



JOURNAL

A Public Policy Monthly from the Citizens League



Minnesota must ensure that immigrant students are ready for and successful in higher education

Committee highlights four policy challenges to meeting that goal

by Wilson Bradshaw (pictured) and Vinodh Kutty

As Minnesota's immigrant population has increased over the last three decades, our institutions of education have wrestled with questions of how to integrate immigrant students into our schools—and whether our schools are up to the task. There is little consensus over how best to educate immigrant students, and little information is available to show us what has been successful.

This much is clear: both moral and economic imperatives demand that immigrant students (and all students) are ready for and successful in higher education. The moral argument is compelling: public schools have always served as an introduction to American culture and citizenship for new immigrants—and one of the fundamental roles of public education is to develop the capacity of citizens to self-govern and participate in our democracy. In addition, we have a particular responsibility to refugees, who are often sent to resettle in Minnesota with little say in the matter and after enduring unimaginable hardships. Refugees make up a significant proportion of Minnesota's immigrant population. The economic stakes are equally clear. The coming retirement of the baby boom generation and unprecedented competition from the global economy add to those demands: to maintain our standard of living,



Minnesota needs to increase the number of students who complete some form of higher education.

To address this need, the Citizens League, in partnership with the MACC Alliance of Connected Communities, launched a study in 2006 that aims to increase immigrant students' participation and success in higher education. We recently completed the first phase of the study, which identified the key challenges facing immigrant students in Minnesota.

Global economy demands educated workforce

Minnesota is at a critical juncture in its economic and social future. The global information economy demands a highly-educated, highly-skilled workforce, but Minnesota's capacity to meet that need is shrinking. At the same time that our baby boomers will begin to retire, the number of students graduating from high school and receiving bachelor's degrees in Minnesota will decline. To maintain its strength in the U.S. and world economy, Minnesota needs more of its high school students to complete some form of higher education.

continued on page 4

INSIDE

2

Connections

3

Viewpoint:
Unusual ideas
wanted

6

Policy Redux:
K-12 enrollment
and funding

9

Perspectives:
*Here comes health
care's big fix*
IRV as easy as 1-2-3

CONNECTIONS

Building a League of Citizens



Dinner & Dialogue: To help inform the work of the Immigration and Higher Education Study Committee, the Citizens League and Marnita's Table are hosting a series of dinner-table conversations throughout Minnesota. The dinners bring together diverse groups of people—immigrant parents and students, teachers, local community and elected leaders, businesspeople, and other interested citizens. For more information go to www.citizensleague.org, or if you would like to attend one of the dinners contact Victoria Ford at vford@citizensleague.org or 651-293-0575. Space is limited, so contact us right away!

June poll results

We didn't get a lot of responses to our question "Outside of voting, what area of your life has the most opportunity for civic engagement?", but this anonymous response caught our attention:

"In my mind, real civic engagement comes when you develop relationships with people who are different from you or may disagree with you, but who are interested or concerned about the same things you are. These days, places of work are some of the only places in our daily lives where we experience true diversity and work actively with people who may be of different race, religion, political party, socio-economic status or sexual orientation than we are. We don't find this kind of diversity as much in the traditional outlets for engagement (churches, community groups, etc.) and I think that hinders a productive engagement process—it's one thing to engage with people who are like-minded and agree on where they are heading, but it is a different challenge entirely to work with people who come from different perspectives and have differing views about the direction an issue should take."

community connections
calendar • point • click • engage

www.pointclickengage.org

New members, recruiters, and volunteers

New and rejoining members

Abdisalam Adam
Kirsten Anderson-Stembridge
Matthew Anderson-Stembridge
Mary and Garrett Bradley
Joshua Becerra
Jan Berry
Jesse Bethke Gomez
Keith Butcher
Yvonne Cheung Ho
Liz Dayton
Wali Dirie
Lorena Duarte
Mario Duarte
Mary Ebnet
Jake and Amanda Elo
Carl Goldstein and Marnita Schroedl
Mary Harrison
Joyce Hoelting
Louis King
John Knapp
Sara Langworthy
James J. Lewis and Bill Bloedow
Sanne Magnan
Jan Malcolm
Geoff Maruyama
Molly Reiling
Kate Reuer
Francisco Segovia
Ro Shirole
Chanda Smith
Jody TallBear
James Trice
Janet Ward
Jeffrey Wetmore
Stella Whitney-West
Cheryl Wilson
James Worlobah

Firms and organizations

Allianz Life Insurance Company of North America
Allina Health System
Andersen Corporation
Association of Metropolitan School Districts
Axis Healthcare
Catholic Charities
CenterPoint Energy
Children, Youth and Family Consortium
Cincinnati, Inc.
Courage Center
Delta Dental of Minnesota
Frank Cheryl
Global Volunteers
Growth & Justice
Minneapolis Urban League
Minnesota Department of Education
Minnesota International Center
Minnesota Minority Education Partnership
Neighborhood House
Richardson, Richter & Associates
Saint Paul Area Council of Churches
Securian Foundation, supported by Securian Financial Group and its affiliates, Minnesota Life, Advantus Capital Management, and Securian Trust

Skyline Exhibits

Thomson

Travelers Foundation

Weber Shandwick Worldwide

The Williston Group

Xcel Energy

Recruiters

Ford Bell
Jeff Peterson
Maren Harrison

Volunteers

Janna Caywood
Cal Clark

Sean Kershaw's isn't the only Viewpoint we want to hear. This month, Citizens League Board Chair Mary Pickard offers her ideas about how the Citizens League's guidelines can help the nonprofit and philanthropic sector better achieve its goals.



