



December 31, 2012

Dear Charter Schools and Authorizers:

As we look to a new year and prepare to welcome back students from the holidays, I wanted to let you know about a change that will take place regarding pre-kindergarten and preschool instructional programs for Minnesota charter schools in 2013.

For years, charter schools and authorizers in Minnesota have not received specific guidance on how to best provide and oversee school readiness instructional programs, particularly for children under the age of five. The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) is pleased to announce that we are posting clear guidance to more effectively communicate opportunities, accountability expectations and instructions for charter schools and authorizers who wish to seek official recognition of their instructional programs for three to five-year-olds.

This guidance will provide a necessary foundation to assist in MDE's official recognition of these charter school programs, which are allowed under Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.10, Subdivision 8(f). This resource will also support authorizers and charter schools who wish to implement such a program beyond their primary age or grade level focus.

Implementation of this guidance will provide unprecedented opportunities and resources for charter schools. Upon official recognition by MDE, a charter school may be eligible to receive funding for the Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge grant incentives, state charter school lease aid, and state and federal scholarships for children younger than five years who are participating in these charter school's early learning instructional programs.

This recognition will be a critical component for efforts at MDE to identify those charter schools throughout the state that are already providing excellent early learning opportunities for children, while also working to spread those best practices to other charter schools as they seek to develop strong programs for students under the age of five. Furthermore, the expectations laid out in the guidance are consistent with classroom requirements and teacher knowledge for school readiness programs run by traditional school districts under Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.15.

Additionally, this guidance clarifies that an authorizer is responsible for overseeing all programs implemented by a charter school, including a charter school's pre-kindergarten and preschool instructional programs. Authorizers will request official recognition of a charter school's early learning instructional programs through the department's new charter school affidavit process (Minn. Stat. A7 124D.10, Subd. 4(a)) or supplemental affidavit process (Minn. Stat. A7 124D.10, Subd. 4(j)) and once recognized, the pre-kindergarten or preschool instructional program must

be included in the authorizer's charter contract with the school (Minn. Stat. A7 124D.10, Subd. 6(2)).

Please take some time to review the new guidance and contact MDE with any questions, comments or concerns. Technical assistance sessions will also be offered through the month of January. We want to make sure you have necessary information and resources as you seek to develop high quality school readiness programs for Minnesota's youngest students.

Thank you for all that you do on behalf of Minnesota's children.

Dr. Brenda Cassellius  
Minnesota Education Commissioner

Enclosures: Technical Assistance Sessions Schedule  
Frequently Asked Questions: Early Learning Program Guidance for Charter Schools and Authorizers  
At-a-Glance: Early Learning Program Guidance for Charter Schools and Authorizers  
FY 2013 UFARS Requirements