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Closing the “achievement gap” in Minnesota

by Cheri Pierson Yecke, Ph.D.

Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty spoke in strong terms about educational opportunity in his 2003 State of the State speech: “...as good as our schools have been, we’re leaving too many children behind. And the sad reality is, they tend to be poor, disabled, or children of color. I will not stand by and allow another generation of disadvantaged children to be cast aside.”

These are strong words. But if you want to find solutions to difficult challenges, you must acknowledge and talk openly and truthfully about the problem.

Test results that seem to indicate that Minnesota is well ahead of the rest of the nation do not tell the whole story. There has never been more evidence of a deep, serious “achievement gap” in Minnesota between students from low-income families and those who are better off, or between students of color and Caucasian students.

When I saw the latest round of Basic Skills Test scores I was shocked at the magnitude of the achievement gap. African-American students passed the math test at a rate 45 points below that of white students. This gap was a mere five points smaller than it was five years ago. The gap in reading achievement is 38 points, only three points smaller than five years ago.

The achievement of black students in Minnesota is nearly three years behind that of white students in fourth grade math. That gap increases to more than four years for black students in eighth grade science. Georgia, Louisiana and Mississippi have less of an achievement gap than Minnesota. Results for Latino students are similar.

One of the things that surprises me the most is the number of people who approach me saying

they have no idea that there was such a large achievement gap in this state. The sad fact is that Minnesota ranks near the bottom in terms of the achievement gap. To put it bluntly, this is shameful and unacceptable.

Behind all of the statistics are real people with individual challenges. Single parents raising children on their own may feel overburdened trying to put food on the table or a roof over their heads. Children of all ages, colors, and ethnic origins need a high quality education, the ticket to a life of intellectual fulfillment, economic success, and full expression of citizenship.

I’m not the first education commissioner in Minnesota to talk about the achievement gap, but I would like to be the first one to say we are well on our way to ending it.

Efforts are already underway to close this achievement gap. We are using value-added analysis to identify schools whose students are making the most learning progress, and to get a better understanding of what works for them and share it with others. We are adopting rigorous academic standards to ensure equity in education. We need to promote a culture of achievement in which all students are expected to reach high academic goals.

We have undertaken these initiatives and others because we believe they will create better learning opportunities for children. However, they are also significant steps toward ensuring that Minnesota complies with the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

NCLB will help us identify real, specific problems. It will peel back the layers of our test results to look at how specific groups of students in each school are doing, including those from a wide range of economic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds.

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Keep higher education affordable and accessible

by Mary P. Choate

It's no wonder that Duane Benson feels like he's diagonally parked in a parallel universe (*Minnesota Journal*, May 2003). He questions why his "high tuition-high financial aid" funding proposal for higher education wasn't more warmly embraced by the University of Minnesota and the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities.

Simply put, it was a bad idea that wouldn't have produced the outcomes he envisions and would have caused serious long-term harm to students and to public higher education in Minnesota.

Benson's proposal is not new. Various reports over the years have recommended "targeting public subsidies at people who are financially needy—not institutions." For example, proponents of this line of thought say, "The state should provide more aid directly to needy college students, rather than trying to hold down tuition for all students, regardless of income."

This so-called reform goes by other catch-phrases as well: "Fund students, not institutions," or "Provide state funds directly to consumers, rather than government institutions." Great sound bites, all.

But many of those who like the sound of these catch-phrases might be surprised to learn that the state's major financial aid program, the Minnesota State Grant, works contrary to those principles.

Look at the idea that funding should "follow the students." In fall 2000, more than four-fifths of all Minnesota college undergraduates—82 percent—were attending a public college or university, either one of the 33 Minnesota State Colleges and Universities or one of the four University of Minnesota campuses. If state financial aid is supposed to "follow the student," one might think that these students would be getting roughly 80 percent of funds provided through the state's financial aid program.

In 2001, however, Minnesota public college and university undergraduates received less than half—just 47.8 percent—of state financial aid provided through the Minnesota State Grant

program. Instead, the bulk of the aid—52.4 percent—went to the 18 percent of resident undergraduates who attend more expensive private institutions.