Today's unusual idea may be just what we need

Nonprofits should embrace innovation and encourage more community engagement

by Mary Pickard

Having worked in philanthropy for more than 30 years, I've been privileged to see how grassroots action can lead to innovation and new public policies. Unfortunately, I've also observed how often we erect very large barriers to success for people with new or different ideas, and as a result our communities miss out on potential solutions to difficult problems.

At the Citizens League, we challenge ourselves to find common ground for the common good. Among other things, we say that we believe in the power and potential of all citizens, that we want to develop new civic leaders, and that those affected by a problem can help define the problem and identify potential solutions. We think democracy is better served with these principles in mind.

The nonprofit community is uniquely positioned to help us realize these democratic ideals, but those of us who work in philanthropy need to support the creation of new organizations and/or encourage existing organizations to dare to be innovative, to listen to and engage the communities nonprofits work with, and to forge new policy discussions. But generally, neither institutional nor individual donors are very supportive of new approaches; we'd rather support the old and familiar.

An example from the not-so-distant past clearly illustrates how foolish this tendency to shut out new ideas can be.

In the early 1970's, a group of women began offering shelter to other women who were being battered by the men in their lives. At first, these were individual acts of courage; women risked their own safety to protect others. But soon it became clear they needed to create a safe space outside their individual homes and to seek broader community support for their efforts. They started a nonprofit, Women's Advocates. They purchased and renovated a house and went in search of financial help.

These women knew there was a need, but others were skeptical. Public policy and human service institutions of the day argued women should go back to their husbands. The social context was also difficult.

We think nothing of developing whole public systems to serve students or the poor without asking what works for them.

Battering was a hidden problem and few understood how widespread it was. Very few women held decision-making roles.

But these tenacious and visionary women persevered. I was proud when The St. Paul Companies, where I worked reviewing grant requests, became the second institutional grantmaker to support Women's Advocates. The Bush Foundation was the first. Eventually, state and county funding came too.

Women's Advocates has since served thousands of people. Just as important, they created the first such shelter in the country, igniting a national movement, raising public awareness, and ultimately, changing public policy. Thirty years later, my younger colleagues think I'm making up stories about the resistance women battled to create what is now so obviously a good idea.

Lessons learned from that experience and many others can help us today as we work to address intractable problems, such as providing adequate mental health care, particularly for the poor, closing the educational achievement gap, and eradicating racism, homelessness, child abuse, and neglect.

- The nonprofit community is an essential part of a thriving democracy; it offers people a place to gather to do what needs to be done when business can't because it's not profitable and government can't because it is unpopular or outside its scope.
- There's a fear now that there are too many nonprofit groups and not enough funding to go around. We should be more afraid of stagnation. Long-time nonprofit organizations need to keep re-inventing their work and new ideas need room to grow.
- We need to remember that, as in the case of battered women, people affected by a

problem often have solutions. We need to listen to them. Business wouldn't consider producing a product without customer research yet we think nothing of developing whole public systems to serve students or the poor or parents without asking what works for them.

- We need to find ways to support people who have innovative ideas and are willing to do the tough work within their communities to actually solve problems and build human potential.
- We need to support innovators by sharing networks and encouraging collaboration. Collaboration among nonprofit groups is essential to addressing serious problems—as we've seen in the work being done by early childhood organizations in Minnesota.
- People close to the action may not have great organizational skills. We need to invest in developing human capital and leadership potential.
- Small, community-based efforts can grow and yield big benefits. Like small businesses, small nonprofits are close to their customers, require innovation, creativity, and tenacity to survive and help develop new leaders.
- We need to support leadership wherever we find it. Every leader in every community has a lifetime to contribute and we desperately need those contributions.

I have seen a multitude of creative, innovative people who have struggled to do what they know needs to be done. Their efforts prove time and again that money isn't a panacea—they accomplish amazing things with very little. But ultimately, resources and moral support are critical to jumpstarting and sustaining any effort, especially efforts that lead to policy change, public awareness, and innovative solutions.

We need to stop, look, and listen to people with ideas that may be out of the ordinary because today's unusual idea may be just what we need. ●

Mary Pickard chairs the Citizens League's Board of Directors. She recently retired after 35 years at Travelers (formerly The St. Paul Companies).

Immigrant students

continued from page 1

Recent work by the Minnesota Private College Council puts the discrepancy in bold relief:

- Between 2003 and 2013, the number of high school graduates in Minnesota will decrease by 10.3 percent.
- Between 2007 and 2017, the number of bachelor's degrees awarded in Minnesota each year will decline by 12 percent, with 3,000 fewer students graduating from college each year.
- Over roughly the same period, the number of college graduates retiring from the Minnesota workforce will grow from 9,000 to 25,000 each year.
- On top of the need created by retirements, new job growth in professional and high tech industries is projected to demand an additional 10,500 college graduates each year.

In short, Minnesota's need for college-educated workers will be growing at the same time that its pool of new workers is shrinking. To maintain our global competitiveness and local quality of life, Minnesota must take advantage of and invest in the skills, knowledge, and ability of all of our students—our “human resources.”

The Study Committee on Immigration and Higher Education is being conducted in two phases. This report represents the first phase of the work of the committee. The charge in the first phase was to **gather the facts about immigrant students in Minnesota and use those facts to identify the critical choices and public policy challenges that Minnesota will face in the coming years.**

The second phase of the study committee was launched in August 2007. The charge for the second phase is to develop recommendations to address the four key policy questions posed here:

Information: How are information and services about K-12 and higher education best delivered to immigrant students and families?

Culture: How can educational institutions and individual educators learn to adapt to the changing cultural makeup of their student populations?

Cost: What do immigrant families need in order to overcome the financial challenges related to higher education?

