Will desegregation suit improve schools?

Editor's note: Last fall the Minneapolis NAACP filed a class-action suit against the state of Minnesota and the Metropolitan Council, claiming that Minneapolis students are inadequately educated. Judge Gary Larson recently refused to dismiss the suit against the state and asked the Minnesota Supreme Court for guidance on the NAACP's claim that the state has a constitutional duty to ensure that urban students perform as well as their suburban counterparts. At a press conference in June, representatives of 20 suburban school districts called on the NAACP and the state to reach a collaborative settlement. According to former NAACP President Matthew Little, both sides are planning preliminary discussions, at the urging of Judge Larson.

Meanwhile, the State Board of Education has continued work on its desegregation rule, while Minneapolis, at the urging of Mayor Sharon Sayles Belton, is making a move back toward community schools this fall.

In light of all these developments, the Journal asked several people familiar with the school desegregation debate to comment on the issue and on the broader question of how to deliver quality education to all students.

Community schools key

by Sharon Sayles Belton

When I took office in 1994, Minneapolis was going to great lengths to comply with a 1973 Supreme Court mandate ruling that children of color were receiving an inferior education program. Because our neighborhoods were segregated, the rule would fix that. But we found that the courts were focused on busing children from the city. The ceaseless debate about desegregation in schools has become a misguided anachronism. It is about the past, about our tragic racial history. Its lawsuits and lessons are about failure and grievances and high principles of social justice. But the courts should focus on the future, not the past.

Craft broad joint solution

by James R. Rickabaugh

A coalition of 20 metropolitan school districts has offered a challenge to the Legislature, the executive branch, the NAACP and other concerned citizens to a lawsuit filed by the NAACP against the State of Minnesota and the Metropolitan Council. The Minnesota State Board of Education has been in the process of amending the state desegregation rule for the past several years. The rule determines how school districts will integrate their schools according to color. The rule has been amended several times, but it has not been adopted.

Schools can be civic glue

by Curt Johnson

The Minnesota State Board of Education has been in the process of amending the state desegregation rule for the past several years. The desegregation rule determines how school districts will integrate their schools according to color. The rule has been amended several times, but it has not been adopted.

Lawsuit is broad-based

by Matthew Little

Perhaps the most discouraging thing to me regarding the opponents of desegregation is the mass denial and rationalization put forth. Only the outright, hard-core racists will argue that the segregation of our society according to color is required by law. The against the State of Minnesota and the Metropolitan Council. The Minnesota State Board of Education has been in the process of amending the state desegregation rule for the past several years. The rule determines how school districts will integrate their schools according to color. The rule has been amended several times, but it has not been adopted.

Focus on education outcomes

by Nancy Smith

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Voluntary approach best

by Barb Sykora and Alice Seagren

During the past 30 years, large cities across the nation have attempted to bolster student achievement and eliminate segregation by busing large numbers of children. Reams of data accumulated in those 30 years show this solu-
A third of food shelf users get main income from jobs

From Hunger Still Hurts: A Survey of Food Shelves and On-Site Meals Programs in Minnesota, The Urban Coalition and the Minnesota Food Shelf Association, July 1996.

In 1995 more than 25,000 people in about 79,000 households relied on the help of a food shelf in Minnesota....

Almost one-third (32%) of the households using food shelves were state-wide indicated paid employment as their major income source...

Statewide, at least 85 percent of the adults participating in the survey had incomes below the federal poverty level ($15,755 per year for a family of four). ...

About two-thirds (63%) of the households using food shelves statewide included children under the age of 18. More than half of the households with children (60%) included children under the age of five...

Just over half (55%) of food shelf survey respondents reported that adults in the household were on food stamps, and more than half (55%) said they had no money for food. For 20 percent of respondents, the principal reason for their use of food shelves was to provide the necessary nutrition for children...