This is because the state more generously subsidizes expensive private colleges by giving students who choose those institutions substantially more financial aid than those who choose more economically priced public colleges and universities. The average state financial aid grant was \$901 per year for an undergraduate attending a public two-year college, or \$1,719 per year for a student attending a state university or the University of

Shifting state funding to financial aid rather than to public colleges and universities would force public institutions to impose dramatic tuition increases in order to continue to offer high-quality programs and services.

Minnesota. But for a student attending a four-year private college, the average grant jumped to \$3,326.

Beyond the statistics and the numbers there are important policy implications to consider. Shifting state funding to financial aid rather than to public colleges and universities would force public institutions to impose dramatic tuition increases in order to continue to offer high-quality programs and services. Tuition increases of 50 percent or more would not be out of the question. Studies nationally have shown that high tuition causes "sticker shock" that discourages many students from even thinking about going to college, even though they may be eligible for financial aid. If this happens in Minnesota, the negative economic implications would be long-lasting.

This impact could be disproportionately felt by students of color and low-income students. Public colleges and universities currently serve nearly three times as many students of color as do private insti-

tutions in Minnesota. The public colleges and universities also serve more than twice as many students from families with incomes of \$20,000 or less. Huge tuition increases could discourage many of these students from pursuing a college education.

Research bears this out. Thomas Kane, of the National Bureau of Economic Research, in a study entitled "Rising Public College Tuition and College Entry: How Well do Public Subsidies Promote Access to College," studied the impact of tuition and grant aid on college enrollment. Among his findings:

▲ States with high public tuition levels have lower college entry rates.

▲ The gap in enrollment between high and low-income youth is wider in high-tuition states.

▲ Tuition hikes lead to lower enrollment rates and wider gaps between high- and low-income youth.

Kane also looked at means-tested targeted grant aid as a way of encouraging low-income students to attend college. He found that, compared to state support to maintain affordable tuition levels, grant aid was "less effective in promoting college enrollment." If you want more low-income students to attend college, raising tuition is not a good idea, even if more grant aid is provided.

Minnesota already ranks among the top 10 states in its support for financial aid for college students. A May 2003 national survey found that Minnesota ranks seventh in the amount of need-based aid provided to undergraduates, trailing only larger states. Looking at need-based aid per resident population, Minnesota ranked fourth.

The Minnesota State Colleges and Universities support the Minnesota State Grant program. It helps students who may not otherwise be able to afford to go to college. While we favor some modifications that would make it more equitable for all students, including adult students who attend college part-time while holding jobs, we believe the concept of

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Viewpoint

Doing the common good worse: race and education in Minnesota

by Sean Kershaw

There is much being said right now about education and educational achievement in Minnesota. Amid all the sound, we could perhaps use a little more fury.

During the last legislative session we heard repeatedly that budget cuts would turn Minnesota into a “cold Mississippi.” Proponents of this argument were apparently overlooking the fact that, when it comes to statistics about race and education in Minnesota, we already are a cold Mississippi. (This, despite dramatic increases in funding during the 1990s.)

If we are interested in “doing the common good better,” there is no better place to start than race and educational equity. Consider these recent statistics:

▲ The gap between black and white students is 45 percent in math, and 38 percent in reading on the Basic Skills Test. Furthermore, the gap has narrowed by less than 5 percent in the past five years! As the Commissioner of Education said at a recent Citizens League forum, this gap is “significant, persistent, and shameful.”

▲ Black students are three years behind white students in measures of fourth grade math achievement. This gap widens to

four years for eighth grade science, placing us behind Mississippi.

▲ Of the 16,000 students who took Advanced Placement tests in Minnesota last year, only 193 were black, 197 were Latino, and 40 were Native American.

▲ While Minnesota ranks seventh in the nation in overall graduation rates, we rank 38th out of 39 among states that reported graduation rates for black students.

The last thing this debate needs is another “expert with the answers,” which I am not. However, I think two points are sorely missing from this recent conversation.

First, these statistics are inexcusable and unjust, and demand a much greater sense of moral outrage and urgency from all Minnesotans. For the most part, however, the silence from the policy community seems deafening.

