Teacher unions should organize around quality, individual schools, 'craft' model

by John Kostouros

It's hard to have a conversation about the current shortcomings in our education system without someone pointing a finger at teacher unions as a major impediment to improvement.

The criticism has teacher union leaders struggling with how to counter the charge that their members are resistant to any changes that might lead to better student achievement. More progressive union leaders acknowledge that this is more than just a public relations problem. Privately, they concede that they often end up fighting against reforms many of their own members would like to try.

Julia Koppich, one of three authors of a new book that envisions a different, more constructive role for teacher unions, was in the Twin Cities April 28 to discuss that vision. Koppich isn't a union basher. In fact, she used to work as an organizer for the American Federation of Teachers and currently serves as an advisor to TURN (Teacher Union Reform Network), a coalition of teacher unions formed to explore how teacher unions can reform to meet the educational needs of the country.

Her visit came at a propitious time. Teacher union representatives were busy at the Legislature fighting the Governor's proposal to create private school vouchers, a not-dissimilar proposal by the DFL head of the Senate education committee, efforts to liberalize Minnesota's weak charter school law and further inroads into the operation of Minnesota schools by the Edison Project or other for-profit companies. They were also taking hits from both government and the private sector.

New manufacturing jobs, retirement, recreation bring rural population rebound

by Martha McMurry

Rural Minnesota is experiencing something of a population rebound in the 1990s. Almost every nonmetropolitan county has grown more, lost less or shifted from loss to growth. Why is the turnaround happening? Will it continue into the future? The answers to these questions have many implications for both government and the private sector.

In an attempt to arrive at a better understanding of what is going on in our nonmetropolitan areas, the Demographer's Office conducted case studies of 12 Minnesota turnaround counties—Otter Tail, Aitkin, Itasca, Brown, Clearwater, Todd, Sibley, Nobles, Pope, Mahnomen, Swift and Polk—that lost population between 1980 and 1990, but gained population between 1990 and 1995. These case studies used existing data sources, interviews with area informants and site visits.

Our results generally show that the reasons for the shifting population trends in rural Minnesota are complex. No single factor explains why these counties have fared so much better in this decade than in the 1980s. Clearly the Greater Minnesota economy has improved. The number of jobs grew faster than the population in all 12 counties, helping to retain residents in the area and attract newcomers. But the factors that are producing job creation appear to vary from one place to another.

Survey finds women less negative on government

by Barbara E. Raye

Women and men apparently view government and government services differently, according to a Ramsey County survey undertaken as part of the county's strategic planning process. In fact, there is a gender gap on every question the survey asked.

Ramsey County's Home Rule Charter, which was adopted by the voters in 1990 and became effective in 1992, requires the county to develop a strategic plan and to play a stronger role in the overall coordination of delivery of services—regardless of who provides those services. Fifteen specified service and policy areas are addressed in the strategic plan.

As part of the planning process, survey respondents were asked to read a vision of the conditions each of the 15 services should produce in the next seven to 10 years. (For example, for parks and open spaces the vision states, in part, that greenways will connect open spaces.) Respondents were then asked:

- Their level of agreement with each vision;

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It's time to stand and deliver educational reform

By Lyke Wry

Another view: Edison charters fit law's purpose, scope

The Minnesota State Board of Education unanimously approved the Edison Project corporation's charter proposal on April 8 after two days of public hearing. The Board's decision is in line with the educational philosophy of the Edison Project Corporation, which was designed to provide educational opportunities for students who are not meeting the expectations of traditional public schools. The Edison Project is an extension of the concept of charter schools, which are independent public schools that have a certain degree of autonomy from state and local education officials. However, the Board's decision has been met with criticism from some education activists who believe that charter schools are a form of privatization and that they divert resources away from public schools.

The Edison Project's charter proposal includes provisions for the allocation of public funds based on student performance. This is in contrast to traditional public schools, where funding is based on student enrollment. The Edison Project's charter proposal also includes provisions for the creation of a competency-based system of education, which would allow students to progress at their own pace.

The Board's decision is significant because it is the first time that the state has approved a charter school proposal that is based on student performance. This is a departure from the traditional model of public education, which is based on student enrollment. The Edison Project's charter proposal is expected to provide a new model of education that is more responsive to the needs of individual students.

Editors want tax reform, unsure on new business tax

Red Wing Republican Eagle (April 30) - Legislators miss the deadline to pass major tax reform legislation, which would have been a major victory for Governor Tim Walz.

"If schools can't be held responsible for student achievement, why did we give them all that money in the first place?"

Edison Project is a for-profit education company that operates charter schools. The company is based in Minnesota and has received significant attention for its innovative approach to education. The Edison Project operates charter schools in several states, including Minnesota, New Jersey, and California.

The Edison Project's charter schools are designed to provide an alternative educational environment for students who are not meeting the expectations of traditional public schools. The Edison Project's charter schools use a competency-based system of education, which allows students to progress at their own pace. This is in contrast to traditional public schools, where students are required to follow a fixed curriculum.

