



# Minnesota Journal

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A publication of the Citizens League

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Volume 13, Number 8  
August 20, 1996

## 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

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### Schools can be civic glue

by Curt Johnson

The ceaseless debate about desegregation in schools has become a misdirected 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

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### Lawsuit is broad-based

by Matthew Little

Perhaps the most disconcerting 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

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### 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 others with an interest in the outcome of the lawsuit filed by the NAACP against the State of Minnesota and

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### Focus on education outcomes

by Nancy Smith

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

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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-

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## Recycling can make sense; reducing is best

by Janet Dudrow

Should we or shouldn't we? Rinse out our tuna cans, that is.

"Recycling could be America's most wasteful activity," according to John Tierney in a July 14 *New York Times Magazine* article. Katherine Kersten, in a follow-up column in the *Star Tribune*, asked "Why do we take such satisfaction in sorting milk jugs and bottles, while remaining contentedly fuzzy on how this really benefits our community?"

The debate Tierney and Kersten unleashed is especially pertinent here. Minnesota was one of the first states to adopt and promote recycling aggressively. In 1995, Minnesota recycled 45 percent of its 4.68 million tons of municipal solid waste, ranking among the nation's recycling leaders, according to the state's Office of Environmental Assistance (OEA).

Since 1989, the Legislature has set minimum recycling goals for each county, now at 35 percent for nonmetro counties and 50 percent for metro counties. A state sales tax on garbage services has

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# Looking for a gold in the school reform marathon

Now that the Olympics are over we can get back to one of our favorite national sports: finger pointing over perceived failures in the K-12 education system. Over the past months and weeks a cascade of newspaper headlines have delivered rather dismal news on K-12 education, making our sport even more intriguing:

- The Minnesota Milestones 1996 progress report, despite some positive news, points to negative trends in the objectives of "children coming to school ready to learn," "students excelling in basic academic skills," and "our communities will be safe, friendly and caring".

- Minnesota schools get a ho-hum overall grade in a self assessment by the Department of Children, Youth and Families. Some say that this was a flattering self-portrait.

- \$194 million dollars presumably appropriated to reduce classroom size produced no reduction in classroom size. A legislator is "surprised" by this revelation. One can guess that the money went to more classes, teacher salaries and parts unknown.

- Minneapolis proposes another major school referendum to produce more money to reduce class sizes. Meanwhile, the district currently spends almost twice as much money per pupil as some suburban districts. The shaky relationship between class size and student achievement is somehow omitted from the discussion.

As the machinery begins to whir in anticipation of the 1997 legislative

## Viewpoint

by Lyle Wray

session—a budget year—and the whiff of unanticipated revenue windfalls wafts out of the Capitol, prepare to listen hard for two core arguments about K-12 education:

**The "invest and we will deliver" argument.** The argument from the educational establishment goes something like this: Education is a critical resource for our state and, as such, has a top priority call on new resources in the state and local coffers. The implicit promise: Give us a lot more resources and we will deliver better student achievement. Indeed, over the past decade, Minnesota has increased real expenditures rather dramatically in K-12 education. The results so far: The money has been spent and student achievement improvements have not been delivered upon.

**The "we can't get good kids anymore" argument.** When faced with bad results in student achievement—to the crude extent that we have good results measures—the argument from many educators goes like this: We are getting more and more children from poverty and difficult home backgrounds so we cannot really be held accountable for results in student achievement. If the implicit argument is that educators account only for a small part of the educational outcome, then why don't we invest in other efforts to more dramatically improve student achievement, rather than first moving to up K-12 expenditures.

For example, the \$194 million class-size reduction funding mentioned above is enough money to raise 19,342 two-person families above the poverty line. Countless other calls on that money—from Head Start expansions to a variety of other early intervention programs to additional housing opportunities—are likely to be able to demonstrate better results, albeit delayed, than the last \$194 million.

Both of these core arguments cannot be true. If we intend to improve student achievement, we need to look long and hard not only at K-12 reforms but at where additional funds are invested.

What to do?

The Citizens League will be launching in September a "fast-track," citizen-based study committee to seek out those three to five reforms in K-12 education the 1997 Legislature should consider to improve student achievement. The League, long a proponent of educational choice and charter schools, will be building on a deep concern for K-12 education. As we get about this task, we should keep in mind results and what works.

