

Regular Board of Education Meeting
Lake Mills Area School District
Monday, March 11, 2002

Madam Chairperson and members of the Lake Mills School Board. My name is Larry Kaseman. I am Executive Director of Wisconsin Parents Association which is a state-wide organization of over 1,400 member families founded in 1984. I do not purport to speak for all of them nor certainly for all homeschoolers in Wisconsin.

I am here to speak in favor of tabling or amending Action Item VIII. A. regarding space available for the K-5 Lake Mills virtual charter school. This is important for several reasons. First, a virtual charter school is a new type of school. If granted a charter, its innovations would have far-reaching impacts on education, particularly public schools. Second, it is a multimillion dollar project and therefore deserves deliberate consideration. Third, because charter schools are so new, you are working on this proposal without clear models or precedents. In addition, virtual charter schools are creating major difficulties in other states. And yet the charter you grant and the agreement you sign with K12, Inc. would be used as models by future such schools, making it even more important that they be carefully designed.

Therefore, I recommend that you take your time first in deciding whether or not to charter a virtual school at all, and second in working out the procedures and details for the proposed school and the agreement with K12, Inc. Therefore, I suggest that you clarify Action Item VIII. A. on tonight's agenda by including the following statement in the minutes.

The Board is not authorizing the Lake Mills Superintendent to negotiate final terms and conditions of the proposed charter school and agreement with K12, Inc. until the Board has been presented with a complete charter proposal and any proposed related agreement with K12, Inc. and has had an opportunity to review the proposal(s) in a deliberate manner, ask questions and get written responses, and then direct the Superintendent as to what further action to take in this matter. This language would qualify the language of intent in the narrative preceding the VIII. A. Proposed Motion portion in today's Board agenda concerning the Board's next meeting on April 8, which reads: "...at which we propose to request final approval of the charter and the agreement with K12, Inc."

I also suggest that you amend the Proposed Motion in VIII. A. by striking the word "final" in the phrase "pending final approval." The word "final" is not necessary and yet would appear to give authority and direction for the Superintendent to proceed in working out final terms and conditions without substantive review and oversight by the Board.

Among the key questions about this proposed virtual charter school that have not been answered are the following:

- Are the costs for the contracted work fair and reasonable, especially in light of the fact that the K12 curriculum is sold for \$1,400 to individuals as a freestanding curriculum that can be used effectively by parents and students in their homes without additional support in terms of technical assistance, teachers, community support, etc.?
- Is the K12 virtual school curriculum in keeping with our mission as a school? Is it something we would want our own children to use or would encourage students from Lake Mills to use? Is a curriculum delivered to students through a computer that requires a minimum amount from a teacher good for most people?
- How would the state and federal tests be administered in a secure manner? Can we assume other school districts would, for example, allow students enrolled in a Lake Mills virtual charter school to take tests at their schools? And will this be true for more than one to two years, after which other districts might become competitive and non-cooperative as is true in Pennsylvania today where 200 districts are

withholding payment to virtual charter schools and the school board association has brought a major lawsuit against such schools? Is the K12 curriculum aligned with state and federal governments curriculum standards and testing requirements?

- Since charter schools are open to any student who meets the basic mission of the school, how many students from Lake Mills who wish to enroll in the Lake Mills K12 charter school are we prepared to pay for?
- Has this program been marketed in a fair and open manner, ensuring equal opportunity for students in public and private schools, including homeschools, by advertising and disseminating information about this potential virtual school to public and private schools in an equal fashion? Or has it been targeted primarily to homeschoolers, leaving others to hear of it nearly incidentally? Is target marketing under the auspices of a public school similar to red-line discrimination in housing and insurance? If so, what liability risks are associated with this?
- Was it a violation of the Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act (that protects vital data of parents and students from being released by public school officials) to make copies of the open enrollment applications from parents and students and send them to the K12, Inc. since they are not under contract with the district and the district has no legal means to protect this information? Doesn't this action and the idea of negotiating a contract for a new, multimillion dollar program in a very short period of time suggest that greater oversight and more of an arms-length business approach are needed in responding to K12's initiative?
- Were these forms used to contact parents and determine their interest in the proposed charter school? If so, this would appear to be a violation of Wisconsin's Open Enrollment Law which calls for a random selection of students.

Other school districts and state education agencies use formal analysis and review procedures in determining whether to charter schools. A review of recent actions taken by the Denver, Colorado, School Board points up the importance of having a complete proposal in front of a board, asking for written responses to questions, and making a determination based on fact finding, analysis, and discussion before deciding whether to proceed with negotiations or a contract. It is my understanding from talking with Mr. Donald Childs on Friday, March 8, 2002, that he had not received a completed proposal for review at that time and yet planned to negotiate a contract leading to a charter on March 13, 2002, and expects the Lake Mills School Board to vote on whether to grant a charter on April 8, 2002. (I am submitting for the record a copy of the written responses to the questions asked by Denver Public Schools District School Improvement and Accountability Council concerning a virtual school proposal submitted to them. I am also submitting for the record responses to other virtual school proposals made before the states of Minnesota and Wisconsin. These documents provide information that should prove useful in making decisions about whether to charter a virtual school.)