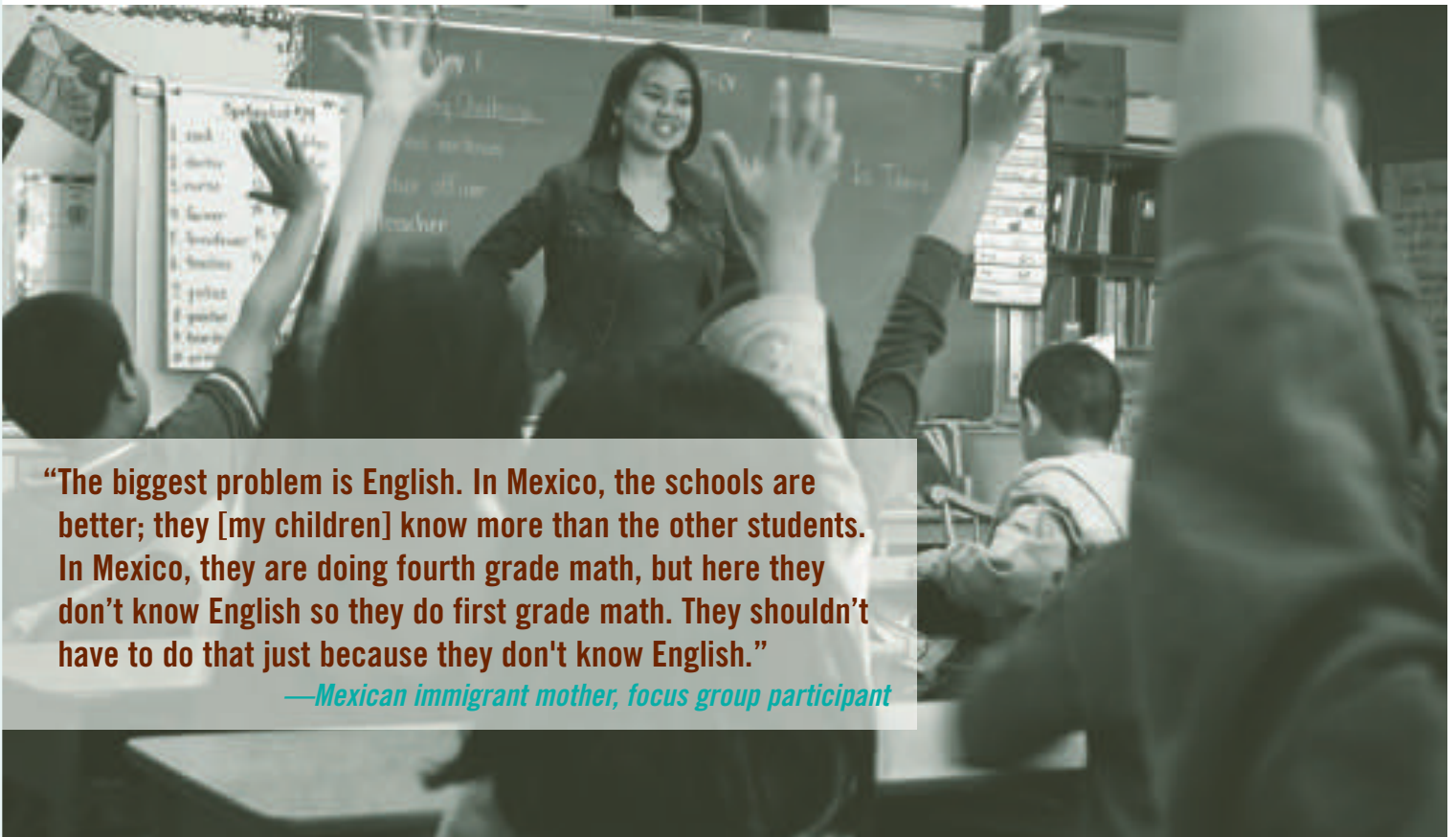
Preparation: What is the best way to prepare immigrant students for college-level English skills?

Immigrant students underutilized

Immigrants make up a growing proportion of Minnesota's population. By 2004, there were approximately 304,000 immigrants living in Minnesota, comprising 6.1 percent of the state's population. In some Minnesota communities, that number is much higher: immigrants make up approximately 15 percent of the populations of both Minneapolis and Saint Paul, and almost 20 percent of the population of

