FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
May 13, 2010

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Stronger Oversight Coming to Minnesota Charter Schools: New Authorizers Approved

First charter school authorizers approved by Minnesota Department of Education under new law

(Roseville, MN) The Minnesota Department of Education approved the first six charter school authorizers under a new law passed by the legislature in the 2009 session. All charter school authorizers (formerly known as "sponsors") have to be approved by the department by June 30, 2011. The new criteria for authorizers include stricter financial and academic controls and adherence to national standards for charter school oversight and quality.

In the first round of applications, there were 13 organizations that applied to become charter school authorizers. The six approved today to authorize charter schools are:

- Anoka Technical College
- Friends of Education
- Minneapolis Public Schools
- Novation Education Opportunities
- Student Achievement Minnesota
- Volunteers of America - Minnesota

"Today marks a new beginning for stronger oversight of Minnesota's charter schools," said Commissioner Alice Seagren. "These new charter school authorizers now meet the highest standards of quality charter school oversight in the nation."

The department worked with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers' (NACSA) using their Principles and Standards for Quality Authorizing. Minnesota's new charter school law was given the Award for Excellence in Improving Policy by NACSA in 2009.

The new law puts in place more robust oversight responsibilities in the areas of capacity and infrastructure, the application process, contracting, ongoing oversight and evaluation, and renewal of charter schools.

The law shifts the focus of the department from approving every individual charter school to approving charter school authorizers, who in turn will be responsible for approving charter schools and holding them accountable. The law also allows the state to approve up to three single-purpose authorizers, whose sole purpose will be to charter schools, adding to Minnesota's charter school options.

The organizations not approved were sent detailed comments from the reviewers and will have 20 business days to resubmit their applications.

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