



# Minnesota Journal

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A publication of the Citizens League

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## Minneapolis skills tests show math gap

The Minneapolis School Board and state officials heralded the most recent results of the Minnesota Eighth Grade Basic Skills Tests. While not declaring complete victory, many officials indicated that they were very pleased with the results.

A closer look reveals that major problems in achievement of Minneapolis students on the tests remain.

by Gary L. Cunningham

Preliminary analyses indicate that the gap in reading scores may be narrowing, while the gap in math scores may be widening. At the current rate of improvement in eighth grade math scores, it will take at least 44 years before the average math scores would reach the passing level of 75 percent. While reading scores have improved, it will take at least four years before the average reading scores reach the passing level of 75 percent.

The Minneapolis National Association for the Advancement of Col-

ored People (NAACP) alleges that the most recent student test results actually show very little improvement overall, particularly for students of color. The NAACP contends that the "failure" of the Minneapolis Public School District to adequately educate all students is a violation of the Minnesota state constitution.

Furthermore, the NAACP asserts that the Minneapolis school district's policies of "community schools," teacher assignment and the historic and present-day discrimination in the Minneapolis housing market have led to "hyper-

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## Issues talk must focus on choices

by Ted Kolderie

*Add this to the list of memos we'd hope would be written—in this case by the editor to a newspaper's political reporters.*

Another campaign for governor is here. This year one of our priorities is to help both the candidates and our readers cut through the nonsense about "the issues."

I don't want us to let any of these

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## Poll: Area economy improving

by David O'Hara and Ken Peterson

Twin Citians feel good about their own prospects and the region's. If there is another state revenue surplus, most residents would prefer to spend it on education. And, finally, residents see crime as the region's most serious problem.

Those are three key findings of the third annual Metropolitan State University Civic Confidence Poll, which seeks opinions of residents of the seven-county metropolitan area on key regional and local issues.

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## Municipal Board process needs change

by John Hottinger

One of the hardest things for legislators and public policy groups to do is look at some of their past accomplishments with a critical eye, recognize when their "reforms" of the past have grown stale and accept change. The article by Philip Wichern in the June 16 *Minnesota Journal* raising concerns about the sunset of the Minnesota Municipal Board reflects that difficulty.

The Municipal Board grew out of Citizens League efforts nearly 40 years ago. Back then there was no Minnesota Planning, an agency created by the Legislature in 1991

to develop an integrated long-range plan for the state and to coordinate activities among all levels of government. In 1959, alternative dispute resolution was unheard of. Now it is a widely praised technique for successful, inexpensive, party-driven resolution of disputes. These two evolutions in policy provide a solid foundation for positive change in an aging Municipal Board process, which had become burdened by suspicions of bias and politicization.

After a variety of hearings extend-

ing over six years, in 1997, with the help and support of the interested local government organizations, the Legislature adopted a proposal to eliminate the Municipal Board and to create an improved process to reach decisions on local government boundaries. That new approach, involving mediation and arbitration, when fully implemented, will result in a more locally based, less formal, less costly and less divisive process.

Unfortunately, Mr. Wichern's article gives the impression that the Legislature's decision was made in

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# 'Magic soup stone' approach can improve buses, too

## Viewpoint

by Lyle Wray

Recently when my car was in the shop for several days, I had occasion to ride on Metro Transit. On one June day, I started out near the busy intersection of Snelling and Larpenteur Avenues. It took a total of 50 minutes to get to my office in downtown Minneapolis—about five times longer than driving.

Later in the day, to pick up my car on the 494 Bloomington strip, I went to the Gateway transit station on Washington Avenue and Second Street in downtown Minneapolis to take an express bus. There is no marked pedestrian access to the station. On the east side of the Gateway station, pedestrians enter by walking on an unmarked traffic divider—avoiding the dimly painted traffic sign—and sit in a bare bench area. There are vending machines to be sure—but behind a locked door and only for transit staff. The ambiance can best be described as furtively getting on a bus under a freeway ramp—it is concrete gray and dark with bus fumes. Architecturally, the station is best described as “grim,” with all the charm of a former East German industrial facility on a really bad day.

Contrast this with a transit station in Charlotte, North Carolina, I visited last year. The Charlotte transit terminal was bright and almost festive. Various convenience businesses, “airport style” monitors of bus schedules, various size buses and

pleasant decoration greeted me. Larger buses met smaller, brightly colored, seven-minute downtown circulators. Visually, banners and other signage made it clear how to get into the transit station. The vending machines were for the passengers, too. The ambiance was somewhere between an airport and an attractive farmer’s market.

Does this mean that we have not done anything right in transit? Not at all. I saw some of the hard work that has gone into improvements. There was a “pay-as-you-leave” policy in rush hour to speed boarding and the Team Transit approach using freeway shoulders in rush hour moved us through traffic quickly. At the [www.metrotransit.org](http://www.metrotransit.org) website there are maps and a series of transit schedules for riders, although the website has a long way to go. The mapping programs at the Yahoo or Excite websites are models of ways to help transit riders get where they are going.

**What now?** The much media-covered struggles to put a \$400 million dollar LRT line to the airport has pulled attention away from urgent and lower cost improvements to the public transit system. The proffered gains of the LRT system remind

me of the “parable of the magic soup stone” that I heard longer ago than I care to admit.