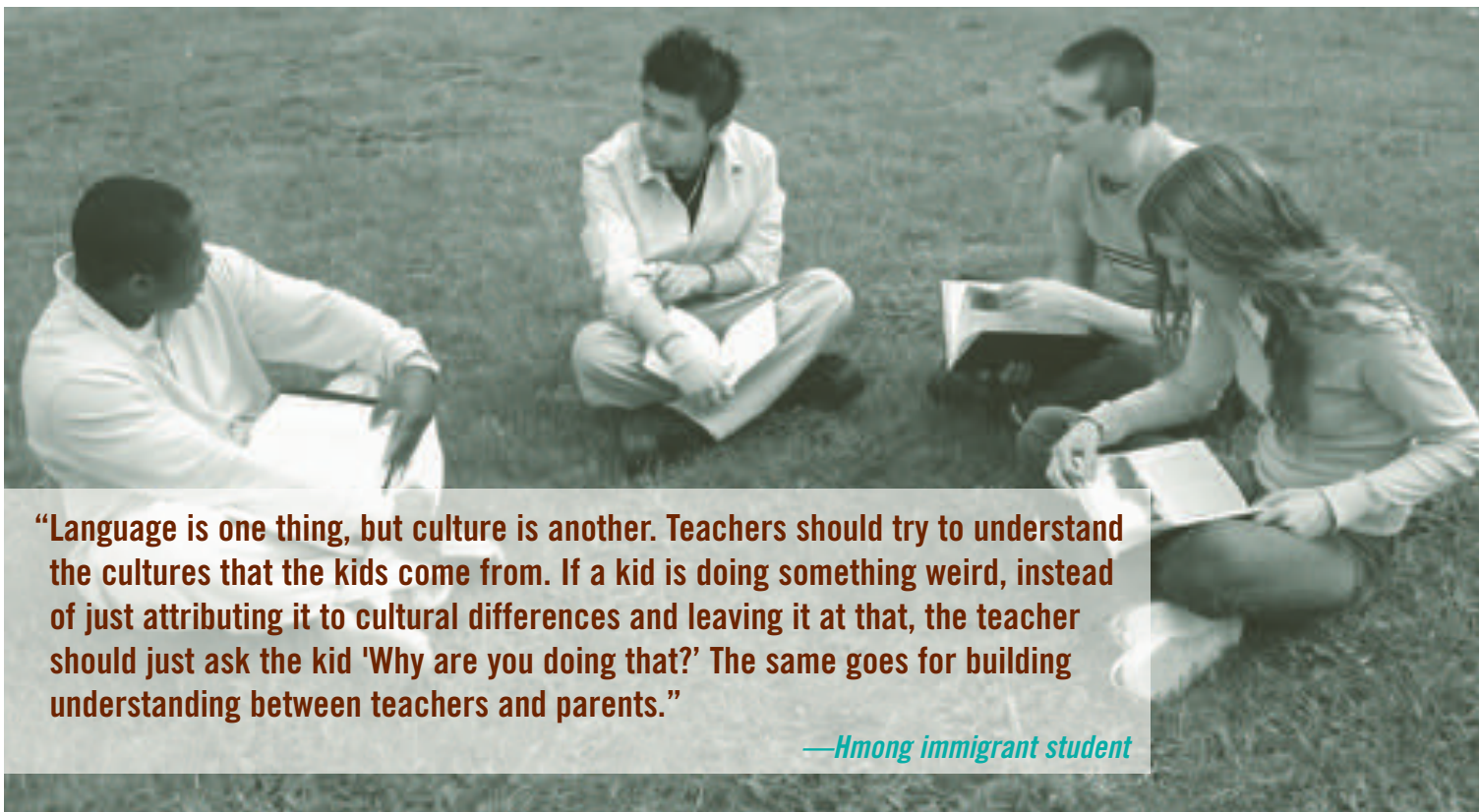
some Twin Cities suburbs and Greater Minnesota cities.

The U.S. Census tells us that in 2000, there were approximately 96,000 children of immigrants in Minnesota schools. However, most school districts, colleges, and universities in Minnesota do not track the immigration status of students and their families. As a result, little data is available to answer the most basic questions about the academic success of immigrant students.



“The biggest problem is English. In Mexico, the schools are better; they [my children] know more than the other students. In Mexico, they are doing fourth grade math, but here they don't know English so they do first grade math. They shouldn't have to do that just because they don't know English.”

—Mexican immigrant mother, focus group participant



“Language is one thing, but culture is another. Teachers should try to understand the cultures that the kids come from. If a kid is doing something weird, instead of just attributing it to cultural differences and leaving it at that, the teacher should just ask the kid ‘Why are you doing that?’ The same goes for building understanding between teachers and parents.”

—Hmong immigrant student

The coming demographic and economic changes necessitate that Minnesota take advantage of all of its human resources, and many immigrant students have special assets that merit particular attention in our increasingly global society: fluency in a

The government’s current conversation about immigrant students has focused almost entirely on the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM Act), which would allow undocumented immigrant students to access

The Citizens League Study Committee on Immigration and Higher Education has identified policy questions in four areas—information, culture, cost, and preparation—that we believe are key to increasing immigrant students’ readiness for and success in higher education.

Minnesota’s need for college-educated workers will be growing at the same time that its pool of new workers is shrinking. To maintain our global competitiveness and local quality of life, Minnesota must take advantage of and invest in the skills, knowledge, and ability of all of our students—its “human resources.”

Information: How are information and services about K-12 and higher education best delivered to immigrant students and their families?

foreign language and international perspective, experience and connections. These assets are too often ignored or viewed as problems that our educational systems need to solve rather than as resources that can improve learning for all students.

federal financial aid and attend public colleges and universities at in-state tuition rates. To increase the participation and success of immigrant students in higher education, Minnesotans must expand this conversation to include other policy challenges—and other voices. The responsibility for addressing the policy challenges raised in this report shouldn’t be held exclusively by government, but shared by the other institutions that serve immigrant families and communities.

Immigrant families do not communicate and engage with schools in the same ways as native-born families. In many cases, immigrants have grown up in a culture where they are expected to defer educational authority to teachers and school systems. As a result, community-based organizations or places of worship are sometimes a more consistent mechanism for communicating with immigrant families than schools themselves. Rather than only investing more in school-based systems of communication, Minnesota should explore opportunities to partner with outside organizations and develop new systems for delivering educational information and services to immigrant families.

The key question

So how can Minnesota increase immigrant students’ readiness for and success in higher education?

continued on page 8

POLICY REDUX

Sometimes it seems as if policy recommendations are made in one year and gone the next, replaced by a new set of discussions and policy priorities. But many of the reports and recommendations by Citizens League study committees have built on the work of previous committees.

In this month's Policy Redux feature, we take a look at the Citizens League's past work on K-12 enrollment and funding.

Matching pupils, teachers, buildings and

This report identifies and provides recommendations to address the current and future problems that will arise due to declining enrollments and increased differential in enrollments in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. The current differential growth/decline in enrollment has been anticipated for many years but there has been inadequate attention given to coping with the problems which these fluctuations are producing. The recommendations in this report encourage communication and coordination between stakeholders, such as individual districts, parents, and higher education institutions which train teachers. The desired outcome of this coordination and communication is better decision making on what schools to close, utilization of empty school buildings by other governmental entities, even distribution of new and experienced teachers between schools, and better long-range planning for educational needs across the entire metropolitan area.