Every once in a while I hear someone chide the South for their discriminatory past, or romanticize the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s as if it were a cherished social-historical antique. All the while, we, to use a biblical metaphor, are ignoring “the log in our own eye” indicated by these statistics on race and education.

Minnesota has demonstrated the vision and commitment to become a national leader in overall student achievement and performance. Our economy and our civil society are stronger because of it.

However, given the strong correlation between education and economic success later in life, and between educational achievement and increases in social capital, how can Minnesotans sit still while an entire segment of our community (clearly defined by race) “falls off the map” in terms of its long-term economic and civic potential? How is this acceptable?

In other times of crisis, Minnesotans have rallied and changed course. It is time we do so again.

Perhaps it is important to ask the “WWH3D” question. (What would

Hubert H. Humphrey do?) At the Democratic convention in 1948 he put race on the table. He named the injustice, and called on his party, his state and his nation to address it. He responded to a clear injustice with a clear sense of urgency. I can’t imagine that he wouldn’t do the same thing today. It is time that Minnesota walk “out of the shadows” of racial inequalities in education, and into the “bright sunshine” of justice and equity in educational achievement.

Second, we are only going to solve the problem by making problem-solvers out of the real stakeholders in the issue. We can’t be afraid to increase the role of parents, educators and the community in addressing this crisis.

It is convenient and easy to blame state officials, district administrators and the bureaucracy. This is somewhat appropriate, given the enormous role in ensuring educational outcomes. However, their role in actually implementing and delivering solutions is extremely limited.

We can’t address these racial disparities unless we are willing to try a number of creative solutions that stop making students, parents and communities “consumers” of education, and start making them producers of education. Teachers and parents know this is true, but have a hard time discussing it, and an even harder time implementing it.

▲ Educators and school officials understand the tremendous role that parents play in the education process. Without an involved parent(s), the job of educators is much more difficult. However, we can’t expect schools to be substitute families, although they must be prepared to deal with any student who lacks family support.

▲ Our traditional solutions have not provided sufficient incentives or opportunities for parents and communities to become partners in the education process. We have seen the beginnings of this in some charter

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Achievement gap *continued from page 1*

To make NCLB work, we are holding meetings across the state with teachers and school officials. We will implement an online, interactive training tool to help schools identify key weaknesses and put together school site teams to manage improvement plans.

We will be aggressive in going after every federal grant dollar we can get our hands on to expand opportunities for teacher training and for encouraging innovative school programs to help students meet our higher standards.

NCLB is not about punishing schools. It is about advancement for excellent students, financial and professional rewards for excellent teachers, and recognition for excellent schools. Minnesota's school performance report cards will more clearly show schools with superior results. Parents will have better information about how their child and his or her school is performing, increasing involvement and encouragement to hold schools accountable. No state will lose money if it does not meet achievement goals.

The key will be whether a school has made adequate yearly progress. Each group of students must show academic improve-

ment from year to year. A preliminary analysis shows that most Minnesota schools do not make adequate yearly progress because of only one or two areas, with a fairly equal number of identified schools in both the urban core and the suburbs.

If we are going to start setting public policy goals in education based on the assumption that some kids will fail, we have a responsibility to say which kids we are planning on leaving out of the picture.

Some who are opposed to NCLB seem to believe that some children cannot meet challenging expectations. I strongly believe that this is not the truth.

If we are going to start setting public policy goals in education based on the assumption that some kids will fail, we have a responsibility to say which kids we

are planning on leaving out of the picture. I'm not prepared to do that. I don't believe educators are either.

Students from schools with exceptionally high poverty and/or minority enrollments have scored in the top third of their state's schools. Some high-poverty schools across the country are also high performing. Many students and teachers at high-poverty schools can and do beat the odds. We can learn from them.

A top-down effort cannot close the achievement gap. Schools must be willing to try new strategies and think beyond the status quo. We need the help of the community, business, and parents.

Our young students don't have time for us play the blame game. They need everyone focused on closing the achievement gap in Minnesota schools. If you were a parent who was frustrated because your child was unable to read, how long would you wait?

New standards, NCLB implementation and other reforms will move us toward the urgent goal of working with the kids who need help the most. Those children will be in sharp focus now. **MJ**

Cheri Pierson Yecke, Ph.D. is Minnesota Commissioner of Education.