**What results are we getting?** We do not have good long-term measures of student achievement based on carefully stratified samples of kids. The Citizens League has called for statewide measurement of student achievement. We have examples to look at, such as in

Edmonton, where school site-based funding has been accompanied by 30-plus years of student achievement measurement and problem solving around results.

**What works to produce results?**

We need to know what works to produce results, especially student achievement, in education. Much of conventional wisdom—reduce class sizes and get more technology into the classroom—is dubiously connected to student achievements. We need to consider a synthesis of what really works.

When we are dealing with a problem as complex as student achievement, it may be helpful to organize our concepts around "causal maps." These describe major factors that contribute in a positive or negative way to our desired result—in this case, student achievement. Then we can drop back a level to look at interventions proven to affect these major factors.

The struggle for improved education is not easy in a society with triple the rate of childhood poverty and far greater concentration of low-income housing than other developed countries. Real reform of the K-12 system is much more like a long-distance running event than a sprint. We need to build on the foundations of educational choice and charter schools to identify and implement those interventions that make sense both inside and outside the traditional K-12 budget categories.

Lyle Wray is executive director of the Citizens League.

# Editors disagree on need for longer school day, year

## On Balance

"All we know who lie in gaol (jail) Is that...each day is like a year, A year whose days are long."—O. Wilde

Duluth News-Tribune praised (Aug. 6) superintendent Mark Myles' proposals for school changes to improve students' standardized test scores. It questioned the wisdom, though, of lengthening the school year and suggested considering year-round schedules, later start times for teens and using summer school for remedial work and enrichment. **Red Wing Republican Eagle** said (Aug. 5) education reform will be a major legislative issue in 1997. "Taxpayers will not be patient forever with the pattern of increased spending and diminished results." It encouraged local and state officials to look at the length of the school year and school day and whether starting times are too early. **Rochester Post-Bulletin** said (July 31) the newly released report card on Minnesota's schools shows "disappointing availability of technology, a relatively short school year and an increasing dropout rate." It expressed its opposition to vouchers, which "only siphon off badly needed funds from the public school system without making fundamental changes." **West Central Tribune (Willmar)** said (July 26) school reform should center on lengthening the school year and the school day. **St. Cloud Times** said (July 26) short school years and early school release times "no longer fit a society where most parents work."

Duluth News-Tribune praised

## The Minnesota Journal

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The Minnesota Journal (ISSN 0741-9449) is a publication of the Citizens League, a nonprofit nonpartisan Twin Cities public affairs organization, 708 S. Third St., Suite 500, Minneapolis, MN 55415, Barbara Lukermann, president. Articles and commentary are drawn from a broad range of perspectives and do not necessarily reflect League positions on policy questions. The Journal is published once a month. Second class postage paid at Minneapolis, MN.

Annual subscription rate for nonmembers is \$40.12 issues. Orders may be placed at 612/338-5151 or by mail at the above address.

Postmaster: Send address changes to The Minnesota Journal, 708 S. Third St., Suite 500, Minneapolis, MN 55415

(July 15) a proposal by the superintendent of the Koochiching-Rainy River School District to tie teachers' pay to gains or decreases in enrollment, since the district draws about a third of its 463 students through open enrollment from other districts. **West Central Tribune** encouraged (July 11) local school districts to determine what type of program reductions they would have to make if the 2.1 percent drop in per pupil funding currently scheduled in 1997-98 takes effect. **Star Tribune** urged (July 16) Minneapolis voters to support the excess school levy referendum this fall. It encouraged flexibility in use of the funds—such as weekly academic assessments, afternoon study halls with tutors and adding days to the school calendar—beyond class-size reductions. But it recognized that the public is more likely to support class-size reductions. "A successful referendum tied to class sizes—with some flexibility—is much better for the district than achievement-focused failure."

**Star Tribune** said (July 18) Minnesota has an opportunity to "design a comprehensive plan for addressing the inequities problem"

being challenged by the Minneapolis NAACP education lawsuit.