Findings:

- School districts in the Twin Cities metropolitan area and statewide are likely to experience significant differential rates of growth/decline over the next 10 to 12 years. Total enrollment will drop, but the decrease will not be uniform throughout schools, which will result in many challenges to the system.
- Reduction in births and changes in housing patterns are the main reasons for the anticipated differential growth/decline.
- Vacant classrooms in many districts and new construction in others are some of the more visible manifestations of changing enrollment patterns.

Rebuilding education to make it work (19

Minnesota's K-12 public education system is unable to adequately meet the demands placed upon it now, and it has no real hope of dealing with an expanded, complex, and technological future. Also, as a major center for corporate headquarters, Minnesota finds more and more of its people engaged in "think work" which requires analysis and imagination. The Citizens League believes it will not suffice to merely pump more money into the same old education system; instead the system must be rebuilt. This report makes recommendations to fundamentally change the current system.

Findings:

There are numerous legal, contractual, and regulatory barriers in our educational system that stand in the way of real change, along with habit and tradition. These barriers include:

- The funding process occurs biennially at the state level with funds being sent to individual school districts. School district boards have only limited authority to raise additional funds.
- School district boundaries preserve existing class and income distinctions.
- The reporting hierarchy in the system places teachers at the bottom of the accountability ladder.
- State Department of Education standards require that credits be awarded for "seat time" in a predetermined location.
- School board precedents and practices mandate specific pupil-teacher ratios.
- State Board of Teaching certification requirements limit school systems in using the skills and knowledge of people who do not have the appropriate certificates.
- Teacher compensation is based solely on the number of years in system and college credits that teachers hold, not on performance.
- Teacher seniority laws of "last hired, first fired" may prevent the hiring and retention of minority teachers.

budgets (1974)

- The differential growth/decline is having a major effect on the age-experience mix of teaching staffs and on the socio-economic mix of enrollment because layoffs are based on seniority of teachers with the most recently hired being laid off first. Districts with high staff seniority also face serious financial problems because of these teachers' higher salaries.
- Declining enrollment raises concern over maintenance of diversified curriculum because course offerings may be cut.
- Declining enrollment raises the following major issues about school financing:
 - > Other public functions might see the enrollment decrease as a reason to increase their competition for limited state and local taxes.
 - > With added competition there will be greater scrutiny on how funds are used and "special needs" programs may be at risk.
- Declining enrollment produces conflict over future of neighborhood schools; many parents are concerned that they will be closed and fear they will not have input into the decision making process.
- Problems associated with the differential growth/decline in the metropolitan area have failed to receive adequate broader-than-district attention. Instead, districts operate as separate, unrelated units which do not share information that would allow for inter-district planning.
- Several major policy issues beyond enrollment are failing to receive attention from the standpoint of the metropolitan area as a whole, such as salary negotiation, teacher mobility, building utilization, state aid formula, and school district boundaries.

Recommendations:

1. The state should promote better age-experience mix of teaching staffs by encouraging more mobility from district to district by providing special reimbursement to growing districts willing to hire veteran teachers from declining enrollment districts, make changes to salaries and pension plans to encourage inter-district transfers, and experiment with teacher-exchange and trial transfer programs.
2. The state should provide special aid to declining-enrollment school districts to the extent that salary expenditures do not decline proportionately with termination of staff positions.
3. The state should establish an education institute for the Twin Cities area which would study and provide leadership on longer range inter-district needs.
4. School districts should adopt guidelines on school closings that include public hearings and procedures to be followed for required neighborhood involvement.
5. New ways should be sought for using public buildings: a municipality's planning staff could prepare an inventory of unused buildings and compare this to the building needs of other governmental agencies.
6. School districts and teacher education institutions should cooperate closely to plan for future teacher education needs.

79)

Recommendations:

1. Various decision making functions should be decentralized from the district level to the school level.
2. Existing barriers to operational excellence should be removed in order to grant more flexibility to educational professionals at the school level.
3. Public educational dollars should follow parents' choices about which schools or educational services should be utilized.

The Legislature should:

- Promote decentralization of the educational system in the metropolitan area by allowing new public delivery systems to emerge and allowing educational dollars to follow parents' choices.
- Legislative direction for the reorganization of the delivery system for elementary and secondary education in the metropolitan area should:
 - > Decrease the regulation of all public schools to promote flexible delivery of service within the parameters of overall public policy.
 - > Do not require students to attend school in their districts of residence. Enrollment would be permitted based on the preferences of children and parents.
 - > No school with access to public resources could enroll a lower proportion of minority or low-income applicants than that proportion reflected in its application pool.
 - > School districts would no longer receive funds directly from state appropriations or local taxes. Instead, these resources would follow the attendance decisions made by families.
 - > School districts would be obliged to assume clearinghouse responsibilities to inform parents of differences in schools.
- The Legislature should, on a regular basis, allow educational services to be purchased from private vendors.

The Boards of Education should:

- Shift authority and responsibility for basic educational delivery decisions as much as possible to individual schools.
- Expand to the fullest degree possible opportunities for families to make the educational decision which they can best make—the choice of which school to attend.

- Begin to release the kinds of relevant information—including but not limited to standardized achievement scores—which permit families to make general comparative assessments of school performance.

The business community and potential entrepreneurs should:

- Promote innovation of education-based products and services by establishing a nonprofit organization to provide technical assistance to potential entrepreneurs, as well as a for-profit venture capital fund with assets dedicated to enterprises that show promise for substantial educational delivery advancements.

Minority report

A minority report was prepared which did not agree with the central recommendations because it was thought they would jeopardize the democratic process that works to balance the tensions between common good, majority consensus, and individual/minority group rights.