Editors disagree on need for longer school day year, longer year


Between 1990 and 1995, nine of eleven of the United States states moved to make the K-12 school day a longer one. Minnesota has an opportunity to "design a comprehensive plan for addressing the inequalities problem that really works."...
Continued

In February of 1995 I urged the state legislature to reconsider its position on busing. In my State of the City address I said, “Every day, children are leaving their homes, and their total distance equals to a trip to the moon. Their bus ride was granted and the district has since proceeded with plans to phase in a system of magnet and community schools. On the strength of the City’s new policy position, I was happy to speak before the Minnesota State Board of Education in support of school desegregation. No one had ever witnessed a total change in the direction of a political body. The busing lawsuit was finally closed, and the district has since proceeded with plans to phase in a system of magnet and community schools, beginning with this fall’s kindergartners.

I realize our plan will not work overnight, and I believe my vision for the present time is to integrate the school system in the fabric of our neighborhood. In the months that followed I prodded the school system to institute a meaningful housing policy, in the form of four principles that would encourage the integration of housing, as well as “lifecycle” housing (suitable for every stage in our lives) throughout Minnesota. The principles were adopted by the City Council and today we are making housing programs and the Planning Department and the Minneapolis Community Development Agency (MCDA). They are the first step in achieving integrated neighborhoods.

At the same time, the Minneapolis public schools and community and schools can be integrated—if we integrate our neighborhoods.

The Minneapolis Public Schools and the city have an opportunity to develop a system of magnet and community schools. The state of the City’s new policy position, I was happy to speak before the Minnesota State Board of Education in support of school desegregation. No one had ever witnessed a total change in the direction of a political body. The busing lawsuit was finally closed, and the district has since proceeded with plans to phase in a system of magnet and community schools, beginning with this fall’s kindergartners.

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Rickabaugh
Continued from page 1
the Metropolitan Council. At a June 21 news conference, we called for a
suspension of legal proceedings to allow intensive efforts to find a cre-
tive, effective and comprehensive solution that will offer significantly
improved educational opportunities for all of our children.
We are facing an expenditure of $200 million in just three hours of time and incalculable energy in a legal dispute that will
take years to resolve without the promise of improving educational
opportunities for any of our children. In fact, an expensive, pro-
tected lawsuit threatens to weaken our ability to meet the educational
needs of our children at a time when the importance of a strong
education is growing.

Sykora/Seagren
Continued from page 9
tution has not worked. While the racial numbers may have been altered, student performance was not enhanced. In addi-
tion, the bus-
ning solution provoked anger and dissection in nearly every city
where it was implemented.
Here in the Twin Cities, a recent lawsuit by the NAACP seeks to
improve integration by mandating a plan to achieve integration in
metropolitan school systems. The suit is similar to a recent
Connecticut court case, where a judge ruled that some Con-
necticut school boundaries violated the equal protection clause
of the constitution. The court ordered the cancellation of all
school-desegregation efforts for the next year and the
reorganization of the school districts to include open enrollment, the Post
Suite program and magnet schools.
The State Board of Education recently released its revised inte-
gration proposals, which have gath-
ered as co-chairs of the House
Reps. Read the full text online or
in the newspaper.

Recycling
Continued from page 1
required to pump up at least 25 per-
cent of the pass-through grant side
of recycling programs up to $14 million — the bulk of the
money in a legal dispute that will
take years to resolve without the promise of improving educational
opportunities for any of our children.

Worth it?
Is recycling— and the public del-
cussion about recycling—worth
the additional cost and effort con-
structed programs not served by cur-
rent recycling programs. Recycling
has often claimed that recycling is more
expensive than conventional waste
Continued on page 7
Minnesota officials were shocked last week to learn that after providing $194 million in state funds to school districts to reduce class sizes, classes are about as big as they were in the 1989-90 school year. Meanwhile, Minneapolis is trying to persuade voters to extend $194 million in state funds to mark for class-size reduction. Meanwhile, Minneapolis is trying to persuade voters to extend $194 million in state funds to mark for class-size reduction.

Overlooked in the hubbub: Class size doesn't matter much when it comes to how well students learn.

