Legislators waver as districts struggle to target funds to schools with poor kids

by Dana Schroeder

The prospects of school sites in Minnesota's largest school districts having greater control of special state funding for educating poor students appear shaky, despite a 1997 state law guaranteeing it. District officials have been reluctant to reallocate funds among school sites and have found some legislators willing to back off on requiring the funding to follow poor students to their schools.

During its special session last summer, the Legislature made significant changes in the state's compensatory education revenue program, which has pumped extra money into districts with large numbers of poor students since 1971. The funding, which amounted to $185.1 million in 1997-98, has been particularly important for Minneapolis and St. Paul. Together they receive nearly half the compensatory funding statewide.

The Legislature hiked the compensatory revenue allocation for the biennium by 40 percent, or $100 million, from $260 million to $360 million. And it required that the money be allocated to school sites where low-income students (those receiving free and reduced-price lunches) are enrolled. Previously district officials have been reluctant to reallocate funds among compensatory funding statewide.

continued on page 6

Teacher settlements don't help students

by Joe Nathan

How do you feel about the salary settlements all over Minnesota? How do you feel about salary settlements all over Minnesota? How do you feel about salary settlements all over Minnesota? How do you feel about salary settlements all over Minnesota? How do you feel about salary settlements all over Minnesota?

continued on page 4

Teaching reading key to better schools

by Marcia Droeger

Our education system is in crisis. Too many students are failing basic skills tests. In many classrooms, disruptive behavior management hinders learning for all students. Many students have become detached and alienated and many parents have lost faith in their schools.

A number of proposals have been made for "fixing" the system: hiring more teachers to create smaller class sizes, charter schools, graduation standards. But as long as our students lack a solid reading foundation, virtually all other measures to fix our education system are destined to fail.

Sound too simple? Take a look at what happens when we fail at teaching kids to read. Students who struggle to read become totally frustrated by efforts to teach them other subjects. Their frustration often turns into overt resistance and they frequently disrupt classes. In this totally unacceptable classroom environment, even the most gifted children can become underachievers and sometimes even leading troublemakers.

Sadly, many of these frustrated students get labeled with varying degrees of learning disabilities and emotional/behavioral disorders. Our remedial programs have become overburdened and are not as effective as they once were. Many students...

continued on page 5
High school graduation standards: Profiles in churning

Viewpoint
by Lyle Wray

I, third, when it comes to curruculums and standards, one is left to think of the task of teaching that material—the state should play a much smaller role. There are many universities and legislative bodies that have taken a stand against micromanagement local public schools with a foolish display of civil construction, local accountability measures move forward. It’s time to look through all the dust that has been kicked up and keep our eyes on the ball. The results-oriented graduation rule, the Graduation Rule for short, was based on four sensible assumptions.

1. A high school diploma should be a credible credential. That means more than just the number of credit hours and the demonstration of some knowledge and competencies to warrant a diploma. Does anybody really disagree with this basic point?

2. Our children and which spend the adults who make their living in the region must confront education system in new ways. Of course, this issue is safely out of the way. “Neither is the true quality of education nor the true quality of the learning environment is too simplistic an evaluation to be taken lightly,” said Roger McCardle, a member and instructor with the Boynton Health Service at the University of Minnesota. “We're especially concerned that the common thread here: a growing sentiment that it's a system that doesn't work and doesn't produce the kind of citizens we need in a time when we need them.”

3. The public and the Legislature ought to be able to tell the difference between preparing students or not. The need for impartial information on district performance has not been a very narrow one. As other people (including us) have been disappointed the Grad Rule did not build in accountability for districts, as well as for students. But recent developments, such as proposals to “reconstitute” schools whose students have performed poorly, suggest that real accountability may be on the horizon. What will the implications be for education in the best way you see fit?

4. The school system is its own problem.
Salaries
Continued from page 1

significantly increasing in revenue, thus helping to produce larger class size, programs can be

Judging by calls I’ve received since asking these questions in the St. Paul Pioneer Press, many parents are

Some teacher's salaries are increasing at a rate that it's hard to pin down exactly how much,

Many teachers are earning, committed and

current negotiating approach doesn’t serve students’ best interests. I’m not

Some teachers complain that they are not

but generally speaking, it’s the time the special education teacher spends

First, they reflect the law.