**Republican Eagle** said (Aug. 1) that Republican Senate candidate Steve Young—"a fresh, upstart, young Republican"—could "play a major role in reinvigorating mainstream Republicans—and Democrats, too." **Star Tribune** said (July 25) former Republican Senate candidate Bert McKasy's mistake was placing "too much trust in Minnesota's flawed party endorsement system for selecting candidates for high office." It said changes such as a June primary, party-controlled access to the primary ballot, and more participant-friendly precinct cause times and procedures "would make the caucus-to-convention system more worth of a candidate's trust." **Hibbing Daily News and Tribune** said (July 27) Minnesota's endorsement system "still caters to far too select a group of people who choose the party's endorsed candidates." It urged a June primary for statewide and legislative offices. **Duluth News-Tribune** said (July 19) legislators will have to learn how to keep private reelection efforts outside their public offices. It urged voters to tell

legislative candidates they want "this logical division of efforts" to be made into law. **Republican Eagle** said (July 24) Republicans have "an excellent opportunity" to regain control of the Minnesota House.

**St. Cloud Times** said (July 16) that the schedule of the Area Planning Organization, set by member governments, has placed a low priority on regional planning. "The continued denial by metropolitan area governments of the need for regional planning will take a toll in the long run...If local governments don't plan their own futures jointly, they may find it is being done for them—by Twin Cities metropolitan area planners."

**Post-Bulletin** applauded (July 20) job growth statistics showing greater job growth outside the Twin Cities than in the metro area. "Minnesota will be better off if its economic strength is spread more evenly across the state instead of being concentrated in the metro area." **Fergus Falls Daily Journal** said (July 16) the reason for the outstate job growth is a better quality of life and a perception that the people work harder. It urged good planning for the growth the Fergus Falls area will likely see in the next 10 to 20 years so "we don't let our slice of the world become what the rest of the state is trying to escape."

# 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 251,000 people in about 79,000 households relied on food from a food shelf in Minnesota...

- Almost one-third (32%) of the households using food shelves

statewide indicated paid employment as their major income source...

- Statewide, at least 85 percent of the households participating in the survey had incomes below the federal poverty level (\$15,575 per year for a family of four).

- About two-thirds (63%) of the households using food shelves statewide included children under

18. More than half of the households with children (60%) included children under the age of six...

- Just over half (53%) of food shelf survey respondents reported that adults in the household had skipped meals in the past month because of lack of money. One-quarter (25%) reported that children in the household had skipped meals in the last month because of lack of money to buy food.

- More than one-third (37%) of people eating at on-site meals programs lived in households with children.

- When people were asked why they ate at on-site meals programs, more than half (55%) said they had no money for food. For 20 percent it was their only meal of the day, indication of the vital role meals programs play in people's lives.

# Belton

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segregated, we were engaged in extensive busing in order to achieve integrated schools.

The citywide integration and desegregation methods envisioned by the Court have grown increasingly problematic. While well intended, it is clear they do not address the problems of today.

Years ago, the neighborhood school was the focal point of our community. We gathered there to meet teachers, attend the PTA meeting, coach softball or watch our own and our neighbors' children in the school play. Children stayed after school for sports, to work on projects or get extra help from their teachers. The key to that participation was proximity. People even bought their homes so that children—and their parents—could walk to school.

Study after study shows parental involvement to be the single most important factor in a child's academic success. But an unintended side

effect of busing has been to physically separate many families from their schools. Lack of transportation, long or difficult working hours and long trips into strange surroundings discouraged parents and children from participating. Busing had removed a vital thread from the fabric of our neighborhoods.

We need to ask ourselves if it still makes sense to bus children away from their own communities—where they can be supported by parents, friends and neighbors—in order to assure them a good education. Isn't our community ready to ensure that any child anywhere in Minneapolis has access to the best education we can provide and that he or she doesn't have to ride a bus to get it?

My vision for Minneapolis has always been based on communities that are both strong and integrated. That is a vision we cannot realize without a holistic strategy weaving together all the complicated housing, economic development and educational strands that make up our social fabric. We can have community schools and they can be integrated—if we integrate our

neighborhoods.

In February of 1995 I urged the community to reconsider its position on busing. In my State of the City address I said, "Every day, Minneapolis children are bused a total distance equal to a trip to the moon. Perhaps they'd be better served if we spend the money on strategies that would get them—at age 18 or 21—not to the moon, but to the door of a well-paying employer."

In the months that followed I proposed the city's first comprehensive housing policy, in the form of four principles that would encourage affordable housing, as well as "life-cycle" housing (suitable for every stage in our lives) throughout Minneapolis. The principles were adopted by the City Council and today they shape the housing strategies and programs of 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 pursued a waiver from state desegregation guidelines

in order to establish a system of magnet and community schools. On the strength of the City's new housing policy, I was happy to speak before the Minnesota State Board of Education in support of that waiver. A few months ago, a waiver was granted 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 or even by the end of my present term. Community schools will fully succeed only when they are supported by a strong economy and integrated neighborhoods.