According to this children’s fairy tale, there is a magic stone that can make soup. The protagonist of the story starts with a stone and then goes from person to person in a village telling them that s/he has a magic stone and that they can all have soup and would they add an ingredient. After having many villagers add ingredients to the “magic stone soup,” there is indeed a pretty good soup.

This story relates to many of the claims for LRT. Putting brightly lit stations with honor-system rapid boarding onto buses with fewer or no stairs would increase transit acceptability and usage, we are told. Adding massive publicity to the LRT line and building community rehabilitation around it all produce benefits.

We need to apply some of that “magic stone” to other aspects of public transit—from serious looks at deregulation of transit to real improvements in our bus system. If Curitiba, Brazil, can do at-grade rapid boarding of clean fuel buses and get broad public acceptance,

why are we not spending a fraction of the funds of a single rail line to get that done here?

We need to get back to the basic issues we are addressing with public transit. If we are dealing with congestion, getting people to jobs in new areas or the needs of those who cannot drive, LRT comes up short as a solution. Massively more new cars will come on the road during the construction of LRT than the LRT line will take off the road. We need more aggressive work on staggered work hours, transit as an employment benefit, “congestion pricing” on major roadways and so-called “paratransit,” whether informal van pools or jitneys.

Most people have voted with their feet, or rather with their wheels, on transit. Transit in our very low-density region is a “single digit” level part of the transportation piece. Providing alternatives requires that we go back to the key problems: access to the urban core businesses, access to jobs for low-income people unable to afford cars, access for those unable to drive and relief of congestion. We need to produce an experience in public transit that is fast, safe and convenient, but our experience tells us we have a long way to go. And, despite the excessive promises for LRT, we have no real plan to get there.

Lyle Wray is executive director of the Citizens League.

# Editors speak out on shape of governor campaign

## On Balance

A vote for better vote hustling.

Duluth News-Tribune said (June 6) the state’s party endorsement item should be reformed to keep more in step with the candidates who are chosen by voters in the party primary. **Fergus Falls Daily Journal** said (June 9) the DFL party endorsement of Mike Freeman for governor was insignificant, as shown by the decision of all the other candidates to run in the DFL primary. **Rochester Post-Bulletin** said (June 17) the goals of the Minnesota Compact are worth supporting in Minnesota’s political campaigns: refraining from personal attacks, focusing on issues, advancing ideas fairly and encouraging citizens to become more actively involved in the political process. It said (June 6) early polling in campaigns has a damaging effect on the political process by encouraging the attitude that elections are a horse race. As a result, voters pay less attention to the issues. **St. Cloud Times** said (June 5) area residents should use their growing political clout to press candidates on issues of concern to the community, especially growth issues.

**Fergus Falls Daily Journal** warned (June 11) of gubernatorial candidates vowing income tax reductions, which are “easy to promise and hard to deliver.” **St. Cloud Times** said (June 8) internal party battles divert attention from things that matter to ordinary

voters. “The average voter wants to know whom to elect, not who’s most electable.” **Star Tribune** criticized (June 16) the Republican Party’s radio ad attacking Skip Humphrey. It said the tone of the ad underscores the importance of the Minnesota Compact’s effort for an honest and civil campaign dialogue. **West Central Tribune** (Willmar) said (June 16) Joanne Benson would be the best Republican candidate for outstate Minnesota, although Coleman stands a better chance than Benson.

**St. Paul Pioneer Press** praised (June 18) gubernatorial candidate Ted Mondale’s efforts to talk about what his promises would cost and how they would be financed. It said the other candidates, too, “have an obligation to be honest with the electorate and not simply pander to interest groups.” **Duluth News-Tribune** said (June 24) the issue of whether to ease state standards for carrying concealed weapons deserves more debate during the gubernatorial campaign and an objective state study for lawmakers to consider.

**Post-Bulletin** said (July 3) Minnesota should scrap its nominal system of electing judges and move to an appointive system modeled on the federal selection process. **Star Tribune** said (June 29) injecting partisan politics into the election of judges could wreck the impartiality and independence of Minnesota’s

judicial system.

**St. Cloud Times** said (June 14) schools should use the results of the first-ever statewide math and reading tests for third and fifth graders to pinpoint causes for low achievement and set goals for improvement. **Post-Bulletin** said (June 23) the important part of the third- and fifth-grade tests is not the initial score but how schools and students react to them. **South Washington County Bulletin** said (June 24) affluence is a factor in students’ performance on the statewide math, reading and writing tests for third and fifth graders. It called for a communitywide strategy for improving tests scores, which might include adult volunteers and peer tutoring. **West Central Tribune** said (June 15) while it is good to have some measurement in the early grades, too much emphasis on standardized tests can encourage teachers to “teach to the test.” It said a longer school year would help improve student achievement and keep tests in perspective.

**Post-Bulletin** said (June 19) a plan among business executives to raise \$200 million to finance a voucher program for 50,000 inner-city public school students is “promising,” because it can expand some private schools’ services without exceeding their capacity and without depriving public schools of needed funds. “It would be a welcome additional investment in education rather than

a diversion of public funds from public schools.”

**St. Cloud Times** called for (June 27) improving civics education with the aim of “teaching young people their role as lifelong citizens.” It praised (June 23) the efforts of the Central Minnesota Deaf School during its first year and called on the St. Cloud school district to let parents know of the alternative offered through the charter school for deaf and hard-of-hearing children.

**Free Press** endorsed (July 1) the idea of conducting canine drug searches in the Mankato schools, with certain safeguards to ensure public confidence in the searches.

