



Missouri NEA Communications Briefing

Charter Schools

All public schools should be accountable to the local community and elected school board.

The Issue

Charter schools were initially promoted by educators who sought to innovate within the local public school system to better meet the needs of students. Over the last quarter of a century, charter schools have grown dramatically to include large numbers of charters that are privately managed, largely unaccountable, and not transparent as to their operations or performance.

Charter schools in Missouri are publicly funded schools operated by the board of a non-profit corporation. Most charter schools in Missouri are sponsored by a higher education institution and not by the elected school board of the community in which the school is located.

Charters have grown the most in school districts like St. Louis City and Kansas City that were already struggling to meet students' needs due to longstanding, systemic and ingrained patterns of institutional neglect, racial and ethnic segregation, inequitable school funding, and disparities in staff, programs and services. The result has been the creation of separate, largely unaccountable, privately managed charter school systems that undermine support and funding of local public schools in those districts.

Informed by this trend, Missouri NEA adopted a new position paper on charter schools in 2017. The new MNEA policy emphasizes the need for all public schools, including charters, to be accountable to the local community through the elected school board.

MNEA's Position

Charter schools should be authorized exclusively by the local school board and only if the charter is both necessary to meet the needs of students in the district and will meet those needs in a manner that improves the local public school system.

Public charter schools, like all public schools, must provide students with a free, accessible, non-sectarian, quality education that is delivered subject to the same basic safeguards and standards of accountability, transparency and respect for rights that apply to every other public school.

Charter schools should be authorized or expanded only after a district has assessed the impact of the proposed charter school on local public school resources, programs and services, including consideration of whether other improvements in either educational program or school management would better serve the district's needs.

The state's role should be to monitor proper sponsorship and oversight of charter schools by the school district and to provide adequate resources and training to support high quality district charter authorization practices and compliance work, and to share best authorization practices across the state.

The renewal of any existing charters should only be under the sponsorship of the school board of the district in which the school is located.

continued

MNEA
believes that
all students
deserve the
opportunity
to attend a
quality public
school.

What This Means to Educators

Expansion of charter schools sponsored by higher education institutions or other entities outside the community undermines local school planning and oversight of schools for the students of the community. These additional schools will divert funding from current schools. This uncoordinated expansion of school sites is likely to force harmful and unwanted cutbacks or closures in existing local public schools.

Nationwide, among the charter schools that opened in 2000, one-fifth closed within five years of opening, and one-third had closed by 2010. Because the opening of charters may also prompt cutbacks or closures in local public schools, these alarmingly high charter closure rates subject students and communities to cycles of damaging disruption. Such disruption can leave students stranded mid-year. Even closures that occur at the year's end disrupt students' education and unmoor communities that previously had been anchored by the local public school.

Allowing sponsorship outside the community also undermines focused consideration of whether other improvements in either educational program

or school management (ranging from reduced class sizes to community or magnet schools) would better serve the district's needs.

Outside sponsorship also removes the school board's ability to consider the impact of the charter on the racial, ethnic and socio-economic composition of schools and neighborhoods and on equitable access to quality services for all district students, including students with special needs and English language learners.

Resources

MNEA stands up for students wherever they are educated. MNEA supports communities that are working to hold charters accountable, including reforms to state charter law, local school board resolutions and actions, and efforts to raise local awareness of the need for charters to comply with the basic safeguards and standards detailed above. MNEA believes all educators deserve the right to collective voice and representation, and that an organized workforce is a better guardian of quality standards for students and educators alike. MNEA will support the efforts of local affiliates that seek to organize charter school employees.

What You Can Do

Talk to your state representative and state senator about the need to make sure all public schools, including charter schools, are accountable to the local community and elected school board. Let them know that MNEA believes in providing great public schools for all students and is committed to ensuring that charter schools meet this expectation.

Your local school board may sponsor a charter school. Ask your MNEA local president how you can help strengthen your local and whether the local can engage with the district in conversation about charter schools. Surveying school board candidates on charter school issues and getting involved in school board elections can make a difference. The larger your membership, the stronger your position to influence policy in your district.

For more information on charter school issues, subscribe to the MNEA *Legislative Update* listserv. Sign up at www.mnea.org, or send an email request to Sandy Smith at Sandy.Smith@mnea.org.

For more information about this topic and other education policy issues, visit www.mnea.org/briefings
Find MNEA's Legislative Platform at www.mnea.org/Missouri/PlatformPriorities.aspx

Missouri National Education Association

1810 East Elm Street • Jefferson City, MO 65101
800 392-0236 • 573 634-3202
www.mnea.org