Second, they reflect the law.

Third, they reflect the law.

And yet, when it comes to finding out why this happened, it’s sometimes

Just because a special education teacher spends

and other special education costs

According to the NAACP, these are among the most common

One school district that I’m aware of, in helping to

I think we need a way to

However, even though many


different effects on individual teachers.

be much higher for special education teachers.

the primary source of this disparity is the

the district's central pool, because of the

In Minneapolis, which is involved in a lawsuit by the NAACP challenging the adequacy of students’ and
salary-setting mechanisms

Inaller, Minnesota teacher pay raises again.

The average teacher's salary in St. Paul is

That's true. Minnesota ranks 19th in average salary. Most of the states paying higher average salaries are on the coasts, where living costs are higher. Moreover, Minnesota, along with some other upper tier states, has been growing by thousands of students over the last decade, meaning

The school board says it

and the boarding students have

Most of the teachers I talk to say the amount

Of course, teachers can make a
discriminating against students

5. Recruit more volunteers.

When a basic curricular program is set, the school must make an effective, consistent,

To solve the problem, we need to

It is true that there is another way to think about this situation.

we need to help students focus on learning and be rewarded for it.

We can’t take a main responsibility for developing high quality reading programs,

It is true that there is another way to think about this situation.

Whether or not they are truly special needs students—special education teachers are in a unique position to teach so much time on due process paperwork that they have virtually no time or no space to focus on teaching.

Two methods: first, negotiating settlements usually in a lawsuit by the NAACP

Increases three ways: first, negotiations, with a master’s degree in the

Some teachers point out that the average Minnesota teacher salary

The current negotiating approach doesn’t serve students’ best interests.

The current negotiating approach doesn’t serve students’ best interests.

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This is another way to think about this situation.

Marcia Droeger has been a special education teacher and parent educator for 13 years.

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Continued from page 1

the money had gone to school dis- tricts, based on the number of stu- dents served, rather than the number with Independent Children. The dis- tricts then had considerable latitude in deciding how to reallocate the compensatory funding for needy children. 

(See "Move to give school sites control of extra funding for needy kids faces roadblocks," Minnesota Journal, November 18, 1997, for a detailed explanation of the 1997 legislative changes in compensato- ry education funding and a school district listing of 1997-98 compensatory funding for Minneapolis and St. Paul.)

As they prepare their school bud- gets for next year, Minneapolis and St. Paul are still struggling with how to reallocate the compensatory funding to school sites in ways that don't shift funds from some sites to others.

And as this issue of the Minnesota Journal was going to press, Larry Pogemiller was meeting with his colleagues in the legislature to determine the amount of compensatory revenue each school district would receive for the 1998-99 school year. (See "Move to give school sites control of extra funding for needy kids faces roadblocks," Minnesota Journal, November 18, 1997.)

Several community-based organiza- tions and some school district spokes- people reported that the amount of compensatory funding for the 1998-99 school year was down significantly compared to recent years. Pogemiller was said to be looking to make different allocations to school districts based on the differences in the number of children served by each district.

As school districts prepare their bud- get plans, they are struggling with how to reallocate the compensatory funding for needy children. Under the law, compensatory funding is now to be given directly to school sites, which are, in turn, to decide how to use it. (See "Move to give school sites control of extra funding for needy kids faces roadblocks," Minnesota Journal, November 18, 1997.)

In practice, some school districts are giving the money to their highest needs schools, while others are giving it to school sites with more students.

As school districts allocate the compensatory funding to school sites, they are making difficult choices about how to use the money. The amount of compensatory funding each school site receives is based on the number of students served by the site, and the number of students who qualify for compensatory funding.

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Compensatory

Continued from page 6

What has happened during the a months they’ve had to plan for next year’s budgeting?

William Larson, assistant superinten- dent for fiscal affairs and opera- tions, said in a prepared statement that his agency has yet been made on what approach to take on compensatory funding for next year. He said, "We’ve played around with the formulas trying to be the most equitable," he said. "We’ve been meeting with the principals. No matter what we do, it’ll hurt somebody. It’s been a real difficult thing to deal with.