Integrated housing in strong communities anchored by community schools can be a reality if we are willing to work hard together on a range of housing and economic strategies. When we succeed, we will have achieved a community in which every neighborhood is a good place to grow and work and go to school and where our children—all our children—will flourish.

Sharon Sayles Belton is mayor of Minneapolis.

# Little

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race and economic affluence is variable or consistent with our American ideals. Yet, we are seeing just that happening at hurricane speed right before our eyes. Our response has been to treat it with benign neglect—or, perhaps, even worse, to minimize the devastation it imposes upon the victims, as well as the greater society.

No sane person can deny the fact that if the core Twin Cities continue to move in the same direction for the next 10 years as they have during the past 10 years, we will be nearing an inner-city apartheid, rivaling some of the worst Eastern cities in that regard.

It is certainly unfair to lay all of the blame for the isolation of people of color and poverty on the education system, but the system has played a major role in being less than honest in dealing with the subject. Ever since the early '80s the Minnesota State Board of Education has been attempting to cope with rewriting the state desegregation rule—ostensibly to cope with the changing demographics of the metropolitan

area. The dilemma in this attempt lies in the preamble of that document. It declares the state's educational commitment to the landmark, NAACP-inspired Supreme Court decision of *Brown vs. Board of Education*. This decision states unequivocally that segregation of school children according to race is inherently unequal and, thus, unconstitutional. Realizing that it is still "the law of the land," and being cognizant of the NAACP's watchful eye, the board has just refused to enforce the rule.

They would certainly get flak from these quarters, but it would at least be more honest and forthright if the state board would denounce *Brown* as no longer being applicable, rather than continue claiming allegiance to the concept, while desperately seeking means of subverting its intent. While the school system cannot solve the problem of inner-city isolation and poverty alone, neither should it look the other way, as if it didn't exist.

Realizing that the problem transcends education administration, the Minneapolis NAACP's suit is broad-based. It names as defendants all of the state governmental units that impact the situation,

including the Governor. It is an education adequacy suit, contending that education in the inner city of Minneapolis is inadequate. Both the education clause and the equal protection clause of the state constitution guarantee all children an adequate education. Isolation of minorities and low-income students makes an adequate education impossible.

Locally, the denial factor is embodied into what we prefer to call "neighborhood schools." The implication is that merely having the schools in the neighborhood is the panacea for an adequate education. The NAACP, too, would applaud a desegregated, diverse neighborhood school, but to imply that there is magic in the words "neighborhood schools" is ludicrous. The expansive outer suburbs can hardly lay claim to neighborhood schools, yet it seems not to be an insurmountable impediment to their education.

But the most deceptive and most negatively used word in this whole desegregation discussion is "busing." Bringing forth the word "busing" negates any rational argument of support for desegregated education. The logic escapes me how the

transportation of kids for education is OK in any other aspect except for racial and socioeconomic desegregation. For the outer-layer suburbs and rural areas it is a necessity that is taken for granted. The term "busing" is not even used; instead, it is referred to as "pupil transportation." Even the Governor's pet education project, vouchers, if adopted, would certainly require a transportation component.

The bottom line, as I see it, is that if this urgent problem of our educational system, as well as our democratic society, is to find a workable solution, we must first shed the rose-colored glasses and accept the realities of the situation. Only then can we hope to find workable solutions.

Hopefully, the NAACP's adequacy suit will force Minnesota to begin the process. It is imperative that we move now! Procrastination, rationalization or engaging in denial will not cut it. Time is still on our side, but we must take positive action.

Matthew Little is former president of the Minneapolis NAACP and now chairs its Education Committee.

# Johnson

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justice. Its remedies—particularly massive busing schemes—have inflamed racist feelings, destroyed neighborhood schools, ruined the traditional mix of income and race in core cities and consumed vast resources that might have been used for education.

When 30 kids live on a block and we send them to 20 different schools, there's little chance of kids helping kids and even less

chance that parents will connect with the school and its teachers. But we can boast of bureaucratic success and legal compliance. Policies on racial balance, facilitated by busing, have succeeded in producing statistical desegregation. We can count the kids by color and send the report to the state.