The minority report agreed with the majority report that structural changes are necessary in the educational system, but it disagreed with the manner in which the committee arrived at the conclusion and the mode for change it suggested. Examples include:

- The committee composition and expert testimony did not reflect the needs and aspirations of the diversity of parents and children served by the public schools.
- The recommendation to have public educational funds follow parents' choice for school is progress toward instituting an educational voucher system.
- Report fails to state that deregulation changes should be incremental and this weakens the recommendation because staff training and development programs are necessary components of system change.
- Vouchers address only economic issues and have little impact upon issues of discrimination and racism.
- Disagrees with the theory that a "marketplace" educational system will produce the best product for minority and poor people because this theory has not proven itself true for these groups in an economic setting.

Immigrant students

continued from page 5

Culture: How can educational institutions and individual educators learn to adapt to the changing cultural makeup of their student populations?

The increase in the number of immigrant students has introduced new challenges to school districts and individual teachers. Even with the best of intentions, it is difficult for teachers and other school staff to become familiar with all the languages, cultural backgrounds, and experiences that their immigrant students bring with them to the classroom. This lack of familiarity can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts between schools, teachers, students, and parents, but much of this would be avoidable if Minnesota's immigrant communities and educational systems had better avenues for understanding each other. The challenge for Minnesota schools is not only to learn about the cultures of today's immigrant students, but also to develop the capacity to adapt to the changing cultural makeup of their student populations.

Cost: What do immigrant families need in order to overcome the financial challenges related to higher education?

The cost of higher education is a significant barrier for many families—and immigrant students are more likely than their native-born peers to live in low-income households. In addition, many immigrant students face other financial constraints unique to their native culture or immigration status. Minnesota should be at the forefront in exploring and developing mechanisms that allow immigrant students to finance higher education in ways that are consistent with their familial obligations, immigration status, culture, and faith.

Preparation: What is the best way to prepare immigrant students for college-level English skills?

Learning English has always been a challenge for new immigrants. Today's students face an even greater challenge than earlier generations of immigrants: to be successful in Minnesota's information economy, they must be proficient in rigorous academic English—something that was rarely expected of earlier immigrants. The English Language Learner systems in Minnesota were built to an earlier standard of proficiency, and too often they do not

adequately prepare students for higher education or professional careers. The ultimate goal must be to build a system that prepares immigrant students not just for proficiency in English but also for the college-level English skills required for success in higher education.

In this report, the Study Committee on Immigration and Higher Education has laid out what it believes to be the most important policy questions regarding immigrant students and higher education. A second phase of this committee is now underway to answer these questions, and we challenge others in the education, business,

government and nonprofit sectors to join us as we develop policy solutions that will help increase immigrant students' readiness for and success in higher education. ●

Wilson Bradshaw and Vinodh Kutty co-chaired the first phase of the Immigration and Higher Education Study Committee.

Wilson Bradshaw is President of Metropolitan State University and a member of the Citizens League Board of Directors.

Vinodh Kutty, a member of the Citizens League, is Project Coordinator for the Hennepin County Office of Multi-Cultural Services

A few clarifying notes:

- The word "citizen" in Citizens League refers to a democratic, rather than legal, definition of citizenship. A citizen, in this case, is defined as an obligated, governing member of a community—whether that community is a team of coworkers, a congregation, or a state. Under this definition, you are a citizen of the neighborhood, city, and state in which you reside regardless of your legal citizenship status.
- The Citizens League has not taken a position on any federal-level immigration issues, including current debates on illegal immigration, border security, and guest-worker programs. In this report, we seek to address the current situation in Minnesota while acknowledging that global politics and federal policy changes are likely to change those circumstances in the future.
- The membership of the MACC Alliance of Connected Communities includes many organizations that have long histories of working in and with immigrant communities in Minnesota. While the MACC Alliance of Connected Communities does not have a position on immigration policy, it remains committed to working in these communities.

The study was a partnership between the Citizens League and the MACC Alliance of Connected Communities. The partnership ensured that the project involved a wide variety of stakeholders, not only teachers, higher education administrators, business leaders, and "interested citizens," but also immigrant families and representatives from the community organizations that touch their lives. The partnership also allowed both organizations to improve their work: the Citizens League was able to strengthen relationships in immigrant communities and communities of color, and MACC was able to delve more deeply into the public policy issues that face the communities in which they work.

Phase I Study Committee Membership

Wilson Bradshaw, Co-Chair	John DeSantis	Carl Phillips
Vinodh Kutty, Co-Chair	Bright Dornblaser	Jasmine Shrestha
Josh Becerra	Leo Espinoza	Stacia Smith
Lois Bollman	Meredith Fergus	Mike Van Keulen
Maureen Bruce	Gary Jeter	Zer Vang
Scott Burns	Lily Moua	Val Vargas
Maureen Cisneros	George Ogbonna	James Worlobah
Mercy Das-Šulc	Traci Parmenter	Zha Blong Xiong

PERSPECTIVES

Expanding Minnesota's Conversation



Health care's "big fix" is just around the corner

We need to make sure that parallel reform dialogues around the state drive toward a common solution

by John Tschida

The health care system as we know it is about to be fixed. Driven by a combination of escalating costs, multi-stakeholder frustration, and a coalescing sense of necessity, regardless of political stripe, change is in the air. I can feel it. Smell it even.

And boy do things need fixing. We've got oodles of seniors crashing down upon us. Exponential growth in exurb development has created unacceptable drive times to the local emergency room. Tremendous workforce shortages will hit every niche from family practice docs to home health aides to first responders. Consumers don't have enough skin in the game. Imaging centers are destroying hospitals and the working poor aren't poor enough to qualify for our state's quality public programs. With all these challenges, what is a blue ribbon panel supposed to do?