The changes in the current House bill “would certainly make it easi- er,” Larson said. “We’re waiting to see what’s going to happen. It’s t

The idea here is not to keep everybody happy. The idea is to get quzlity education for our kids.

Minneapolis Urban League Interns CEO Laura Scott-Williams

ommended the new model, because some schools would take a big hit. "It’s a real dilemma. There will be difficult choices in the future.”

Under the new model, Dudycha said the districts will be given the money to school sites for enough teaching positions to keep class sizes in the range projected before the last referendum. Then state and federal funds would be allocated for city-wide special education and Limited English Profici- ency (LEP) programs. Compensatory education funding would be allocated to schools as required under the 1997 law. Any money left over would be allocated on a per pupil basis, with high schools receiving a higher per pupil amount. That would be a change from the current method of strictly allocating money to schools based on staff positioning.

This parallels how the district receives it," Dudycha said. "But the formulas don’t meet the essen- tials of running the schools. We have to change the equation if it doesn’t meet the educational needs.”

Under the new model, Dudycha said the district would tell sites that out of the funding they have to make the choices next year. "We can plan for it." The challenge is how can we do for school sites with reductions in compensatory funding.

To make the change, Minneapolis school officials have been dis- cussing a new model of funding that renews sites-based budget- ing. The new model, he said, "would not be the total answer.”

Dudycha said district officials are not yet sure whether they will rec- omend the new model, because some schools would take a big hit. "It’s a real dilemma. There will be difficult choices in the future.”

"We don’t want to change the [compensatory education] system to address it," Weid said. "We’d rather address it through special education. We have to take a look at special education. Some general education revenue should fund special education. And it’s appropriate to allocate compensatory revenue at the site level. But we don’t want it siphoned off. We’d rather the problem of city- wide special education programs be new through special education fund- ing.”

It’s clear that targeting compen- satory funding has been difficult for school districts and sites that have to come by relying on the revenue. But when Larry Pogemiller, when money is reallocated, "you don’t keep everybody happy. The idea is to get quality education for our kids.”

Dana Schneider is editor of the Minnesota Journal.
Court orders extra funding, specific school programs

As a mediated settlement is considered for the NAACP’s educational adequacy lawsuit, this news from New Jersey: A judge appointed by the state Supreme Court there has recommended that an additional $312 million be spent annually by the state on its urban schools—and has specified exactly how money is to be spent (New York Times, Jan. 23). The Supreme Court now has to decide whether to accept the recommendation and order New Jersey to provide the additional money for those services.

Judge Michael Patrick King’s recommendations came eight months after the Court found Gov. Christine Todd Whitman’s school financing plan unconstitutional and ordered additional spending on urban schools. That decision also appointed Judge King to determine which programs were needed to provide the “thorough and efficient education” guaranteed by the New Jersey constitution.

Judge King’s decision called for urban districts to adopt the reading program proposed by the state, plus all-day preschool for three and four year-olds, all-day kindergarten for five year-olds, summer programs for all ages and health clinics for middle and high schools. Gov. Whitman and her attorney general, Peter G. Verniero, aren’t pleased, arguing that “a higher degree of certainty should be required before programs and services are deemed constitutionally essential.” According to the Times, school finance experts are questioning whether a court can order districts to adopt specific programs. Legislators, too, are frustrated by the prospect of having to raise or reallocate that money.

It’s a cautionary tale: If school districts and legislators don’t figure out how to get the education system to produce better results, the courts may come up with an answer that nobody much likes. —Janet Ducrow.

With so much money sloshing around this year, the Legislature is less careful about what it spends. For the public, though, value probably still counts. So legislators—or Gov. Arne Carlson—might usefully set some upper limit on what to spend on light-rail transit per new rider attracted.

This is easily calculated. All studies contain the numbers on cost (unlikely to be overestimated) and on ridership—present and project—in the corridor (unlikely to be underestimated). How much seems “too much” to attract one new rider? $25,000? $100,000? $200,000?

Equally relevant perhaps: How much is it necessary to spend to turn a driver into a rider with other transit strategies—say, by lowering bus fares or by subsidizing taxi rides?—Ted Kolderie.