But too many of these kids getting off the bus come from neighborhoods that have lost their civic glue. Instead, there are mothers, sometimes dads, too, trying to pay the rent, moving when they can't. People who get better jobs moving just to get out and away. Kids sensing the likelihood of being killed

being about as good as graduating from school. Kids living in trouble, who make trouble wherever they go, even if the bus takes them miles away to school. And middle-class parents with money to make choices taking their kids to safer schools in suburbs.

Even with dedicated,

sometimes heroic, teachers, things are not going to get better without trying something radically different. The time has come to acknowledge that kids will not do better in schools until the neighborhoods are stable and safe and a culture of work and high expectations is restored.

The indispensable first step is a community-based elementary school, with facilities and programs that make it the center of neighborhood life. Where there are bad facilities, let's fix them up. Where we've torn them down, let's build new ones.

Get the community involved, not just the parents. Only a few years back, in the Sandtown neighborhood of west Baltimore, truancy, teen pregnancy and drug infestations made school achievement impossible. The numbers were worse than Newark. By building community centers around their schools and involving neighborhood residents in everything from truancy patrols to health clinics, there's a bold pattern of community participation and commitment to kids.

And the numbers show it today.

Pick school principals who want the assignment and let them pick teachers who want to teach there. Let the administration run on results, not rules. There's a large elementary school in the core of Reading, Pennsylvania, an old manufacturing center with every imaginable urban stress on its center city. Its mostly minority and low-income demographics would normally spell failure. The actual performance at Lauer's Park Elementary is among the best in the region. The parents are involved. The school is the center of community life. The principal breaks a lot of rules. But the teachers work there because they want to be in an atmosphere where you can feel the commitment to every kid's development.

We should create more Lauer's Park schools and less litigation. The kids will do better.

Curt Johnson is the chair of the Metropolitan Council. The views in this essay are his own and do not represent any official Council positions or policy.

# Smith

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and numbers or, more precisely, percentages. The desegregation rule has enormous potential, however, to be much more than that for Minnesota students.

Minnesota has one of the richest cultural groupings of any state in the country, including many nations of Native Americans, African Americans, European Americans, Asian Americans from many different cultural areas, Hispanic peoples from Mexico, Central America and South America and newly arrived immigrants from Somalia. The potential this presents for learning about diversity should be an inspiration in the deliberation over the desegregation rule.

Desegregation rule need not be just a document outlining percentages for integration. It can be a vehicle for establishing educational excellence for Minnesota students,

including establishing guidelines for closing the learning gap between students of color and their white peers; redesigning the English as a second language program to become a program of high academic achievement and eventual mainstreaming; developing, recruiting and retaining staff members of color; and establishing requirements for the redesign of all curriculum to include diverse perspectives.

Currently, students of color make up 60 percent of the Minneapolis and St. Paul school enrollment. Low-income students in both districts are near 60 percent, as well. Some schools in Minneapolis are becoming largely segregated by color and income level. These schools tend to have teachers with less experience and less per pupil expenditures than their more integrated counterparts. In addition, the gap in education achievement between these students and their white peers is steadily increasing. The desegregation rule can impact upon this, if educational excellence

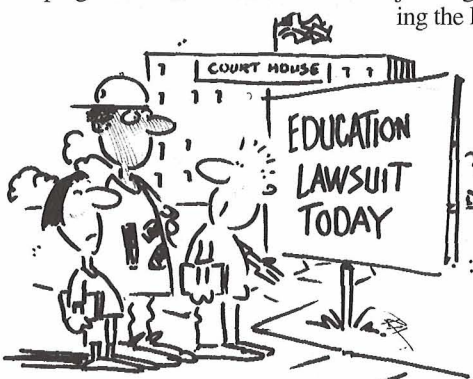
is the driving force for the rule. Mandating that closing the achievement gap between students of color (and low-income students, as well) be part of every district's desegregation plan, along with earmarked funding for implementing this initiative, needs to be a major focus of the rule.

School desegregation must be a metro-wide effort. Conditions contributing to segregated schools in Minneapolis and St. Paul were the result of policymaking at the city, county and state levels and include other areas, i.e., housing, employment and transportation. There must be a metro-wide resolve to alleviate the entrenchment of poverty in the Twin Cities, concurrent with school desegregation efforts. All metro school districts should be mandated to become part of the desegregation process by developing desegregation policies and offering open enrollment for all metro students. Research shows that interdistrict choice plans have a positive impact on the achievement levels of low-income students, with

no negative effect on middle-class students.