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and district schools, but progress is insufficient. We must identify the barriers that are preventing us from replicating these models in more communities, either through the creation of new schools, or the dramatic reform of efforts in existing schools.

Changing our education system to address this issue may certainly take additional resources. However, without a sustained sense of urgency in the community and a willingness to consider redirecting existing resources, this disparity in educational achievement will remain exactly what it is right now: unjust, shameful, and not in our long-term social or economic self-interest. **MJ**

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providing financial aid to needy students is a good one.

But the idea of cutting base funding of public colleges and universities to support a program that primarily benefits students attending expensive private colleges goes against the grain.

Demand for a public higher education has never been higher than it is right now. The Minnesota State Colleges and Universities have had four consecutive years of enrollment increases, and indications are that fall 2003 will show another increase. The public colleges and universities offer programs that meet the critical workforce needs of the state: nursing, law enforcement, teacher education, and engineering, to name a few.

Higher education is one of the few state investments that actually provides a

measurable return. We know that higher education leads to higher incomes, and that higher incomes lead to a higher quality of life for all Minnesotans.

In our rush to resolve a short-term budget deficit, we should be careful not to destroy the access to higher education opportunity that our predecessors worked so hard to build. The "high tuition-high aid" model is not the way to keep Minnesota competitive with other states; keeping a college education affordable and accessible is a better model for the state's future. **MJ**

Mary P. Choate is Chair of the Board of Trustees of Minnesota State Colleges and Universities.

Kids are different, schools can be too

Charter schools offer opportunity to reinvent education

by Ted Kolderie

It can be tough to follow the discussion about education policy. But it isn't a problem of needing to know the players as much as it is a problem of needing to understand the game.

What in the world is all this about? Standards and testing and "No Child Left Behind" accountability and kids-not-graduating; choice and charter and vouchers. For a poor citizen who grew up thinking it was enough to have a good teacher and good books, to take courses and get grades and pass and graduate, it is mightily confusing.

But like most things it really is simple if you cut to the heart of it. Let's try to do that.

We want kids and schools to do better. The big question is: How? The old answer was: Make 'em learn. The main line of policy at the moment is just about that. They should sit down and study hard. If they don't learn they won't graduate. And get tough on the schools: Hold them accountable, too.

Maybe this will work. But maybe it won't. "Getting tough" makes some assumptions that may or may not hold.

The first is about "achievement." People agree kids must read. The harder questions are about highschool; the assumption that knowledge is divided into "subjects" history, science, social studies which students should "master." And that the measure of achievement is scoring high on tests.

The second is that the kids—all kids—want to work hard enough to master all those subjects. Perhaps they don't. Most school doesn't interest most kids much. And some adults don't think it's important whether kids are interested: They say that school ought to be hard, that kids aren't supposed to enjoy it, that they'll appreciate later that you made 'em work.

This highlights the third assumption: that the schools can get kids motivated so they will work hard. And maybe they can't. Motivation is individual, and school isn't set up to individualize learning. And kids might rather study projects than be instructed in courses. So motivation might require quite a different sort of school. Lots of adults don't want to change "school."

The people who run the schools, who teach there, are used to age-grading, courses and classes, teachers talking to kids in groups. It's hard to get away from "instruction." School isn't built to let kids follow their interests.

A fourth assumption is that if the adults did want to make school more motivating they could do that. Again, maybe they couldn't. Schools as schools may not have enough autonomy, enough control over their resources, to change significantly. And schools belong to districts, which—politically—have a hard time with change. Pressures from their employees and from the community, and expectations that they will keep "school" pretty much the same, hold them in old patterns. Boards and superintendents don't often fight for flexibility, anyway. They fight for resources, which doesn't encourage change.

Some cities—Philadelphia, say—have launched ambitious "improvement" efforts betting the Legislature will provide money and the mayor and business community will provide political support and that the union will cooperate. In Philadelphia, none of these assumptions held, and its effort crashed.