Too much magic bus: In the transit battle between light rail and bus, too often the head-to-head comparison fails to look at the fundamental goal: convenient, cost-effective service. But Chicago, whose elevated trains are the “heavy” transit twin of LRT, is thinking about a dedicated busway along its central lakefront to service the McCormick Place Convention Center, home to a significant amount of annual tourism to the Windy City.

According to Chicago’s Metropolitan Planning Council, the busway is being pursued for the simple reason that it would provide better service to McCormick Place than any alternative. Currently, the primary mode for convention visitors is the door-to-door service of private charter buses; a dedicated busway would make travel from downtown hotels significantly faster. In fact, in case the busway falls by the wayside, planners are looking at alternative locations for a new convention center.—Ron Wirtz.

Curt Johnson’s “State of the Region” address Mar. 4 may have been the best and most politically important talk ever given on metropolitan affairs around here. Two things stood out.

One was its conviction that “sprawl” cannot really be contained effectively by trying to wrap our arms around the outer edge of the region with green belts and no-growth lines and restrictions on zoning and sewer extensions. If the core of the region is a place people wants to leave, the fringe will grow.

The other was the strongest assertion in the 30-year history of the Metropolitan Council that public education is a key to whether families will want to live in the core. “Good schools” is an issue coming up rapidly on the urban agenda at all levels: metropolitan, municipal and neighborhood.—T.K.

The Duluth City Council last November debated an ordinance that would have imposed a Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) on some Duluth nonprofits. Introduced by Councilor John Young, the ordinance would have set up an 11-member board to review individual nonprofits and determine if each was a “purely public charity.” Organizations not meeting the criteria would be subject to a PILOT equal to 40 percent of what the property tax would be if the property weren’t tax-exempt.

A 1988 Citizens League report said that nonprofits and units of government should pay a fee for property-related services such as police and fire protection—a recommendation that drew vocal and well-organized opposition from the nonprofit sector back then.

Not much has changed, evidently. A well-organized turnout by Duluth nonprofits at a Nov. 24 council meeting killed the proposal after two hours of debate. A later attempt to set up a task force to study the idea further was also scuttled.—J.D.

What might more appropriate, be called the anti-fiscal disparities law continues to help offset the peaks and valleys in development from place to place, from time to time. Minneapolis started as a net recipient of tax base, then became a net contributor for some years, then drew again from the regional pool, now is a net contributor again. Over its 24 years of operation, city governments have left this program to work. “Losers” in one year have not tried to change the rules to their short-term advantage. Growth cycles; nobody can predict the future. The program is basically tax-base insurance.—T.K.

Don’t put down “Minnesota Nice.” Incivility is a problem in public discourse these days. The ability to have a polite discussion has been a significant factor in Minnesota’s civic progress—especially because a community driven by opportunity rather than by crises has to think out and talk out what it wants to do.

Some years back a visitor from New York City expressed amazement at a discussion here about health care and hospitals. “If we’d tried to have this discussion in New York,” he said, “people would have been at each others’ throats in five minutes.”—T.K.

“Take Note” contributors include Minnesota Journal and Citizens League staff members.

Take Note

“There is no such thing as justice—in or out of court.”—C. Darrow
Does the common good have a prayer?

Citizens League 45th annual meeting features a discussion about the role of communities of faith in public leadership.

What is it that faith brings to public leadership? and what are people of faith failing to do in public leadership?

Panelists from various segments of the faith community will discuss these two questions at the Citizens League annual meeting at 4:30 p.m. Wednesday, March 25 at the Lutheran Brotherhood Auditorium in downtown Minneapolis.

The panel will be moderated by Doug Wallace, who will also offer some closing remarks.

Panelists include Rev. Curtiss DeYoung; President, TURN Leadership Foundation; former Governor Al Quie; Matthew Ramadan, Executive Director, Northside Residents Redevelopment Council; Rev. Alfred Babington-Johnson, President, Stairstep Foundation and Dr. Anita Pampusch, President, Bush Foundation.

As a first stage of the project, the League interviewed 57 people with experience in the challenges of public leadership. We heard many things that provided a rich portfolio for expanded public discussion. Consequently, we decided to feature public leadership issues in all of our programming throughout the year.