**Post-Bulletin** endorsed (June 18) a yes vote in an election to extend the 0.5 percent city sales tax, which will stay in effect until \$71.5 million is raised. The funds are to be used for five purposes, including increased protection of the water supply, improving higher education opportunities, highway improvements, improvements at the Rochester airport and expansion of the Mayo Civic Center.

**Free Press** said (July 6) Congress should consider deregulating the railroad industry if the Union Pacific fails to correct service problems to southern Minnesota farmers. **Post-Bulletin** said (June 27) the community should try to stop a planned billion-dollar expansion of the Dakota, Minnesota & Eastern Railroad.

# Deteriorating news quality disconnects public, media

From Media Matters—Improved News Coverage: Shared Responsibility, Mutual Benefits, Report Summary, *Twin Cities Project on Media and the Public, June 1998.*

Interviews were conducted with nearly 100 Twin Cities business and community leaders.

The vast majority of interviewees expressed serious concerns, suggesting that the quality of local news coverage has deteriorated...

A second major finding was the strong consensus that this deterioration has produced a disconnect between the public and the media—a disturbing contrast between the profile of the commu-

nity produced by news coverage and the one people recognize every day. There was startling agreement among these leaders in pointing to the sources of this disconnect:

- **Fairness and balance**—the perception that reporters and editors are increasingly building stories around an opinion, rather than objective facts, or doing analysis pieces that run as “news”;
- **Accuracy**—the perception that increasing numbers of stories are not true, do not include information necessary to understand what’s true, or mix unsubstantiated assertions with facts, leaving out relevant information;

- **Accountability**—the perception of difficulty in persuading news organizations to make corrections or to give these corrections visibility comparable to the errors, and the dilemma news organizations face in responding substantively to the feedback they receive;

- **Sensationalism**—the perception that news organizations are increasingly “hying” stories beyond their news value, attaching lead-ins, headlines or “Hard Copy” techniques as promos;

- **Negativity**—the suspicion that news organizations just don’t believe the public is interested in solutions, or that they won’t watch, listen or read unless it’s a diet dom-

inated by things gone wrong and people in trouble...

Seven public “Feedback Forums” were hosted that included citizens, concerned stakeholders, local news professionals and nationally respected experts on the news media...

- Dissatisfaction with Twin Cities news coverage ran deep among participants...

- The harshest criticism was reserved for television news, which most participants saw as drifting more toward entertainment, and growing increasingly unreliable for balanced community news.

## The Minnesota Journal

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## Poll

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People are more confident about the region’s economy than in previous years. This year, 52 percent said the region’s economy was improving, compared to 35 percent in 1997 and 28 percent in 1996. On the flip side, only 11 percent believe it is getting worse, compared to 24 percent two years ago.

For the first time since the poll’s inception, a majority (52 percent) of Twin Citians feel the region is headed in the right direction. In

both 1996 and 1997, only 45 percent agreed.

This year, as in previous years, Twin Citians are also optimistic about their own future: 81 percent said they expect to be better off in three to five years than they are today, identical to responses in 1996 and 1997.

We asked residents for their top priority for spending any future state surplus: 32 percent favored education, 29 percent an income-tax cut, 19 percent property-tax reductions and 20 percent infrastructure, health care and the environment.

Those ratings were similar to last year’s, except that support for income-tax cuts has grown by five percent. The response is illuminating for the fall’s elections: 52 percent support increased spending, while 48 percent support tax decreases or reforms.

## Education

We asked respondents how they would improve education: 45 percent said smaller class sizes, 15 percent increased funding for districts with high percentages of low-income children, 13 percent increased availability for state-

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# Poll

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funded voucher-type programs, 12 percent a common statewide curriculum, eight percent reducing the power of teachers' unions and eight percent more after-school programs. A slightly higher percentage of parents than nonparents supported vouchers and support was higher in the suburbs than in either Minneapolis or St. Paul.

Despite recent criticisms, schools as institutions enjoy deep support among metro residents: 68 percent are either satisfied or somewhat satisfied with their own school district, while 79 percent have either a lot or some confidence in it. Satisfaction and confidence is highest among suburban or rural residents and lowest among Minneapolis residents. St. Paul falls in-between. Satisfaction and confidence did not vary greatly between parents and nonparents and has remained high in the three years of polling.

## Government performance

As with schools, Twin Citians are happy with the performance of their governments overall. City, county and state governments satisfied or somewhat satisfied over 70 percent of residents. The federal government trailed slightly, earning only 62 percent. Specific government services—such as parks, libraries, garbage collection and 911 services—received approval ratings of 85 percent or more. One exception is the Minnesota summer course of road repair, which somewhat satisfied 33 percent of Twin Citians and fully satisfied 45 percent. These findings are similar to those of previous years.

Metro-area residents seem to have responded positively to the welfare reform law signed by President Clinton in 1996. Two years ago, 52



"Does it make any sense at all that I trust federal government less because the news media talks about it more...and local government more because you talk about it more?..."

percent were satisfied or somewhat satisfied with administration of welfare programs; today, 63 percent are. This is the most significant change in the public's judgment of government performance we have seen in the last three years. However, it is also a government service with which most Twin Citians have little actual contact.

When asked which level of government Twin Citians trust to do the "right thing" most often, 53 percent said local, 35 percent state and 11 percent federal.

People's trust in government apparently increases with personal contact: 42 percent said they based their impression of local government on direct experience. In contrast, only 21 percent based their impression of the federal government on their own experience, while 74 percent based their impression on news media reporting. National polls also show that trust declines with greater reliance on media.

