



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
December 7, 2010

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Three More Charter School Authorizers approved by Minnesota Department of Education

New law brings stronger oversight to Minnesota charter schools: Nine Charter School Authorizers now meet the rigorous state law

(Roseville, MN) – There are now nine charter school authorizers approved by the Minnesota Department of Education under a new law passed by the legislature in the 2009 session.

The Minnesota Department of Education approved three charter school authorizers on Dec. 1, 2010, including a single-purpose authorizer with the sole purpose of chartering schools. All charter school authorizers (formerly known as “sponsors”) planning to earn approval must 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 second round of applications, 16 organizations applied to become charter school authorizers. The three approved charter schools authorizers announced today are:

- **Ordway Center for the Performing Arts**
- **Pillsbury United Communities**
- **Innovative Quality Schools**

Eleven organizations remain eligible to earn Commissioner approval to operate as charter school authorizers. These organizations have through late December to respond to identified deficiencies in their applications.

Innovative Quality Schools was the third and final single-purpose authorizer approved. Under current law, the number of single-purpose authorizers is limited. The next round of authorizer application reviews has a submission deadline of February 16, 2011. Previously denied applicants are eligible to apply.

“These charter school authorizers meet the highest standards of quality charter school oversight in the nation,” said Commissioner Alice Seagren. “The applications for the single-purpose authorizers were especially competitive and speak to the quality and the commitment of the organizations seeking to become charter school authorizers in Minnesota.”

The previously approved authorizers are:

- Anoka Technical College
- Friends of Education
- Minneapolis Public Schools
- Novation Education Opportunities

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- Student Achievement Minnesota
- Volunteers of America - Minnesota

The department worked with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) using its Principles and Standards for Quality Authorizing to develop the new criteria implemented in law in 2009.

The new law received NACSA's 2009 Award for Excellence in Improving Policy. In addition, Minnesota was recently ranked second in the nation for strong charter school laws and was one of only three states to receive an "A" rating from the Center for Education Reform. The 2009 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. It shifts the department's focus from approving individual charter schools to approving charter school authorizers, which 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, with the sole purpose of chartering schools, adding to Minnesota's charter school options.

The organizations not approved were sent detailed comments from the reviewers and may resubmit their applications.