Many of the issues and problems identified in the leadership interviews had a spiritual dimension—especially when it comes to areas people referred to as the "culture." But there seemed to be a sense that the spiritual dimension of public life has diminished.

Some argue that getting at our most intractable problems requires nothing less than changing the dominant cultural messages, especially for today’s young people. In some areas of the country, the religious or faith communities have been credited with reshaping attitudes toward crime and drugs, for instance. Are we doing that in this region? How should communities of faith be involved in shaping public leadership?

Join us on March 25 to discuss the role of faith communities in developing public leaders.
Getting the Jobs Done
New study begins with public forums

The League’s new study was launched on March 5. Minnesota’s state economist Tom Stinson and state demographer Tom Gillaspy painted a picture of a very tight labor market for years to come and explained why that could be detrimental to the long-term health of Minnesota’s economy. But they also noted that the situation presented unprecedented opportunity to improve productivity and economic opportunities for many citizens.

The final session on March 18 will focus on the challenge facing Minnesota’s public leaders in government, business and the independent sector. Must the state simply accept these trends and wait for the market to respond, or can we make choices to capitalize on the opportunities and minimize the dangers? George Garnett, Vice President of the Minneapolis Foundation and Rick Krueger, President of the Minnesota High Technology Council, will address those questions. The final session will be held from 4:00-6:00 p.m. at the Humphrey Institute, on the west bank campus of the University of Minnesota.

In April, the Citizens League will begin the study committee that will develop an in-depth report and recommendations for policy.

Applications to serve on the committee will be accepted through March 20. In selecting the 40 people who will serve on the committee, the League Board of Directors will attempt to create a diverse group that brings a broad perspective. Special consideration will be given to those people who are “generalists” and not professional experts on the subject.

The committee, co-chaired by Gary Cunningham and Steve Keefe, will meet on Thursdays from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. and should finish in August.

Youth Citizens League goes to work
The Citizens League is using the labor shortage study to launch an effort to involve teenagers in tackling public policy problems. Teenagers from the Downtown YMCA and Summit Academy OIC will work on proposals to raise teens’ awareness of the labor shortage and the opportunity it provides for teens’ career futures. The teens have already been a welcome addition to the forums.

Special thanks to Makeda Zulu-Gillespie of the YMCA and Terrall Lewis of Summit Academy OIC. And to a group of Citizens League adult members who will serve as mentors to the youth: Archie Spencer, Matthew Ramadan, Jim Dorsey and Gary Cunningham.

A new WRINKLE on AGING

The Citizens League is collaborating with the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) Project 2030 on a series of policy events on the issue of the impact of an aging baby boom generation.

The initiative will focus on three themes related to the aging baby boom generation:

- Increasing choice and options for tomorrow’s elderly;
- Building communities that meet future needs; and
- Ensuring a strong workforce for tomorrow’s economy.

Applications for membership on the labor shortage study committee will be available at the March 18 meeting, or call 338-0791.

The project will begin with a four-part Mind-Opener series.

On May 19, Marilyn Moon, senior fellow at the Urban Institute’s Health Policy Center in Washington, D.C., will be the featured speaker at a luncheon meeting at the Sheraton Metrodome.

The project will conclude in June with a half-day symposium focusing on policy implications and potential solutions to problems identified in the earlier sessions. Former Senator Dave Durenberger will be the keynote speaker.

Tuesday, March 31

Maria Gomez
Assistant commissioner, Aging Initiative: Project 2030

An overview of issues and the policy implications of an aging baby boom generation.

Tuesday, April 7

Dr. Robert Kane
Director, Center on Aging University of Minnesota

The impact of aging baby boomers on healthcare and long-term care.

Tuesday, April 14

Dan Lindh
President and CEO, Presbyterian Homes of Minnesota, Inc.

Building age-sensitive, integrating communities for the needs of an aging population.

Tuesday, April 21

Michelle Fedderly
Senior consultant Quantum Performance Group

The changing impressions of retirement and productive aging.

All of the Mind-Opener meetings will be at the University Club, 420 Summit Ave., St. Paul from 7:30 - 8:30 a.m. Cost is $10 for members; $15 for non-members. To register, call 338-0791.

THANK YOU SPONSORS

The League is grateful to the following for their financial support for A New Wrinkle on Aging:

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