Research has shown that desegregation based solely on numbers moves bodies, but not test scores. These attempts to achieve integration solely through busing tend to bypass the very constituents most profoundly affected by desegregation—our school children and their opportunities for improved educational outcomes. The State Board of Education needs to refocus its efforts from numbers and percentages to improving educational outcomes, specifically for students of color and, ultimately, all students. The effects of the desegregation rule are going to be felt far and wide and will impact upon all school children in Minnesota. The State Board of Education has the historic opportunity to devise one of the methods that will allow Minnesota school children to access an equitable, diverse and improved educational system.

Nancy Smith is education program officer for the Urban Coalition.



"Is this what grownups mean by 'back to the basics'?"

## Rickabaugh

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the Metropolitan Council. At a June 21 news conference, we called for a suspension of legal proceedings to allow intensive efforts to find a creative, effective and comprehensive solution that will offer significantly improved educational opportunities for all of our children.

We are facing an expenditure of tens of millions of dollars, untold 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, protracted 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.

The recently decided desegregation lawsuit in the State of Connecticut offers an example from which we can learn. After years of litigation, the judge did not present a solution for the parties to implement; rather, he required them to develop a plan for his review. It seems that we have the opportunity now to develop our own plan and avoid the loss of time and waste of resources. We owe it to our children.

We traditionally have served students based on the location of their residence and the placement of schools. Consequently, housing policies and patterns that promote segregation, employment opportunities that are inaccessible to people residing in some neighborhoods and the unavailability of convenient, low-cost transportation can result in schools that are segregated. The variables that create these circumstances influence the com-

position of student enrollment but are not controlled by school boards and educators. Segregated schools often are the result of decisions made in sectors of the community not responsible for education. We believe that a comprehensive solution to the issues involved in the current desegregation lawsuit must include the governmental and community entities that are responsible for or influence decisions related to community elements, such as housing and transportation policies and economic development. We are ready to take responsibility for our part in the resolution of this complex situation and share leadership with others who have responsibility for and an interest in the solution.

We are convinced that the creativity, commitment and judgment exists in our communities to craft a solution that will serve the metropolitan area effectively now and in the future.

Therefore, we have asked that a broad-based group of students, parents, community leaders, educators and public officials be convened to make our very best effort to find alternatives to the courts for resolving this important matter.

We have before us one of the most significant challenges and unique opportunities we have ever faced. We can continue on the current course toward a predictable and inadequate outcome. Or, we can choose a new course, to face the challenge and seize the opportunity, coming together to find a better way to improve the housing, economic and educational prospects for our children and their families.

*James R. Rickabaugh is superintendent of the Burnsville-Eagan-Savage School District and a member of the Association of Metropolitan School Districts.*

## Sykora/Seagren

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tion has not worked. While the racial numbers may have been altered, student performance was not enhanced. In addition, the busing solution provoked anger and dissension in nearly every city where it was implemented.

Here in the Twin Cities, a recent lawsuit by the NAACP seeks to impose a similar forced busing plan to achieve integration in metro schools. The suit is similar to a recent Connecticut court case, where a judge ruled that some Connecticut school boundaries violated a segregation clause in the state constitution. The court ordered the Legislature to find a solution.

With regard to the NAACP law-

suit, there are some important differences. First, Minnesota has no segregation clause in its state constitution. Also, the Minnesota Legislature has already addressed (and will continue to address) equity funding by sending more dollars to urban schools.

Perhaps more importantly, Minnesota has for years used innovative programs to address student achievement, including those that give more choices to families. They include open enrollment, the Post Secondary Enrollment Option and magnet and charter schools.

The State Board of Education recently released its revised integration plan, using input we gathered as cochairs of the House Republican Task Force on Student Achievement and Integration. The Board worked long and hard to fashion a commonsense plan that

emphasizes achievement and provides for voluntary integration.

During our many task force hearings last summer, we found this is what people want. They like neighborhood schools and they told us student performance hinged mainly on the support of parents or other significant adults.

We also found that city and suburban school districts recognize the importance of integrated schools and are committed to reaching this goal. There is a great deal of cross-district cooperation and planning to improve racial balance and achieve the true goal of enhancing student performance. This includes two magnet schools which will open in the near future.

This is the approach we support, for many reasons. People working together voluntarily, with a com-

mon objective, can accomplish great things. A voluntary program also eliminates the anger, fear and resentment raised by the specter of forced busing. Financially, the millions used to bus students around the metro area can be better spent in the classroom.

