



Newsletter:



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WEBSITE: [www.charmmpls.org](http://www.charmmpls.org)

EMAIL: [info@charmmpls.org](mailto:info@charmmpls.org)

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## What is ChARM?

Children's Autism Rights Mpls (ChARM) is a coalition of families that formed in response to recent policy changes to the Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) autism program by the MPS Special Education Department. Starting in the fall of 2015, many families will no longer have the option to send their Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Kindergarteners to the Citywide Autism Program.

## Why was ChARM formed?

Special education administrators have repeatedly ignored parents' concerns, excluded the teachers who know these students best, and misrepresented their plan to families, the school board, the public, and the media. Changes to the Citywide Autism Program (CAP) are being implemented with reckless haste, and with every step, these administrators are demonstrating a negligent disregard for the needs of children with autism. ChARM is working to unite parents, bring awareness to the issue, bring the district's mishandlings and misinformation to light, and ask that the MPS Special Education Department reverse their decision to implement these changes until they can provide a clear outline of their plan and prove it is truly best for students with ASD.

## Why fight for the Citywide Autism Program?

There has always been an option to send a student with ASD to his or her community school. Ask any parent with a child in the Citywide Autism Program, and they'll tell you there was a time when they did not want to send their child to a 'program school'. But ask how they feel about the program after having experienced it, and they will almost unanimously tell you it was the best decision they could have made for their child. The Citywide Autism Program is absolutely INCLUSIVE; children spend as much time in the General Education classroom as their IEP and Federal Setting will allow. Unlike the new model being rolled out by MPS, within the CAP there is a tremendous network of support provided by educators specifically trained in ASD. These educators have the knowledge and experience to work with all aspects of ASD from the most subtle (e.g. withdrawal) to the most visible (e.g. meltdowns). Often, students are clustered into groups of three or four, bonding with one another over their similarities and then branching out to typical peers who have been educated about autism (and are thus unlikely to bully). Placing students in clusters often leads to more Special Education Assistant (SEA) time in the General Education classroom as the minutes from their IEPs get pooled, allowing some students to remain in General Ed longer than they would otherwise.

Children with autism have unique needs. Unfortunately, under the district's plan, special education teachers at community schools will serve several disability categories at the same time; an unspecified number of these schools will have no experienced autism teacher on site. Moreover, children's needs in those community schools may not coincide with the SEA's limited schedules. The Citywide Autism Program provides flexibility by having trained autism educators and aides always available on-site to intervene the moment a child with autism needs help.