

# THE Center for Education Reform



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## FAX ALERT

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**To: Charter Friends**  
**From: Jeanne Allen**

*From Joe Nathan, the following is in response to the results of a charter school study released by Minnesota's Office of Educational Accountability. Joe is Director of the Center for School Change of the Humphrey Institute for Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota.*

The caller was blunt: "Joe, how can you support charter schools when a new Minnesota study says charter students don't do as well as other public school students?" She had heard a two-sentence report on TV and had lots of questions.

I began by asking if she preferred the former Soviet style economy, or our American economy. "I like the US," she replied. "Why?" I asked. "Well, Americans have lots of good choices. I can decide where to buy groceries, clothing and cars. In Russia, you don't have much choice." Then I asked, "Is our economy a failure if some companies go out of business? Or do we like the fact that a company, which isn't meeting customers' needs, has to improve, or close? Do we gain when people can create businesses using new approaches?" She replied, "Is that the charter idea? Giving families more choice in schools, and giving people a chance to start innovative schools? I like that." Yes, that's the idea.

Then we discussed the "ripple effect" of charters. Knowing that teachers and parents can start charter public schools helped encourage Duluth and Rochester boards to start Core Knowledge schools, encouraged the Forest Lake board to start a Montessori school, and encouraged St. Paul to start more small secondary schools.

Cy Yusten of the St. Paul schools says that the number of students attending charters using existing space in town has saved tax-payers from paying for a new building which otherwise would have been needed. "Fascinating," the caller responded. "But what about this report on TV?"

The new report was published by the Office of Educational Accountability at the University of Minnesota. It says, that on average, charter school student's score below the average Minnesota public school students on statewide third, fifth and eighth grade tests. The report also shows that more than half of the charter students tested were in their first year at the charter. The test really measures what students learned in PREVIOUS schools. "Wow," the caller noted, "TV didn't tell me that... More information makes me more positive about charters," she concluded. "Teachers in charter and other public schools, believe they should be judged on how well students do after they've worked with them for a few years, not just a few months. The caller agreed that's fair.

The report also shows that charter schools, on average, enroll three times as many limited English speaking students, twice as many low income students, and about twice as many students with disabilities, as average Minnesota public schools. However, charters are responsible for improving achievement, attendance and graduation rates. Many are, and ones that aren't, have been closed. Other states like what we're doing. Minnesota pioneered charters, in 1991. New York just became the thirty-fourth state to pass a charter law. "People need this information -- not just two sentences on TV," the caller concluded.

I agree.