## Crime

Despite declines in most crimes, people still view crime, including youth gangs and drug abuse, as the region's chief problem. In 1996, 68 percent of Twin Citians saw crime as the most serious problem, compared to 42 percent in 1997 and 46 percent in 1998.

While much of this concern is well-placed, some may be due to higher priority given to crime reporting on television than in other media. Television is the leading source of news for 46 percent of residents, with newspapers the chief source of 33 percent and radio 15 percent. And it may be that it takes time for public opinion to absorb the fact of decreasing crime.

Though declining slightly, fear of crime remains high. In 1996, 52 percent said there were areas within one mile of their home where they were afraid to walk because of crime. In 1997, 42 percent said there were such areas and this year, 41 percent. These fears are higher in the two central cities and lower in suburban and rural communities.

Despite concerns about crimes, most Twin

Citians believe law enforcement officials do a good job, with 87 percent either satisfied or somewhat satisfied with their local police. They also believe officers are honest. When asked whether they thought their local police would lie or commit a crime in order to obtain a conviction, 76 percent said they either definitely would not or probably would not do so. Only 10 percent said their local officers definitely would lie or commit a crime to get a conviction and 14 percent said they probably would. Concerns with such police conduct were higher in Minneapolis and lower in St. Paul and suburban and rural communities.

## Congestion

After crime, traffic congestion was seen as the most significant problem in the region, chosen by 10 percent of respondents. The related problem of urban sprawl was ranked first by six percent. Residents were asked their first choice for reducing congestion: 44 percent favored light-rail transit, 25 percent wanted to build more roads or expand existing ones, 15 percent chose improved bus service, 10 percent supported more carpooling and six percent preferred toll roads.

There is no single solution to either traffic congestion or sprawl, so this question may have forced residents to make unrealistic choices. Further, it did not couple choices with cost estimates or include choices such as encouraging more dense housing patterns. Still, responses show greater support for more costly, large-scale options and less support for cheaper approaches requiring more individual responsibility.

## Cumulative trust

The support for government institutions demonstrated by the poll suggests that now may be a good time to use them to help better address collective problems. Apparently, for example, the public trusts schools' capacity to handle initiatives such as achieving state standards or various governments' ability to resolve transportation issues.

However, public support must be treated carefully. Public opinion is cumulative and, on institutions, hard to change. Views over time of the federal government show how trust can be easily lost if governments are perceived as failing. In 1965, when the Vietnam War was

## 1998 Metropolitan State University Civic Confidence Poll, Selected Results

In your opinion, what is the chief problem facing the Twin Cities metropolitan area?

Crime	48%
Traffic congestion	10
Urban sprawl	8
Government	7
Education	6
Taxes	5
Other	14

There has been a great deal of discussion in recent years on how to improve the education of the young. Which of the following would be your first choice for improving our educational system?

Reduce class sizes	44%
More low-income funding	15
Vouchers	13
Common statewide curriculum	12
Reduce power of teachers' unions	8
After-school programs	8

Traffic congestion is an increasing concern of a number of Twin Cities residents. Which of the following is your first choice for reducing traffic congestion?

Build light rail	44%
Build more roads	25
Improve bus service	15
Increase car pool	10
Use toll roads	6

heating up and Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty just beginning, the University of Michigan found 72 percent of Americans said they trusted the government in Washington to do what is right most of the time. Trust levels, according to the same poll, started to decline in 1966 and have never gone above 48 percent since, hitting lows of 20 percent in 1980 and 1994.

Closer to home, the greater skepticism of law enforcement in Minneapolis than in other communities is likely not due to any specific actions of Police Chief Robert Olson, Mayor Sharon Sayles Belton or individual officers. Rather, doubts are probably consequences of difficult police-community interactions and organizational behavior over years and decades. Changing them or any other public perception of government is not easy.

David O'Hara is assistant professor of economics and Ken Peterson associate professor of public administration at Metropolitan State University, where they codirect the University's Civic Confidence Poll. The poll is based on interviews with 500 residents of the seven-county area from May 11 through 30 and has a general margin of error of 4.5 percent, with slightly higher margin for subunits like Minneapolis or St. Paul. A summary of the poll's results is available by calling 612-341-7567.

# Municipal

Continued from page 1

ate and reduced the importance statewide standards in boundary decisions. In fact, the information presented to the Senate in numerous hearings over a number of years provided a solid foundation for the sunset and focused on concerns that the Municipal Board's decisions were often influenced by politics and personality as much as by statewide standards.

The requirement for adding county commissioners from the affected county to the board's three standing members for annexation hearings led to anti-annexation bias and chilled efforts to resolve boundary disputes. Vacancies on the board became subject to gamesmanship between cities and townships to influence new appointments. And the frequent political struggles at the Legislature between townships and cities over these issues leaked into the board's interaction with cities and townships at contested hearings.

Accordingly, Sen. Jim Vickerman (D-L-Tracy), the Senate Local and Metropolitan Government Committee chair and a long-standing advocate for township government, and this author, who frequently has sided with cities on boundary dispute issues, were able to join together with Sen. Steve Morse (D-L-Dakota) in offering a bill that introduced community-based planning and reformed the boundary dispute process. Not even the Municipal Board testified in objection to that proposal, although the staff was present for the hearings. Sen. Pat Pariseau (R-Farmington),

a supporter of the board, tried to have the sunset removed in 1998 and got little support.

