Innovation and Accountability in K-12 Education: Chartering by the City of Milwaukee's Common Council

By Howard Fuller and Cindy Zautcke Institute for the Transformation of Learning Marquette University December 15, 2012

In 1998, the City of Milwaukee's Common Council became one of the first municipalities in the country to charter schools. In order to take advantage of the opportunity, the Common Council, in partnership with Mayor John Norquist, established the Charter School Review Committee (CSRC) to develop the systems for awarding charters and monitoring the fiscal and academic performance of those charters.

The Common Council's **process for awarding a charter** is well-regarded because applicants must prepare a thorough application and go through a rigorous interview process in order to be awarded a charter. Information gathered during the application process includes:

Management and fiscal information:

- Background information about the people presenting the proposal.
- A thorough review of the proposed fiscal systems.
- The most recent audit of the organization for schools already in operation in Milwaukee or in other parts of the country.

Educational programming information:

- Detailed information about the curriculum, instruction, and assessment program
 of the proposed school, including which standardized tests and local measures the
 school will use to measure student achievement.
- Value-added analysis of student achievement data for schools already in operation converting to charter status
- Information about staff development, parental involvement, and student recruitment.

During the interview process, applicants are given the opportunity to clarify information in the application as well as demonstrate community support for the application. In November, the CSRC, using a scoring rubric (included in attached application), makes a recommendation to the Council's Steering and Rules Committee about whether or not to award a charter to the applicant.

Once chartered, the City's charter schools are **monitored annually by an accounting firm and by a team of consultants who monitor academic and compliance issues.** These annual reports are the basis of the high quality accountability system the CSRC has set up for the Common Council.

Key features of the academic and compliance monitoring, designed and administered by Janice Ereth and Sue Gramling of the Children's Research Center (CRC) are:

- Clear contract provisions, reported annually to the Common Council as having been **met or not met.**
- An annual Student Learning Memorandum, which lays out for the schools what the coming year's targets will be.
- A newly launched scorecard, capturing the multiple measures used by the CSRC in one number.

The annual reports from CRC and the companion report from M.L. Tharpes on the schools' fiscal health become the basis for discussions and decision-making by the CSRC and the Common Council. From these reports, the Council members know:

- If the City's charter school students are **reading**, **writing**, **and computing at or above grade level**;
- If the City's charter school students are **growing at more than one year's growth** for the cohort of children who started at the charter school behind grade level:
- If the school's financial status is good; and
- If the school is in compliance with state and federal laws.

The students attending City of Milwaukee charter schools are attending among the most accountable schools in the state. In fact, the City's CSRC was the first authorizer in the city to recommend **revoking a charter**. After five years of operation, the CSRC determined that Khamit Institute was not operating an academically or fiscally viable organization. The school will cease operations at the end of the 2003-04 school year.

The leadership of the City of Milwaukee in 1998 took advantage of a unique opportunity to create new K-12 options in our city. Leadership at the city in the mayor's office and the Common Council have the opportunity to continue this innovative and accountable effort by supporting continued chartering of high quality applications and continued monitoring of existing charter schools.

1. Frequently Asked Questions about charter schools in Milwaukee

1. How many charter schools are there?

Milwaukee is unique in that it has three active charter school authorizers—the City of Milwaukee's Common Council, the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and the Milwaukee Public Schools. The Milwaukee Area Technical College is also an authorizer, but has decided not to use its authority.

2. How many students attend charter schools?

Approximately **18,000**, with 7365 of those attending charter schools authorized by UW-Milwaukee or the city of Milwaukee.

3. Which schools does the Common Council authorize?

A list of schools for the 2012-13 school year is attached.

4. Does the City's charter school program cost the city anything?

When Chapter 330 was passed, charter school supporters and city leaders agreed that the program would not cost the city taxpayers anything. Funds to support the monitoring work and the staffing of the CSRC are raised through fees charged to the schools and through fundraising.

5. Do charter schools have certified teachers?

Yes. Charter schools must hire licensed teachers, or must have teachers enrolled in a licensing program.

6. Do charter school students take the same state tests as MPS students?

Yes. As public school students, students attending charter schools must participate in the Wisconsin Student Assessment System (WSAS). The City of Milwaukee's CSRC has incorporated the student achievement data from the WSAS into its overall accountability system.

7. Where can I learn more about City of Milwaukee charter schools?

Please contact Cindy Zautcke, director of the city's charter school initiative, at (414) 288-0453 or by emailing her at cindyzautcke@yahoo.com.

CHARTER SCHOOL	DESCRIPTION	Phone	Contact Person	Grades
Central City	Elementary School with	(414)	Chris Faltz	K4-8
Cyberschool	strong educational	444-2330		
	technology use			
CEO Leadership	Small college-prep high	(414)	Rashida Evans	9-12
Academy	school	873-4014		
Darrell Lynn Hines	International	(414) 358-	Barbara Horton	K4-8
Academy (DLHA)	Baccalaureate elementary	3542		
	school			
Downtown Montessori	Montessori	(414)	Virginia Flynn	K4-8
Academy		744-6005		
Escuela Verde	Project-based high school	(414)	Bobbi Aguero	9-12
		988-7960		
King's Academy	Elementary school	(414)	Mondell	K4-8
		371-9100	Mayfield	
Milwaukee Academy	Elementary, middle, and	(414)	Judy Merryfield	K4-12
of Science	high school	933-0302		
Milwaukee Math and	Elementary school	(414)	Ergun Sevilmis	K4-8
Science Academy	managed by non-profit	263-6400		
	Concept Schools			
North Point	Elementary school	(414) 461-	Ashleigh Plauch	K4-8
Lighthouse Academy	managed by non-profit	5339		
	Lighthouse Academies			