The research has shown repeatedly that across-the-board reductions in class size have little effect on student achievement. “The evidence suggests that many teachers either do not react to such decreases or do not change what goes on in the classroom to capitalize effectively on the smaller class,” according to economist Eric Hanushek in his book Making Schools Work: Improving Performance and Controlling Costs.

To be sure, students who are doing poorly or who have special needs benefit from more intensive attention. But for most kids, dropping the class size has at least a partial solution for the “summer construction blues” for motorists: require high-occupancy vehicles to use the I-35W construction.

The program also stipulates rewards and punishments for coming in ahead of or behind schedule. To be sure, students who are doing poorly or who have special needs benefit from more intensive attention. But for most kids, dropping the class size has at least a partial solution for the “summer construction blues” for motorists: require high-occupancy vehicles to use the I-35W construction.

What happened to the $194 million? Maybe we should ask, “How could we better spend $194 million?”—Janet Dudrow.

How about for I-35W? The New York Department of Transportation has at least a partial solution for curing the “summer construction blues” for motorists: require high-occupancy vehicles to use the I-35W construction.

Contract bidders estimate the number of days for project completion. This number is then multiplied by a figure for daily external costs, which is determined by the NYS-DOT, using a computer model. This figure is added to the cost of the actual work. The project is then awarded to the contractor with the lowest total bid.

The program also stipulates rewards and punishments for coming in ahead of or behind schedule. To date, this approach has shaved 68 months from aggregate construction times (about four months per project), which has saved $26 million in private costs associated with construction, including fuel consumption and lost time.—Ron Wirtz.

Calling all nonprofits... The Minneapolis Community Development Agency (MCDA) recently sent letters to nonprofit organizations in the city to clue them in on their eligibility for the agency’s 501(c)(3) Revenue Bond program. The program offers tax-exempt revenue bonds—which offer tax-exempt interest income to investors and, thus, can be sold at favorable interest rates—to nonprofit organizations to finance capital improvement projects over $500,000. The agency can issue similar bonds to for-profit businesses, as well.

According to the MCDA’s Charles Curtis, the federal government has a state cap on the amount of tax-exempt revenue bonds that can be issued to for-profit businesses; that cap has been reached for 1996. There is no such cap on bonds for nonprofits.

Since 1970, the MCDA and the city of Minneapolis have issued over $1 billion in revenue bonds, about one-fourth for nonprofits, Curtis said. By far the largest nonprofit users of the bonds have been hospitals, followed by nursing homes. Even in this day of in-patient downsizing, hospitals continue to be heavy users of the bonds, for refinancing debt following consolidations and for renovating facilities that remain open when others are eliminated.—Don Schroeder.

A progress report on Minnesota Milestones, the state’s 30-year plan, shows some disturbing negative trends for the state’s youngest children. According to the NYS-DOT, using a computer model. This figure is added to the cost of the actual work. The project is then awarded to the contractor with the lowest total bid.

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A progress report on Minnesota Milestones, the state’s 30-year plan, shows some disturbing negative trends for the state’s youngest children: ages 10 through 17 (per 1,000 children): runaways, 8.6 in 1990, 11.5 in 1994; apprehensions, 38.3 in 1990, 53 in 1994; schools districts with a 12th-grade dropout rate over 10 percent, 14 in 1990, 21 in 1994. On the positive side, the percentage who use alcohol or illegal drugs at least monthly: grade 9, 28 percent in 1990, 24 percent in 1995; grade 12, 55 percent in 1990, 39 percent in 1995.

The report showed further that the state is falling behind on goals for young people, which were set in 1992 by the State Planning Agency, with public input: net cost of college tuition as percentage of disposable income, 9.9 percent in 1990, 11.5 percent in 1993, target for 1995, 10 percent; percent of high school graduates pursuing advanced training or higher education one year after high school, 65 percent in 1990, 68 percent in 1994, target for 1995, 79 percent.—Betty Wilson.