So you can't assume that "getting tough" will work. You can't make people do what in truth cannot be done. You can tell people they have to swim across Lake Superior. You can give 'em money to do it, measure progress and impose career-changing consequences if they fail. But it still won't work. People can't swim across Lake Superior.

So another strategy is emerging in the policy discussion.

It says essentially: Start by motivating students. This'll require schools that are different. It's OK to be different: Kids are different. And don't put all your chips on changing existing districts and schools. They won't—can't, really—change enough, fast enough. Create the different schools new.

This requires changing our notions about "public education." Somebody other than the local board will get to offer public



I learned a bunch of cool stuff today, Mom. . . I learned how to say hello and goodbye in Spanish, I learned where babies come from, and how to respect kids that are different from me . . . then the bell rang and we had to go back in the building.

education; somebody other than the superintendent can start and run a public school. Kids aren't assigned any more: they choose. Money follows.

So life changes for the districts. Enrollments and revenues may fall. They can't take families, or the state, for granted anymore. They have to persuade kids to come, and to stay. To do that they may have to improve their schools. Superintendents really have to manage. Boards have to make change.

The new kinds of schools may change the old notion that learning should be divided into subjects—British philosopher Alfred North Whitehead in *The Aims of Education* called this "the fatal unconnectedness of academic disciplines." And these schools may change the notion that teaching "inert ideas" is good education.

Minnesota and other states are gradually introducing this new sector with its different approach to learning. Partly, districts have been creating different "alternative" schools for kids who don't work out in regular school. But mainly it's appeared as the state has let "others" create new schools under the charter law. A Citizens League committee chaired by John Rollwagen had the idea well worked out by the time of the Itasca Seminar in October 1988.

Chartering is working. Good chartered schools—some very different models—are appearing (along with some not-so-good and a few that have failed). And some districts, feeling the pressure, are starting to respond. But, predictably, the districts are

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OnBalance

Views From Around the State

Provisions of Minnesota's new conceal and carry law have editorial writers up in arms, while budgets and bar times get mixed reviews.

"Minnesota lawmakers were wrong to tie the hands of local officials on the handgun issue," declared the **Mankato Free Press (5/15)**.

"Their solution to this problem is to allow local control over the issue. Allowing cities to ban guns in the city parks and libraries would go a long way toward claiming some of the fears that surround this new law."

The **Duluth News Tribune (5/7)** agreed that the new conceal and carry law should be applied consistent across all branches of government. "What's deemed good policy for the state legislators at the Capitol surely should be allowed on city-and county-owned property. This is a matter of basic consistency and local control."

"How is this not a double standard?" demanded the **St. Cloud Times (5/8)**. "How does it not send voters the message that legislators believe they are entitled to special treatment?"

"The situation clearly points out the pitfalls inherent when liberal conceal-and-carry laws run up against the realities of life," said **Worthington Daily Globe (6/4)**. "Can you imagine attending your house of worship—a place of peace—and having to look at a "No guns, please" sign on the front door? This new gun law may, indeed, lead to no real threat to public safety, as supporters predict. But getting it right continues to be a work in progress."

The **St. Cloud Times (5/29)** questioned the law's effect on businesses and revenues. "Businesses that allow guns on site may never know how many customers they lose because there is no sign in the window. Similarly, because the legislation requires obvious, even blatant promotion of bans, businesses doing so potentially could lose untold numbers of clients who won't give up their right to carry a gun. Entrepreneurs face tough enough times. Their successes should be tied to factors such as product, price, and service, not a debate about where the people have the right to bear arms."

The Legislature's final solution to the budget dilemma disappointed many.

The **Rochester Post-Bulletin (5/31)** criticized Gov. Tim Pawlenty and the Legislature for persistently sticking to the "no tax" pledge, while severally cutting human service programs. "Gov. Pawlenty's election campaign pledge to get rid of the \$4.2 billion deficit without raising taxes was ill-advised. It has resulted in putting serious holes in the social safety net that in the past has protected children and low-income families during hard times. Middle and upper-income families will not be affected, and that is deliberate discrimination."