The Municipal Board has two levels of duty. One is ministerial and results in the paperwork necessary to deal with municipal boundary changes and in assistance to local governments in making decisions in that area. Those duties were diluted a few years ago when the Board of Government Innovation and Cooperation was given authority to provide financial and technical assistance to merging local governments. Those duties are more appropriately within the charge given to Minnesota Planning in 1991 and the 1997 legislation transferred them there. Importantly, the sound statewide standards for boundary-setting contained in Chapter 414 are retained.

The second function of the Municipal Board is to serve as a quasi-judicial decision-maker in disputed annexation matters. This is an increasingly controversial area, as pointed out in the differing points of view from Sen. Vickerman and me in our point/counterpoint articles in the June 18, 1996, *Minnesota Journal*.

The new approach enacted in 1997 takes advantage of the remarkable successes shown in mediation/arbitration efforts used increasingly in civil litigation. It builds on the philosophical concept that local governments and landowners involved are more likely to have "ownership" of the decision if they are involved in selecting the decision-makers rather than having state government impose a decision on them. The approach also responded to the increasing costs of the semiformal process with the



"O.K., gentlemen...I think if we can just start referring to annexation as an attribute or consequence, rather than conquering or being conquered, we'll start getting someplace!"

Municipal Board by reducing the level of legal formality. According to testimony at two separate Senate hearings, the new process will be less contentious, focusing not on litigation, but on reaching consensus and encouraging compromise. In contrast, the Municipal Board process, by its very nature, was combative, concerned more with producing winners and losers in disputes.

For the past six years, a very emotional debate about annexation and land-use policy has taken place at the Legislature and around Minnesota. Hearing rooms have been filled with interested individuals holding strongly stated views on the issue. Fundamental to that debate were issues relating to the Municipal Board's quasi-judicial role.

Since 1992, the Municipal Board sunset proposal has been introduced as separate legislation, originally by Rep. Kevin Gordon (R-Moorhead) and Sen. Randy Kelly (DFL-St. Paul), then by myself and Rep. Ann Rest (DFL-New Hope). The proposal has been debated a number of times before both the Senate and House Local Government Committees. The Municipal Board has been before these committees to explain its work and why the Municipal Board process should continue. Representatives from local governments have also testified about the Municipal Board sunset. Legislators have heard both sides of the issue.

In 1997, the affected local government groups put their differences aside and worked cooperatively to develop an agreement to replace the Municipal Board process, which they all agreed was not working. Of particular concern was the fact that since the three board members were appointed by the Governor, the policy direction of the board could change with the shifting political interests—towards cities or townships—of the Governor. A number of legislators, with the assistance of local government leaders, worked diligently to pass this unprecedented cooperative proposal. In recognition of the need for a transition period, the sunset was delayed to help all parties adjust to the change.

To characterize the proposal as one reached by legislators and lobbyists with no real analysis is incorrect

and inappropriately plays into cynicism toward government. As noted, this issue has been in front of the Legislature on a regular basis for at least six years, not only at the Capitol, but at joint hearings of the House and Senate Local Government Committees held around the state. Anyone with an interest could have checked the legislative committee hearing schedule and attended the discussions.

Certainly, representatives of local governments were keenly aware of the issue and were always present to give their input and suggestions on improving the process. The Legislature had to consider objections that the Municipal Board process was unfair, politically motivated, expensive, time-consuming, and, maybe most importantly, unnecessarily divisive for the areas involved. The Legislature realized that a change was needed and acted to replace this process.

A lot has changed in Minnesota since the Citizens League made its good suggestions nearly 40 years ago and since Mr. Wichern researched the Municipal Board in the late '60s. Accelerated growth and urban sprawl have linked annexation and land-use planning together for years at the Legislature, so it is natural that the process used to resolve annexation disputes be part of comprehensive planning legislation.

Changes in the patterns of growth and urban sprawl call for new approaches. The alternative dispute resolution process is exciting and will make the annexation process more fair and more meaningful to the parties by giving them direct involvement in determining who the decision-makers are and, ultimately, by providing them more investment in the final decision.

In the spirit of the Citizens League, the proposal to sunset the Municipal Board has received years of discussion and analysis. The decision has a solid basis and was agreed to and supported by the very local governments that are the usual combatants. After 40 years, even the best ideas need to be evaluated and changed to deal with new realities.

John Hottinger is a DFL state senator from Mankato and a member of the Senate Local and Metropolitan Government Committee.

# Issues

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people get away with shouting: "Housing. Jobs. Health care. Education. These are the issues!" They can talk about problems to be solved. They can talk about dreams to be realized. But if they're going to talk about *issues* I want us to insist they talk about *choices*.

My dictionary says an issue is "a matter in dispute." When A is asserted and B is counter-asserted an "issue" is created between the two. So:

"Housing" is not an issue. Whether to build new housing directly for low-income families, or to build for "empty nesters" so the new families can move into existing houses: That's an issue. Whether to build "housing projects" or to give low-income families money to rent housing anywhere in the existing stock: That's an issue.