Last month we noted that metro school districts approved more than $2 billion worth of capital projects from 1986 to 1995. The district with easily the biggest total was Minneapolis, with $225 million. This includes a $141 million project last year for school additions, renovations and compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

St. Paul came in third at $122 million, $55 million behind Rosemount-Apple Valley. But curiously, neither Minneapolis nor St. Paul had to get voter approval for a single dollar of the combined $347 million spent in the last 10 years. Why? A number of years ago, the Legislature gave the Minneapolis and St. Paul school districts independent bonding authority, allowing them to approve capital funding sans voter approval. The only permission needed is that of the Commissioner of Children, Families and Learning.

While many might gripe about the apparent favoritism, Don Haydon, director of facilities for Minneapolis Public Schools, noted that a 1992 inventory identified more than $300 million in repairs and other required upgrades in Minneapolis. The district is currently embarked on a five-year, $350 million capital project—of which $130 million is going solely for maintenance—while trying to handle an influx of 1,000 new students annually.—R.W.

The GreenPrint for Minnesota, developed in 1993 by the state’s Office of Environmental Education, describes environmental education outcomes that should be achieved by preK-12 programs.

Some of the outcomes—and measures to assess them—concern knowledge: for example, students will “understand scientific principles that define ecological systems.” Some of the outcomes concern attitudes and behaviors: for example, “Develop personal appreciation, sensitivity, and stewardship for the environment.”

We’ve noticed no hue and cry among the education goals, which clearly involve both objective science instruction and encouragement of behavior viewed as desirable. For contrast, think about sex education, where the proposition that certain behavior should be taught because it is socially desirable is frequently met with outrage.—I.D.

“Take Note” contributors include Minnesota Journal and Citizens League staff members and Betty Wilson, a freelance writer and former Star Tribune political writer.
Welcome New Members

David Doth
Carol Fredrickson
Susan Heegaard
John Mullen
Nikolas H. Sten

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The Citizens League promotes
the public interest in
Minnesota by involving citi-
zens in identifying and framing
critical public policy choices,
foraging recommendations and
advocating their adoption.
Suggested dues for member-
ship are $50 for individuals
and $75 for a family member-
ship. Other categories are
also available. For more infor-
mation on membership, please
call 338-0791.

New look Mind-Openers resume in September

Time of day and day of the week will vary

The Tuesday morning Mind-
Opener breakfast series will
return this fall—but with some
significant changes.

First, the meetings won’t always
be on Tuesday. Secondly, they
won’t always be breakfast meet-
ings. They will, however, con-
tinue to examine important
issues and feature knowledge-
able and prominent speakers.

Last spring’s extremely success-
ful series on managing urban
growth indicated that the right
topic, good speakers and a con-
venient time and setting could
attract record crowds.

We don’t want the meetings to
be a mob scene. Some informali-
ty and intimacy is built in by
design. But we do want the ses-
sions to attract enough people to
create energy and excitement.

This year the Mind-Opener
series will expand on the format
introduced last spring.

We will continue to program
topics that are timely, that relate
to the League’s agenda and that
explore emerging issues. We
will select speakers that best fit
those topics, including a few
from outside our region to add
perspective and depth to our
local discussions.

The most noticeable change will
be that the meetings will no
longer be every Tuesday morn-
ing. Day of the week and time of
the day will change with each
series depending on speaker
availability and facilities.

We hope that this will actually
make the Mind-Openers more
convenient. Judging by the suc-
cess of the experiment last
spring, we’re confident that more
of our members will be able to
attend at least some of the Mind-
Openers.

More than 20,000 people
have attended the 350
Mind-Opener meetings the
League has sponsored dur-
ing the past ten years.

At this writing, planning for the
fall program has not been fin-
ished. But here’s the plan so far.
There will be three series this
fall. We are currently working
on a series on reorganizing pub-
lic service delivery, entitled
“Markets Do The Funniest
Things.” We have invited the
Mayors of Milwaukee and
Indianapolis to talk about their
experience in contracting for
public services. Former Oregon
Governor Barbara Roberts has
also been invited to talk about
public service redesign in
Oregon’s innovative benchmark-
ing program.