The most vulnerable will disproportionately bear the brunt of the budget cuts, cautioned **St. Cloud Times (6/2)**. "Make no mistake about it. Minnesota's Republican-led government balanced the budget and kept Pawlenty's campaign promise at the expense of this state's most needy and vulnerable citizens. Early estimates show programs that serve Minnesota's poor, elderly and those with disabilities absorbed roughly half of the cuts needed to balance the budget without raising taxes. Yet these programs account for about a fifth of state spending."

Red Wing Republic (5/19) supported Pawlenty, saying his budget solution is just common sense. "Pawlenty could have taken the easy way out during his freshman term. He could have produced a "balanced" (read: raise taxes) budget as urged by the Democrats. But a tax hike is the wrong solution both for the short- and long-term. For the past two years families and companies in the private sector have been adjusting budgets to cope with reduced incomes. Increasing tax burdens now goes against common sense."

Targeted tax increase would have been better, argued the **Daily Journal (5/16)**. "The House and the Governor need to recognize that some tax increase is needed. Closely targeted tax increases are the way to go: Go ahead and raise cigarette taxes; charge tolls

on the metro area freeways. Those are sensible, sustainable tax increases that do not inhibit businesses and job creation."

Last call on 2 a.m. closing time

The **Mesabi News (5/23)** thinks expanded bar hours will be good for business and improve public safety in border cities. "The law change will be especially beneficial for the Twin Cities, Duluth, Rochester and St. Cloud—Minnesota cities that do the most convention business. Convention-goers usually are not driving, but are interested in enjoying their evenings out on the town. That's just a part of the convention scene. Minnesota's 1 a.m. closing time is not an enticement to most conventions...The nightly 1 a.m. run across the two bridges from Duluth to Superior, Wis., will still be an option for those who want to stay out until 2 a.m. But staying in Duluth will also now be an option. And the less traffic at the time of the night from Duluth to Superior, whether designated drivers or not, will be good for all."

Minnesotans should value safety over pleasure, chided the **Daily Journal (5/20)**. "However for the average Minnesotan, the later bar closing time, like the proposed increased speed limit, may give us additional pleasure. But it is a pleasure that Minnesotans have always lived without. And considering the safety risks, such forbidden pleasures should stay that way."

When it came to nuclear waste storage, the **Post-Bulletin (5/31)** griped, the Legislature suffered a power outage. "The Legislature also failed the people of Minnesota by putting too few restrictions on the nuclear waste storage at the Prairie Island and Monticello power plants. In addition, it gave the Public Utility Commission rather than the Legislature power to make such decisions in the future. Such decisions should be made by elected officials, not PUC board members who are appointed and who are more susceptible to being influenced by Excel Energy."

slow to give up the comfortable old arrangements.

Most superintendents acknowledge it's a new—a competitive—world, where the state requires them to show performance and students have choices and the money is not the district's money any more. But enough really hate it, as the teachers union really hates it, to throw up an intense resistance. It really is 'brass knuckles and broken bottles' out there. Some superintendents have succeeded in killing proposed new chartered schools. Others have tried but failed.

Bear this in mind when you read about chartering. Much that's written tries to compare schools by category: chartered, district, private, etc. This is largely nonsense; it is just the political fight. Saying a school is 'district' or 'chartered' or 'private' tells you nothing about how it teaches. A charter is an empty structure, as a building is an empty structure. Kids learn from what's put into it. Watch for studies that

look inside each category and inside the school, to see what's done, and how it works, and why.

Note: Chartering can be succeeding as a strategy even if not all the schools chartered are succeeding. It is partly an R&D program. Not all new-things-tried succeed, anywhere. Some do; and then improve over time. A lot of efforts to fly a heavier-than-air craft failed before Orville and Wilbur got it right. After that aviation evolved. It's important to give the strategy of new-and-different schools enough time.

Finally, in addition to knowing the players and knowing the game you also have to know how to evaluate the "coverage." Journalists often have trouble with change. News is day-to-day; episodic. And, as one veteran journalist says: "There are really only two stories." Reporters and editors slide back and forth between Gee-Whiz! and God-Awful! It's safe to report what voices-of-authority say; it can be risky to

challenge the superintendent. And, however unfair, it's typical always to hold "the new" to a test of perfection . . . which produces those tut-tutting editorials about chartered schools that are late with their audit reports.