We believe the Twin Cities can do better than to imitate other cities' failed plans. We can ensure all of our students get the opportunity and the support they need to succeed. In the future, we will continue to sponsor legislation that will focus on students achievement and open enrollment choices with accountability standards.

*Barb Sykora (R-Excelsior) and Alice Seagren (R-Bloomington) are members of the Minnesota House of Representatives and serve on the House Education Committee.*

## Recycling

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generated \$18 million annually since 1990. A small part of that is used for state recycling programs, but the bulk—\$14 million—is passed through to the counties to help pay for the ongoing costs of recycling. The counties are

required to pony up at least 25 percent of the pass-through grant amount in their own funds, but most provide more.

Last year, 3.4 million households in 700 Minnesota cities were served by recycling programs—up from 3.2 million households in 692 cities in 1994—and nearly 1,300 recycling centers and stations pro-

vided residents not served by curbside programs the opportunity to recycle. Business participation is also increasing, according to the OEA.

### Worth it?

Is recycling—and the public dollars and time devoted to it—an efficient way of helping the environment? That's difficult to answer.

Accounting for and assigning all of the costs and benefits involved in recycling isn't as straightforward as it sounds.

Even a strictly financial accounting is complex. Critics have often claimed that recycling is more expensive than conventional waste

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## Recycling

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disposal. David Morris, director of Washington, D.C.- and Twin Cities-based Center for Local Self Reliance, says that's sometimes true in the short run. As programs are starting up, costs often are higher because of the capital investment required. Also, cities typically take awhile to transform their waste disposal systems so that recycling replaces traditional collection, rather than being added onto it, according to Morris. But he said a longer term view shows that per-ton costs usually decrease as participation increases and economies of scale are achieved.

Evaluating environmental costs and benefits is also challenging. The environmental benefits of recycling can include reduced groundwater pollution, preservation of natural habitat as a result of decreased mining activity and reduced dependence on nonrenewable natural resources.

However, recycling in some circumstances could be undesirable from an environmental perspective. Like an extreme example, it would probably hurt the environment more than help it to send a truck out to pick up six glass bottles from a lone house in a remote area.

Given the complexity of both the financial and environmental accounting, waste managers and analysts have tended to consider financial and environmental concerns separately, according to Jonathan Hubschman, a policy analyst at the Minnesota Environmental Quality Board. Because there is little research showing the joint environmental and financial trade-offs between waste-management strategies, it's difficult to know whether an additional dollar should be spent on recycling, composting, incineration or landfilling to achieve the most positive overall benefit in a particular community, Hubschman said.

Crafting an integrated waste-management system should involve a calculus of many financial and environmental factors, such as the underlying value of the commodities and the existence of markets for them, the volume of material

available and the technologies available to the community. In general, recycling is most cost-effective and environmentally beneficial when the supply of material that can be collected is large and inexpensive to collect, the "virgin" material has high inherent value and disposal costs are relatively high, Hubschman said.

Every community is different and no one waste-management strategy will be appropriate for all of them, Hennepin County Commissioner Randy Johnson emphasized. Tierney's *New York Times* article erred by looking at New York City's experience and generalizing its lessons for the U.S. "When was the last time we looked at New York as our model for doing anything?" Johnson asked.

### Green limits?

On balance, the Twin Cities metropolitan area has many of the conditions that can make recycling economically and environmentally beneficial. Here it makes good "green" sense for individuals to recycle aluminum and newsprint, for instance. It makes even better sense—because of the volumes—for businesses to continue recycling paper and other materials. Waste managers and environmental advocates generally agree that Minnesota can and should increase the share of municipal solid waste that is recycled beyond the current 45 percent. But how high should the target be?

Bob Meier, policy analyst at the OEA, and Morris said there probably is a point where it doesn't make sense to increase the share of waste that is recycled. They don't think Minnesota is anywhere close to reaching those limits, however.

The notion that more recycling is not always a good idea—for all communities and all circumstances—is counterintuitive and rankles some advocates. Hubschman said zeal for recycling can sometimes stifle candid discussion about its limits.

Now that the state has a half-dozen years of recycling experience, Hubschman said, policymakers are in a position to ask different questions: When should we add another commodity to the list of recyclables? When does public involvement and subsidy make sense and when



...We have options ... recycle, throw 'em in the garbage, or ... shoot the cat."

should government let markets handle recycling, as they have historically for some commodities?