We are also working on a series
on urban design, which we hope
will coincide with the wrap-up
of the Livable Communities
Committee in November or
December.

Watch your mail for details of
upcoming series.

Ten years ago this fall the
Citizens League introduced the
Mind-Opener breakfast series.
More than 20,000 people have
attended the 350 Mind-Opener
meetings the League has spon-
sored during the past ten years.

The League has sponsored
Tuesday morning breakfast
meetings since 1961, but the
Mind-Openers introduced the
series concept to the meetings.
Attendance in the season before
the advent of the Mind-Openers
had slipped to embarrassingly
low numbers.

The Mind-Openers revitalized
League breakfast meetings.
Several speakers on a single
topic, special brochures and a
partnership with CityBusiness
helped boost average attendance
in the inaugural season to just
over 50 people per session.
Attendance has remained steady
at around 55 to 60 per meeting
with a peak of 68 in 1990.

Ten years of this kind of pro-
gramming and membership
support without any real signifi-
cant changes is a long time. We
hope that this year’s changes will
enhance this already very suc-
cessful program and result in
another burst of energy and
enthusiasm.
Back to School

Application forms for the next League study committee are in the mail.

The main objective of the committee is to recommend an agenda of four to five specific action steps that the 1997 Legislature should take to improve student achievement in the K-12 system.

The League Board of Directors expects that the committee, in developing its proposal, will briefly review the major solutions that have typically been offered to achieve better student performance, examining the empirical evidence and the ideological underpinnings of each. The committee will also briefly review the fiscal history and budget projections for K-12 education. Based on these reviews, the committee should form conclusions about which strategy or combination of strategies is most desirable and likely to result in improved student achievement in Minnesota.

Co-chaired by Pam Neary and Buzz Cummins, the committee will meet Mondays from 4 to 6 p.m., probably on the St. Paul side of the metro region.

The committee will be on a fast track. It must complete its work by November 8 and submit a final draft for approval by the League Board of Directors at its November 20 meeting. The final report will be released publicly in mid-December.

This tight timeline puts a lot of pressure on the committee. It will be difficult for the committee to grapple with the complex and technical aspects of this topic.

The League appreciates and encourages member participation in study committees. But it should be noted that the Board of Directors appoints the committee membership and can limit the number of members appointed. That being the case generalists and those without direct stake in the outcome are particularly encouraged to apply.

Applications are due by Friday August 23, 1996.

Greetings From Camp Citizens League!

August 1996

Dear Folks:

It's been a good summer so far at Camp Citizens League. We've had the usual scrapes and bruises and unhappy campers. The mosquitoes are a lot worse, but at least the new camp design is more livable. All in all it's been fun.

Lyle, our head counselor, has been a bit grumpy. He's been too busy to get any R&R, altho he did get to spend the 4th of July looking for fireworks in New York City. He's trying to get one of the cabins rebuilt to get rid of the squirrels, but so far the camp is refusing to extend the TIF district.

Janet has been working on upgrading the facilities. The new sink is from Italy, the light fixture is from Taiwan and the paint is from Martha Stewart. The workmen from Wayzata are getting pretty tired of hearing about high-performance work processes.

With so many new kids here this summer the density is getting a bit much for Ron, so he's spending most of his time out flyfishing. He found a great spot by the river, and now he's trying to get it rezoned to keep everyone else out.

Trudy spent some time fishing too. She couldn't help wondering who has jurisdiction over all these lakes and whether they're riparian or not. We'll write when we find out.

Phil is on a field trip to Wisconsin. He's exploring his native state and is trying to determine whether the Twin Cities commute-shed stretches to Madison yet.

Gayle is actually having the best time of all of us. She got a job in the projector room. They're showing travelogues of Hawaii all during August.

That's it for now. We can hardly wait to get back to school. Miss you.

See you soon,

Sincerely,

P.S. Please send money by August 31.