Explore the whole struggle over education policy on a new web site: www.EducationEvolving.org. Joe Graba's talks are available in pdf format. Click on "Good Reading," and look for "We cannot get the schools we need by changing the schools we have," under the state policy leadership...heading. To read more about the importance of schools being different, see "Who Should Adapt: Kids to School or School to Kids?" in the *Minnesota Journal*, July 23, 1996, and "Arrange School So Students Want to Learn," Nov. 16, 1999. **MJ**

Ted Kolderie is a contributing editor of the Minnesota Journal.

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TakeNote

Policy Tidbits

As Minnesotans wait impatiently for summer's warm breezes, state lawmakers eagerly await news of a warm-up in the economy.

State legislators from across the country overwhelmingly expect budget shortfalls to continue or worsen over the next two years, according to a recent survey by the Pew Center on the States. Eighty-five percent of those surveyed said additional cuts in social services are likely; 71 percent expect additional cuts to health care programs; 62 percent expect additional cuts to prisons and corrections; and 61 percent expect additional cuts to transportation.—Kris Lyndon Wilson.

Charter school report scores Minnesota poorly. The Morrison Institute for Public Policy's recently reported on individual states' success in the authorization practices for charter schools. The North Star state's overall grade for charter authorization was a C minus; Minnesota earned a D in both support and external accountability for authorizers and application process, and a D plus in both transparency and internal accountability. The state did better, earning a B for performance contracts and a B minus for support for charter schools. The report does not reflect the success of Minnesota's charter schools, but rather is an evaluation of how charter schools are developed and authorized. The full report is available at www.morrisoninstitute.org —Sean Kershaw.

Public safety spending in Minnesota per traffic fatality is one of the lowest in the nation. According to a recent survey by the Surface Transportation Policy Project, Minnesota ranks 46th for the average yearly safety spending per traffic accident, spending less than \$25,000 per traffic fatality. Neighbors South Dakota and Iowa ranked 45th and 48th respectively, while North Dakota ranked 27th and Wisconsin came in at 39th. —Scott McMahon.

In total renewable electrical generation, Minnesota ranks in the middle of the pack. According to the Energy Information Administration's Renewable Energy Annual 2001, Minnesota ranked 19th for total kilowatt-hours of renewable electricity generation. The state ranked 9th overall for the greatest percentage of total electricity that is non-hydro renewable generation (3.97 percent), and far behind the national leader, Maine (29.28 percent). The energy bill signed during Gov. Jesse Ventura's administration called for a good faith effort in developing 10 percent of the state's electricity generation from renewable resources. It looks like we need a lot more wind turbines and biomass pilot projects around the state to reach that level.—S.M.

Hands across the borders might look a little different. According to *Governing Magazine*, Iowa and Minnesota are working on a new relationship—merging school districts. In Iowa, the Northwood-Kensett school district is analyzing whether or not a merger with a Minnesota school district four miles across the border might be an option to help both school districts through budget problems. One of the biggest issues the districts face is different teacher salary schedules between the two states. Will this happen? Probably not since both states will need to approve the merger. Another option being considered is to share students and resources.—S.M.

A federal judge recently ruled unconstitutional a Delaware law requiring a woman wait 24 hours before receiving an abortion. U.S. District Judge Sue L. Robinson ruled the law fails to meet constitutional standards because it only allows for an exception if the mother's life is in danger. Citing U.S. Supreme Court decisions, Robinson wrote that the law must also make exceptions for cases where the mother's health is at risk. How will the ruling impact Minnesota's new law requiring a 24-hour waiting period? Nobody knows, but the law seems likely to face a court challenge soon.—S.M.

Is Internet access taxation illegal? Well, maybe not. The Internet Tax Freedom Act, passed in 1999, banned taxation on Internet access, but 18 states are currently taxing access when the service is bundled with other services, such as telephone, through the same provider. This bill wasn't high on the states' radar when it was enacted because state budgets were doing well and Internet access was at a lower level. But now, as Internet access is increasing exponentially and state budgets are feeling the pinch of the poor economy, many states are doing whatever possible to increase tax revenue.—S.M.

Take Note contributors include Citizen League members, staff and former staff.