Great work is currently underway in multiple corners of our great state on these and other sticky issues that threaten the health, well being, and financial security of all Minnesotans. As a taxpayer, I'm thrilled so many leaders from the health community continue to devote time and organizational resources to cure what ails our gummed up system. Trouble is, I'm having trouble keeping track of all this good work and where these efforts are taking us.

At a Twins game nowadays, you pay two bucks outside the dome for a nifty analysis and scorecard that tells you who's suited up for the day's contest. Roles and areas of expertise are clearly articulated. The goal is clear. The rules inside and outside the baselines are commonly understood. The only uncertainty is the final outcome. What is certain is that there will be an outcome. The process is guaranteed to get us there.

We need such a program—and process—for health care reform. Different constituencies with key roles to play (at the individual and organizational level) are

As a taxpayer, I'm thrilled so many leaders from the health community continue to devote time and organizational resources to cure what ails our gummed up system. Trouble is I'm having trouble keeping track of all this good work and where these efforts are taking us.

now getting their hands dirty to produce marginal improvements to "the system," often in multiple forums. I'm currently involved in six health reform task forces, advisory panels, working groups, and planning teams. Hard questions are being asked at every table. I see many common players around multiple tables. Progress is being made. But no one is connecting the common threads from these dialogues and incorporating them into a planful whole. No process has been agreed upon to get us to an eventual result. No common goal has been identified. Heck, we don't even know who's on the roster let alone where the niche talent exists and where it should be directed most effectively.

Like baseball, we do have our health system superstars, and those slogging daily in the policy, provider, and payer trenches are probably in general agreement as to who these folks are. They're the scary smart and savvy who move effectively among multiple stakeholders. They have the ear of captains of industry or (in some cases) are the captains themselves. They're often invited to the "big" planning table, while a supporting cast of smart-but-not-scary-smart supporting staffers ring them at the "junior" table, the grown-up version of Thanksgiving at grandma's. We need these superstars, a crazy quilt of government, private, nonprofit, and community leaders to take charge, agree on the ground rules and process, and articulate the common goal. We at the kids' table can begin by assembling a laundry list of all the current (and recently completed) micro reform efforts to ensure this good thinking is incorporated and debated. Protectionism needs to be checked at the door.

We've got multiple goals for our health system, and new ones from the just completed legislative session, among them universal coverage, cost control, and reimbursement reform that rewards health promotion and longitudinal outcomes across the continuum of care. Maybe the newly authorized Transformation Task Force will get us there. Maybe the newly re-energized Health Care Access Commission will be the catalyst for the Big Fix. We need to ensure that each of our parallel reform dialogues is driving toward a common solution and that those with the skill and leverage to make it happen are fully engaged and participating. I'm optimistic the fix is coming. The right batters just need to step up to the plate. ●

John Tschida, a member of the Citizens League, is Vice President of Public Affairs and Research at Courage Center.

Instant Runoff Voting offers a better, fairer alternative to our current electoral process

Democracy gets shortchanged when state officials are elected by less than half of the voters

by Ellen T. Brown

After the gubernatorial election last year, I promised myself I'd get involved in electoral reform in Minnesota. I'm fed up with the process we have in place.

Too few people (about 15 percent of eligible voters) participate in primary elections and their votes choose the candidates for the general election the rest of us will vote on. And in general elections with

immediate majority, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated and that candidate's first choice ballots are reassigned according to the voter's second choice candidate. It makes sense to me and begins to address my central issues.

Looking at the vote totals from recent elections, it is easy to see that some—maybe many—of those elections might have had different results if voters had been allowed

State primaries, where partisan ballots commonly feature multiple candidates vying for party nomination, frequently yield similar results. In winner-take-all primaries, candidates rarely earn their spot on the general election ballot by winning a majority of the vote.

In non-partisan municipal elections, the top vote-getters in the primaries advance to the general election. Yet even here, primary election turnout is generally *very* low, so only a few voters decide which candidates will compete in the general election.

Low turnout primaries and winner-take-all outcomes are making voters all over the country question whether our current method of voting is really producing a representative government. Many don't think so and several jurisdictions have already adopted Instant Runoff Voting.

Minneapolis, which overwhelmingly approved an instant runoff initiative last fall, will implement it in 2009. An energetic campaign is underway in Saint Paul to give voters in 2008 the option to choose IRV for future city elections. IRV has already been adopted in several U.S. cities and states, including San Francisco, Calif., Burlington, Vt., Takoma Park, Md., along with Louisiana, South Carolina, and Arkansas. IRV has been approved and

Looking at the vote totals from recent elections, it is easy to see that some—maybe many—of those elections might have had different results if voters had been allowed to rank the candidates in order of preference.

multiple candidates, folks are scared they'll be spoilers if they vote for a "third party" candidate so they pull the lever for their second choice, a candidate they often view as the lesser of two evils.

