



***Audubon Center of the North Woods***

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Sept. 27<sup>th</sup>, 2010

Alice Seagren, Commissioner  
Minnesota Department of Education  
St. Paul, Minnesota

Dear Commissioner:

Audubon Center of the North Woods (ACNW) has, over six years, submitted Affidavits to Sponsor twenty-five (25) charter schools that have been approved by your office. Of those sponsored schools, one school did not open due to an early cancelation of sponsorship by ACNW and one is pending approval until the continuation of ACNW status as Authorizer. Twenty – three charter schools with 4,424 students are currently operating and are educating these Minnesota children in FY 2011.

Twenty-two schools at this time are organizationally sound, following Minnesota state and specifically the charter school law, and are in proactive communication with ACNW regarding developmental challenges. One school is on ACNW Notice of Probationary Status (Level 2 concern). Throughout the years, ACNW has strategically intervened / provided guidance to challenge Boards and the leadership of schools during their development to improve /change practices. ACNW has demonstrated the necessary leadership to protect the taxpayers' investment in establishing an appropriate school operational basis for student achievement. Financially, no ACNW sponsored schools have been in SOD in the last 3 years and none are in debt this year. Fund balances are generally appropriate for each school with few exceptions.

What a group of schools: most which are operating either in rural or inner city communities. And such diversity in academic approaches: basic skills, STEM focus, boy's focused, girl's focused, Montessori, environmental, expeditionary, project-based,

community schools, new immigrant and culturally based. Students of color make up 2/3<sup>rds</sup> of population being served. ACNW support of innovation is consistent with charter school law and we have followed up with facilitation of opportunities for educators to share what works, including sharing with traditional district schools. The achievement gap is too wide to not act promptly to adopt best practices. This is warranted as many of the schools that we are the sponsor of are academically high achieving schools. None are less than fully committed to improve and, in a couple cases, know that they must improve significantly their students' academic achievement or face contract non-renewal.

ACNW unequivocally commits to the high quality implementation in our Authorizer role. This, we have concluded, currently requires an ACNW course change in some key areas. We will keep what we have learned helps build quality in our schools while implementing a new course of action so our schools show dramatic positive results on all measures of student academic achievement.

This course change is supported by our schools. Our new ACNW Guides are comprehensive and organized to completely reflect the updated policies and procedures of the ACNW Charter School Division. Our new Charter School office in Minneapolis (Riverplace) is fully functional and accessible to the public, charter school leaders, and may be used by school groups.

Commissioner Seagren, ACNW fully embraces the Principles and Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing developed by NACSA and will utilize these guidelines in all decision-making and as reinforced/enhanced by our considerable experience as a sponsor of Minnesota charter schools.

We appreciate your consideration of our request for ACNW to be an approved Authorizer for Minnesota charter schools. We await your decision on this important matter for all involved.

Sincerely,

ACNW Board of Directors  
ACNW Board Charter School Committee Sub-Committee  
ACNW Director – Melonie Shipman  
ACNW Charter Schools Coordinator – Steve Dess

cc: Schools

Agriculture & Food Science Academy High School; Aurora Charter School; Best Academy; Bright Water Montessori School; Canon River STEM School; Cross Lake Community School; Emily Grey Accelerated Charter School; Glacial Hills Community School; Great Expectations Community School; Harvest Preparatory Academy; La Crescent Montessori Academy; Laura Jeffry Academy; Lighthouse Academy of Nations; Michael Frome Academy; New Discoveries Montessori Academy; Noble Academy; Oshki Ogimaag; Prairie Seeds Academy; River Heights Charter School; Rivers Edge Academy; Riverway Learning Community; Swan River Montessori School; Voyageurs Expeditionary High School & Discovery Woods Montessori (pending)