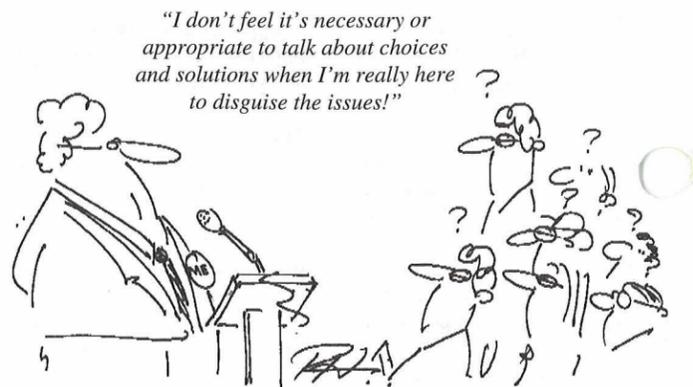
"Student learning" and "accountability" in education are not issues.

(Remember "Graven's Law": "Reverse the assertion and if nobody disagrees then no real issue exists.") Who's *against* student learning or accountability? Whether students should be able to recite the principal products of Brazil or show they can use their mind well: That's an issue. Whether schools can more effectively be held accountable politically, by closing schools and firing teachers, or *nonpolitically* by letting parents move their kids and their money: That is an issue.

"Health care" is not an issue. The choice between having care managed by law and regulation or by physicians controlled by incentives: That is an issue.

"Transit" is not an issue. Whether it will be more effective to install a European vehicle system into a low-density American housing pattern, or to install a small-vehicle, low-capital vehicle system: That is an issue.

"Higher education" is not an issue. Whether to flow the money to the institution or to the student: That's



an issue. Whether appropriations should continue to assume professors-lecturing-to-students as the method of instruction or whether the use of live instructors to present material to students is over: That's an issue.

I appreciate how hard the candidates will try to avoid choices. They want to get elected. To get elected they want to talk about problems and dreams, fears and hopes. They'll try to talk only about good-things-that-ought-to-happen. We want them to talk about how-to-make-it-happen.

They will complain this is unfair. They will plead that they have to get elected before they can govern. That's true. But our business is choices, policy. We work for the public and they need to know. So we have to lean the other way.

I'm serious about this. No more letting candidates get away with stuff like "Education is the Number One Issue", or "We have to improve student learning." Push 'em to choices. Ask 'em: *How?*

Ted Kolderie is contributing editor of the Minnesota Journal.

# Tests

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segregation" of the Minneapolis Public Schools. A number of prominent public officials have indicated that the situation is much more complicated than just integration and desegregation. With all the accusations and public pronouncements on all sides, how does one discern the facts?

## Achievement factors

Indeed, education of children is a complex subject. There are many factors that contribute to the success or failure of students. A recent report entitled "Quality Counts '98: The Achievement Gap" in *Teacher Magazine* (June 1998) identifies concentrations of poverty, hiring highly qualified teachers, school climate and politics and governance as critical challenges facing

urban districts. Other studies point to the importance of parent involvement and classroom instruction techniques, such as direct instruction, phonics, whole language, etc. Teacher training, preparation and professional development are also important factors in effective educational practices.

Low attendance, student mobility and participation in gifted and talented programs are major factors influencing student achievement of minority students, according to a 1997 study by Dr. Samuel Myers, director of the University of Minnesota's Roy Wilkins Center for Human Relations and Social Justice. One finding in the Wilkins Center study challenged common assumptions: that poverty did "not exhibit consistently negative impacts on test scores." In fact, the study found that white students had higher test scores in schools with

higher percentages of students of color. According to the Wilkins Center study, factors such as individual poverty, neighborhood poverty and early childhood education do not fully explain the significant racial gap in test scores.

As of 1998, students of color represented 68 percent of the total enrollment in Minneapolis public schools. Minneapolis students of color also live in communities that are highly segregated by race and class, as John Powell of the University of Minnesota's Institute on Race and Poverty found in a newly released study. A 1997 study published in the University of Minnesota's Center for Urban and Regional Affairs *Reporter* found "Rates of poverty among African-Americans in the Twin Cities are the highest in the nation." The report also found that from 1980 to 1990 Black poverty rates rose

"modestly" from 51 percent to 56 percent and Asian poverty rates rose from 62 percent to 71 percent in established ghetto areas of the Twin Cities.

Given these demographic realities, it is difficult to see how the Minneapolis school district can racially and economically integrate its student body without involving suburban school jurisdictions in some meaningful way.

The Institute on Race and Poverty study found that "High poverty schools in Minneapolis and St. Paul consistently have lower achievement than their more affluent counterparts within the two districts and in the surrounding suburbs. Poor students of color are at the short end of a large learning gap, achieving at very low levels." The study notes, however, that the Wilkins Center study "fails" to connect the influence of race and poverty on students' test scores, which are captured in variables such as student mobility, low attendance and single-parent households.

Continued on page 7

# Tests

Continued from page 6

In the Wilkins Center and the Institute studies call for further research to determine the extent to which segregation, poverty, teacher race and education, administrative structure and other factors impact student achievement.

