
- Recognizing that there are huge differences in curriculum, educational philosophy and instructional strategy among both district and charter public schools; we believe it makes sense to try to learn from the most effective schools. This seems like a more constructive approach than continued debates about which are better or more effective, district or charter. Someone suggested that attempting to compare results of district and chartered public schools is like trying to compare gas mileage of rented and leased cars. The comparison is not useful because there are wide variations in both categories.
- Looking ahead, it will be important to examine enrollment and performance trends. It also will be valuable to determine whether collaborations are taking place between district and charter public schools, and what impact on students these collaborations have.

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About the Center for School Change

Since 1988, the Center for School Change has worked with at the school, community and policy levels to help improve public education. Foundations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates, Annenberg, Carnegie, Rockefeller, Blandin, Cargill, Frey, Carlson, Helzberg, Kauffman, Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Travelers Foundations, and the Minnesota and U.S. Departments of Education have provided more than \$26 million to help the CSC carry out its work. More than 20 state legislatures and several Congressional committees have asked CSC to provide testimony on research-based approaches to improving public education. USA Today, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Atlanta Constitution*, *Sacramento Bee*, *Star Tribune*, *Pioneer Press* and other newspapers have published guest columns written by CSC staff. CSC Director Joe Nathan writes a weekly column on education/youth issues for the ECM, Sun and Current newspaper groups in Minnesota.

CSC currently is working in several partnerships. These include

- A federally funded partnership with the St. Paul Public Schools and several local charter public schools to help improve achievement and graduation rates
- A federally funded partnership with the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices to help strengthen public school choice programs in several states.
- A Minnesota Department of Education project to help provide information on Dual (High School/College Credit) programs, and a Leadership Academy for District, Charter and Alternative Public Schools.
- A partnership bringing together St Paul Public Schools, a charter, and a suburban public school to help increase the number of students fully prepared in reading, writing and math for some form of higher education, and to reduce the number of graduates who have to take remedial courses on entering some form of public higher education in Minnesota. This is funded by the Frey, St. Paul and Travelers Foundations.
- A partnership with eleven Minneapolis area charter public schools to increase student achievement and family involvement, and help produce lasting collaborations among these schools. This is in partnership with Clifton/Larson/Allen and funded by Cargill.

CSC staff includes Paj Ntaub Lee, Outreach Coordinator, Kabo Yang, Associate Director, and Joe Nathan, Director. As noted, this report was done with assistance from Jordan Lim, who served as an intern with CSC during the spring, 2012 semester.