### Cutting down

On one point, there is widespread consensus: The first and most important waste-management strategy should be to reduce the amount of waste produced in the first place.

In Minnesota, policymakers are paying greater attention to "source reduction," according to Kevin O'Donnell, environmental integration manager at Minnesota Technology, Inc. (MTI). Two state programs—MTI and the Minnesota Technical Assistance Program (MnTAP), housed in the Office of Environmental Assistance—help businesses improve purchasing, production and product design to minimize the amount of waste they generate.

In most cases, these strategies yield significant benefits to the businesses' bottom lines, according to MnTAP director Cindy McComas. Thirty percent of the raw material used to produce fiberglass is lost in scrap and airborne particles, for example, and a fair amount of spray paint aimed at a product doesn't actually hit the target surface. Redesigning production processes and making other changes to reduce product waste almost always improves overall efficiency, McComas said.

Newer equipment can dramatically reduce both solid and hazardous waste and improve efficiency. But McComas said that even less expensive "low-tech" strategies, such as better staff training and rotating perishable stock can make a big difference.

Businesses have been involved in recycling for years—long before

recycling became popular among citizens—because it made good business sense. St. Paul-based Waldorf Corporation recycles 450,000 tons of paper a year, and CEO Eugene Frey said in a letter to the *Star Tribune* that recycling has been the "heartbeat of our business since 1907." Now businesses are working on reducing waste not just to comply with environmental regulations, but to be more competitive and profitable, said MTI's O'Donnell.

Waste management experts agree that business source reduction represents a significant opportunity to cut down the stream of all kinds of waste—municipal solid waste, air- and waterborne waste and hazardous waste.

### Reducing vs. feeling good

"Source reduction" should be a goal for individuals as well, policymakers say. Recycling advocates and waste-management professionals agree: People will have to make other changes that won't be as easy as sorting garbage. "Recycling is popular because people can feel good while not really reducing their consumption," Hubschman said.

If people really want to save the planet, what else should they do? "Buy less, use what you've got, use fewer toxic products," Hubschman said. "Get rid of your pre-1983 car and get a more energy-efficient model, and spend less time and attention manicuring your lawn," Johnson said. "Those things have more environmental impact than rinsing out tuna cans."

*Janet Dudrow is a research associate at the Citizens League.*

# Class-size hubbub ignores research proving little effect

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 a 1990 excess levy referendum earmarked 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 from 26 to 24, or from 22 to 20, isn't likely to affect academic achievement significantly.

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 highway contractors to figure the economic effects of traffic disruption into their bids.

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

## Take Note

*Summer fodder to keep vacationing brains engaged.*

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.—*Dana Schroeder*.

**A progress report** on *Minnesota Milestones*, the state's 30-year plan, shows some disturbing negative trends for the state's youngsters, 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 1995 school 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 over these 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.—*J.D.*

"Take Note" contributors include Minnesota Journal and Citizens League staff members and Betty Wilson, a freelance writer and former Star Tribune political writer.

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SECOND CLASS  
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MINNESOTA



# Citizens League Matters

August 20, 1996

News for Citizens League Members

## Welcome New Members

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

### Citizens League

708 South 3rd Street  
Suite 500  
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Visit our Web site:  
<http://freenet.msp.mn.us/ip/pol/citizen/>

The Citizens League promotes the public interest in Minnesota by involving citizens in identifying and framing critical public policy choices, forging recommendations and advocating their adoption. Suggested dues for membership are \$50 for individuals and \$75 for a family membership. Other categories are also available. For more information 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 meetings. They will, however, continue to examine important issues and feature knowledgeable and prominent speakers.

Last spring's extremely successful series on managing urban growth indicated that the right topic, good speakers and a convenient time and setting could attract record crowds.

We don't want the meetings to be a mob scene. Some informality and intimacy is built in by design. But we do want the sessions 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 morning. 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 success 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.

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

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At this writing, planning for the fall program has not been finished. But here's the plan so far. There will be three series this fall. We are currently working on a series on reorganizing public 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 benchmarking 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 sponsored 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 programming and membership support without any real significant changes is a long time. We hope that this year's changes will enhance this already very successful 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

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,

*Lyle Janet Ron Gayle Trudy*

P.S. Please send money by August 31.

be difficult 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