## Passing percentages

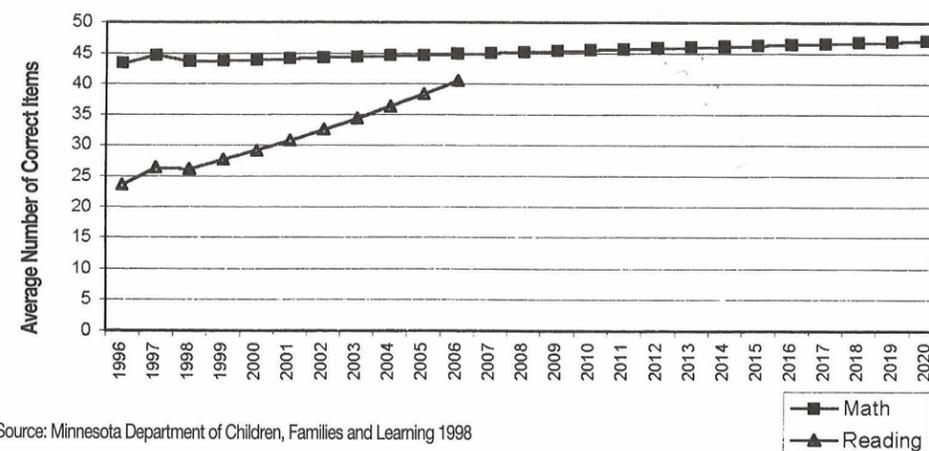
With the assistance of two graduate students, I conducted several preliminary analyses to ascertain if there has been any significant improvement in the Minneapolis eighth grade test scores over the last three years. The data used was from the Eighth Grade Minnesota Basic Skills Tests for math and reading in 1996, 1997 and 1998. Two measures of student achievement were used in the analyses: the percentage of students passing the tests and the average test scores. The analysis of percentage of students passing the test used data only from the district's 21 "mainstream" schools, while the analysis of average test scores used data from all eighth graders taking the test.

(It should be noted that in 1996, 70 percent was considered the passing score on both the reading and math tests. In 1997 and 1998, 75 percent was considered the passing score. For consistency, we considered 75 percent to be the passing score all three years.)

From 1996 to 1997, the percentage of students from the 21 schools passing the math test decreased by approximately nine percent, while it increased by approximately 14 percent from 1997 to 1998. So the average annual percentage increase in the percentage of students passing the math test was only 2.6 percent during the three-year period.

The rate of increase in students passing the reading test was significantly higher. From 1996 to 1997, the percentage of students passing the reading test increased by approximately five percent, while it increased by approximately 24 percent from 1997 to 1998. So the average annual percentage increase in the percentage of students passing the reading test was 14.2 percent over the three-year period.

PROJECTED MATH AND READING TEST SCORES, MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS



Source: Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning 1998

It is clear that Minneapolis students showed significant improvement in the percentage of students passing the reading test over the three-year period, while minimal improvement comparatively has been made in math. In fact, in 1996 a higher percentage of students passed the math test than the reading test, but by 1998 the situation was reversed: a higher percentage of students passed the reading test than the math test.

## Test score projections

Our analysis included a simple projection of the future math and reading scores, based on the trends during the first three years of testing for all Minneapolis public school eighth graders. This analysis utilized the percentage change in the average scores in 1996 to 1997 and 1997 to 1998 to arrive at an annual percentage change in test scores.

The total number of questions on the math test is 68 and the total number of questions on the reading test is 40. Thus, a passing score of 75 percent requires getting 51 questions right on the math test and 30 questions right on the reading test.

Based on the preliminary results, it will take approximately four years, or until the year 2002, before the average reading score in the Minneapolis public schools reaches the passing level of 75 percent. For math, it will take approximately 44 years, or until the year 2043, before the average test score reaches the passing level of 75 percent.

Our analysis also made separate

projections based on the performance over the past three years of the students who passed and the students who failed the math and reading tests. Based on these trends, the average reading scores will continue to improve, both among students who pass the test and among students who fail the test.

But the projected math scores show a widening of the gap between passing and failing scores. Trends in the first three years show increasing math scores among students passing the test and decreasing math scores among students failing the test.

## Research, leadership needed

The preliminary analyses demonstrate the need for further research to evaluate the progress of the Minneapolis public schools to improve student achievement. They also show that while there has been some improvement in reading scores, math scores are and will continue to be a significant issue.

As students, parents, activists, scholars, practitioners and politicians struggle to understand the meaning of the latest test score results and how to improve outcomes for all students, Minneapolis needs a collaborative effort among community, business, schools and universities to improve test performance for minority youth.

The University of Minnesota Extension Service has funded a study to be conducted by the Humphrey Institute's Roy Wilkins Center for Human Relations and Social Justice on creating community-school partnerships to

improve test scores for minority youth. This comprehensive study will pull together a roundtable of University of Minnesota faculty and community and educational partners. The community-school partnership will collect baseline data to measure and monitor performance of different initiatives and their impact on student achievement.

But research is not enough. As Minnesota faces a long-term structural labor shortage, which may threaten our quality of life, we can no longer afford to chart a course that increases the gulf in educational achievement.

Given the high level of racial segregation, poverty and social isolation in Minneapolis, the metropolitan area as a whole must shoulder its part of the responsibility for increasing student achievement. We must move beyond parochial public policies that prevent all students from realizing their full potential. We need legislative and gubernatorial leadership, not only to create greater accountability for results in the Minneapolis schools, but also to build community partnerships across traditional boundaries to improve achievement for all students.

Gary L. Cunningham is associate collegiate program leader for the University of Minnesota Extension Service at the Humphrey Institute and research fellow of the Institute's Reflective Leadership Center. Graduate students Mai Neng Moua and Mia Robillos assisted with the research for this article.

Percentage of Students Passing Math and Reading, 1996, 1997 and 1998						
	1996	1997	% change '96-'97	1998	% change '97-'98	Ave. annual change '96-'98
Math	43.7%	39.7%	-9.2%	45.4%	14.4%	2.6%
Reading	36.7%	38.5%	4.8%	47.6%	23.6%	14.2%

Source: Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning

# Group seeks better access to Phillips neighborhood

Included in the \$200 billion federal transportation bill signed by President Clinton on June 9 was a \$2 million appropriation for a study on improving highway connections to Minneapolis' Phillips neighborhood.