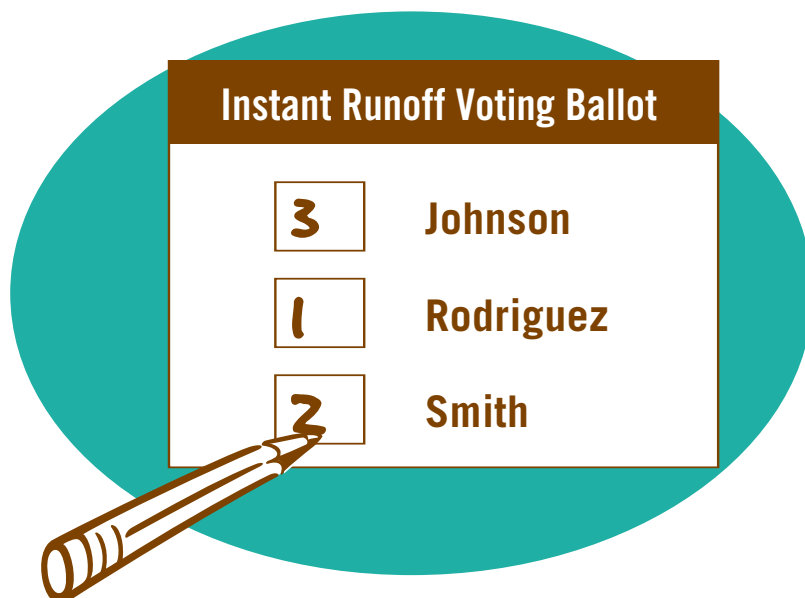
Also, since 1998, too many of our state officials have been elected without majority support: Gov. Jesse Ventura was elected with just 37 percent of the vote; Gov. Tim Pawlenty received just 44.4 percent and 46.7 percent of the vote in his two elections. And with little third party opposition, U.S. Senator Norm Coleman fell shy of a majority vote in 2002.

Lastly, if you don't vote for the winner, you are essentially without a voice in the winner-take-all election system we have.

As I began to research electoral reform issues, I found that in 2004 the League of Women Voters had done an extensive review of election systems that had led them to endorse a different kind of electoral system: Instant Runoff Voting (IRV). IRV is a very simple system that simulates a series of runoff elections with a single ballot, eliminating the need for separate primary and general elections. It allows voters to rank some or all of the candidates in order of preference. If no candidate wins an

to rank the candidates in order of preference. Let's look at the reasons why.

Increasingly in Minnesota, more than the two "major" parties run strong candidates for major offices. The result is officials elected by a plurality rather than a majority of the vote. In our winner-take-all system that means most voters didn't vote for the winning candidate.



implemented in upcoming elections in Oakland and Berkeley, Calif., Pierce County Wash., and Ferndale, Mich. And it's been approved for optional use in Vancouver, Wash. and in the California cities of Santa Clara and San Leandro.

FairVote, the leading national organization working on electoral reform, argues that the best voting system for a particular situation depends on what you value and what you are trying to accomplish. For me that's having elected officials who have been chosen by a majority of our citizens and a voting system that encourages people to participate.

Most supporters of IRV, myself among them, think a ranked voting system would help accomplish these goals. Here's why:

- **Majority governance.** We aren't comfortable with governance by officials who are not supported by most voters. With IRV, although the elected official may not be the first choice of a majority of voters, she or he is likely to be at least the second choice.
- **Voter participation.** As I noted above, turn out in primary elections is quite low. So if all the candidates for an office were on the general election ballot, more voters would participate in choosing a winner. And those voters would have more candidates to choose from. IRV supporters expect having a greater choice of candidates is likely to increase general election turnout even further, although we won't know for sure until IRV is more widely implemented in the United States.
- **Positive campaigns.** If candidates need to be concerned about getting second (and perhaps third) choice votes, they are more likely to conduct positive, issue-oriented campaigns. Early reports from San Francisco's implementation of IRV support this outcome.
- **Cost.** Running a single election costs the government and the candidates less money.
- **Balancing intensity and breadth of support.** Most voting systems favor either intensity or breadth of support. IRV requires both: sufficient core support

to avoid elimination and enough broad support to win a majority of votes.

- **Avoids "wasted" votes.** Third party candidates often lose votes because people are afraid of "wasting" their vote. These voters fear the "Nader effect," where even a small number of votes cast for a third party candidate can lead to the election of these voters' third choice rather than their first or second choice. With ranked voting, these voters would

surrounding localities' ease of transition to choice voting and IRV. One goal is to forge a statewide consensus on implementation so that voting equipment needs can be presented to vendors in a united, systematic manner.

Finally, critics suggest IRV is too complicated. I think they underestimate our electorate. This isn't rocket science. It is rank ordering a series of candidates on a ballot. With clear ballot instructions and

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be assured that their second choice vote could be counted.

So why isn't Instant Runoff Voting a no brainer? Well, to me it is. But some people think it doesn't strictly adhere to the principle of "one man, one vote" stipulated in the Constitution. But we already have a two-step (or two-vote) system with primary and general elections. IRV simply offers a more efficient system that gives voters the maximum choice of candidates while eliminating the need for primary elections or runoff elections.

There have also been questions raised about the cost of implementing IRV, particularly because current voting machines aren't set up to count votes this way. But many machines can be modified to accommodate IRV ballots, and many more are due to be replaced in the near future. Minnesota Secretary of State Mark Ritchie has initiated the Minnesota Ranked Choice Voting Issues Group to explore issues

voter education, complication should be the least of our concerns.

Proving IRV's worth at the local level should convince naysayers in the state legislature that giving more voters more choice is a good thing for democracy in Minnesota. Saint Paul voters can advance that cause by educating themselves and their neighbors about voting options and by supporting IRV in 2008. And other communities should start the steps necessary to implement instant runoff voting in their local elections. ●

Ellen T. Brown is a Citizens League member and community leader with professional and volunteer experience in the public, private and nonprofit sectors. She is a board member of FairVote Minnesota and treasurer of Minnesota's Independence Party.

10/02

Civic Minds: The Warrior to Citizen Campaign

6 to 8 p.m., Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs Atrium, University of Minnesota

10/16

Policy and a Pint: The Death of Environmentalism

5:30 to 7:30 p.m., the Varsity Theater, 1348 Fourth Street S.E., Minneapolis

Presented in partnership with 89.3 The Current

10/24

Citizens League Annual Meeting

5:30 to 7:30 p.m., the Depot, 225 Third Avenue South, Minneapolis

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Fax: (651) 293-0576. E-mail: info@citizensleague.org.
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