The study continues an initiative that began last year with an Allina-sponsored look into improving access to Abbott Northwestern Hospital, located at 26th Street and Chicago Avenue, in that can't-get-there-from-here spot just south of the 35W/I-94 interchange. That study yielded three recommendations: (1) designate preferred routes from all the major highways; (2) improve transit service to the neighborhood; and (3) improve highway ramp access from 35W.

All three strategies were quickly adopted by the Phillips Partnership, a coalition of business and government groups working to revitalize the neighborhood. Leaders from Honeywell, Children's Hospital, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, the Lake Street commercial strip and the proposed Sears redevelopment have joined the planning, as have neighborhood residents.

The signage improvements are nearly done. The Phillips Partnership and Metro Transit are working up longer-term plans for expanded express bus service on 35W (including reverse-commute service for Phillips residents), a fully enclosed transit station at Lake Street and, eventually, an east-west circulator route running between the Lake/35W station and the new LRT station on Hiawatha and Lake.

The federal money will pay for the enclosed transit stations and the development of design alternatives for on- and off-ramps from 35W to the area.—*Janet Dudrow.*

**A June 30 story** in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reports on a decision by the Philadelphia school board to commit to a five-year plan to end social promotion, conduct citywide exams and require students to finish three interdisciplinary and community-service projects during their school careers.

Here's the catch: Superintendent David Hornbeck estimates support programs to make those standards

## Take Note

*"Politics is not the art of the possible; it is the art of making possible what is necessary."*—*J. Chirac*

work—smaller class sizes, summer school programs, extra instructional hours, preschool programs, year-round school for students who fall behind, foreign language instruction in the elementary grades and school-to-work programs—could cost \$400 million for the first five years in a district already projecting a \$55 million deficit for next year.

While the governor's office says it's highly unlikely the state will fund that kind of increase, Hornbeck said phasing in the new standards depends on the status of the support system each year. If the supports are not in place, then the next set of requirements will not be implemented.

A sincere effort at improvement? Or just a more sophisticated version of "We'll do better if you'll give us more money?"  
—*Dana Schroeder.*

**It might be a morbid exercise** (pun intended), but a Minnesota Department of Health study on the top 10 causes of death by age group reveals some interesting tidbits.

In Minnesota, death by "unintentional injury" is easily the leading cause of death for those between one and 34 years old (not including homicide figures). However, though "only" the sixth leading killer among those 65 and older, the incidence rate of death by unintentional injury might make us rethink safety issues related to seniors.

Consider this: from 1991 to 1995, there were 2,796 deaths by unintentional injury for all people under the age of 65—out of approximately four million people statewide. By comparison, death by unintentional injury killed 3,351 people over the age of 65, whose total population was only about 550,000.—*Ron Wirtz.*

**I've fallen, and I can't get up!** That could have been the title of a study of the external causes of injuries presented at the River Falls (Wisc.) Area Hospital in 1996 for

emergency-room and inpatient admissions.

Epidemiologists Janny Brust and Marguerite Rheinberger of the Allina Foundation analyzed "E-code" data from universal billing forms. E-codes—for external cause of injury—provide standardized and specific data that supplement the diagnosis of the injury itself. E-code data allow researchers to distinguish the broken arm caused by a car crash from one caused by a violent spouse.

The River Falls data showed that falls were the leading cause of injury for both emergency room visits (18 percent) and inpatient admissions (72 percent). The average charge for fall-related emergency-room visits was \$458; for inpatient admissions, \$7,270. Falls due to tripping (41 percent) were the most common type of fall.

Falls were the leading cause of injury for ages 0 to 4, 45 to 64 and 65 and over. Falls are a contributing factor in 40 percent of nursing home admissions and people over 65 are six times more likely than younger people to die as a result of falling.

Some of the steps to reduce falls among the elderly are medical—hormone replacement therapy for postmenopausal women to help maintain bone mass, for instance. But some of the solutions are simple: Lose the throw rugs, don't leave junk on the stairs and never

go to the bathroom in the middle of the night without putting on your eyeglasses first.—*J.D.*

**The cartoonist** for the *Pioneer Press* got it right the other day: The discussion about a school superintendent in Saint Paul is a discussion about a "Superman." Can you improve student learning? Can you leap tall buildings in a single bound?

It's understandable the board wants to focus on the candidates. But the real question is about the board.

The better—the more aggressive, the more visionary—the candidate, the more people need to be asking how far the board is willing to let him/her go, politically, to put students first. Close failing schools? Bring in new schools on contract? Take a strike?

The superintendent is only as good as the board. Superman didn't have a board; he didn't have to worry about getting fired.—*Ted Kolderie.*

**The "Take Note"** in the June 16 *Minnesota Journal* should have been more precise: Some vouch advocates are trying to create the impression that in 1997 Minnesota enacted a tax-deduction and a tax credit for private-school tuition. In fact, the tuition-tax-deduction that was increased in '97 was enacted in the 1970s; and the tax credit enacted in '97 was not for private-school tuition.—*T.K.*

*"Take Note" contributors include Minnesota Journal and Citizens League staff members and Janet Dudrow, communications specialist at Allina Health System.*

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