The Edison Project's charter schools are funded by state and local governments, which provide a portion of the funding for the schools. The Edison Project also receives funding from private investors and partnerships.

The Edison Project's charter schools have been controversial, with some opponents concerned about the potential for privatization and the diversion of resources away from public schools. However, supporters of the Edison Project argue that charter schools provide a needed alternative for students who are not meeting the expectations of traditional public schools.

The Minnesota Journal (May 20, 2019) - The Edison Project is a for-profit education company that operates charter schools. The company is based in Minnesota and has received significant attention for its innovative approach to education. The Edison Project operates charter schools in several states, including Minnesota, New Jersey, and California.

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process, rewarding good practices and discouraging bad ones. In terms of preparing a child for kindergarten, it is a process of naming things, encouraging a child to use correct speech patterns and to explore and name the world.

Parents of successful children do these things. When children lack readiness skills, it is unreasonable to expect their parents to have them. When parents lack the education and resources to provide them, it is unreasonable to expect our public schools to provide them. Time is a critical part of the equation. Teachers complain that they only have kids 20 percent of the time. Unfortunately, our commitment to integration interferes with the public’s ability to teach reading and writing skills to underperforming children.

Reading is a skill like shooting baskets or fixing cars. It takes time and practice. Before buses are allowed to integrate, home-work was used by the teacher to extend the school day. The simple rule was: those who did not do their homework were held after school. Students would be punished and changed all that. Holding children after the buses had left created a transportation problem. When the buses left, so did the kids who needed after-school homework.

This dilemma was resolved by dividing the six-hour school day in half. The six-hour school day became a four-hour school day. The students have a half-hour more class time, which reduced the amount of time available for instruction. This change in the use of class time switched the focus of the class from pushing the top of the class ahead to making everyone meet the minimum standards. In a classroom of under-performing children, this change in policy is a change in environment where kids were no longer required to stretch to catch up. Right, capable, underperforming children were no longer challenged to meet their potential. Where they were required to ensure passage from grade to grade, the standard lowered so that all of students and only nine percent of African American students are now passing the eighth-grade tests in Minnesota.

Along with higher standards, we need to provide underperforming children with the skills and the time where they can do their work. To achieve this simple objective, I propose the following for underperforming kids:

1. Extend the elementary day from 7:30 a.m. to 3:45 p.m.
2. Support integration, expand the use of adults in support of integration, and establish a path to integration.
3. Abandon busing for integration.
4. Support teachers in that task of teaching and in the task of preparing their children for the world.

Koppich met with educators and teacher unions. He said, “The teaching profession is in the middle of a major change, in the middle of a major teacher unions, which are aware that a major change is needed positive force in American education system that truly meets the needs who doesn’t think so should study the history on how fairly paid and powerful teachers were until they joined together to bargain collectively.

Teacher unions have been so successful, in fact, that they have become the best organized and the most single influential force in American education. Koppich says, “The problem is that we need from teachers changed dramatically as we move from the Industrial Age to the Knowledge Age, and union’s aren’t organized in a way that helps teachers adjust to this successful a math program.

By doing these three things a school is created that engages the child in the constructive learning of Koppich. “But that only half of the job. Teachers have been largely absorbed in the discussion of how to change our schools to the times.”

“Teachers in this era must be trained to understand these responsibilities. And schools need to give teachers the flexibility they think they need to teach in the current system, he says, provides for neither of these needs. Koppich and his co-authors call for a “new teacher role” that “leaves a powerful room with large numbers of underperforming children a quiet, productive place to explore and name the world.

Koppich met with educators and other interested in reforming education throughout the day, culminating with a private meeting with teacher union leaders that included casual conversation about both the need to make unions more productive in school reform efforts and the obstacles to making that happen.

Koppich’s book (United Mind Workers: Unions and Teachers in the Knowledge Society, Jossey-Bass Publishers) lays out an argument for why teacher unions should change, offers a blueprint for how the new role might look. The main reason for change lies in what we’ve discovered about learning in recent years.

“We are becoming a Knowledge Society, where strategic use and manipulation of information has become as important as wealth and power as labor, land, and capital,” says coauthor Joseph G. Weeves. “The goal of this work is to rethink the school in front of this frontier. Each day teachers must rethink, react and adapt as they develop this new knowledge and transfer skills and knowledge to the next generation.”

Unions can’t make this transition alone. State contract laws, school board policies, and state statutes, including giving schools more autonomy to innovate and the policies concerning pensions and benefits would have to be changed. That job is one for the union to assume responsibilities now left to school district administrators to remove the barriers and measure up. And they would have to embrace standardized testing and other accepted measures of student performance to ensure quality control.

One teacher leader who had Koppich agreed with much of what she had to say was Mrs. Charlotte A. Shanker was an early supporter of the Education Reform Program in Minneapolis and Toledo have instated peer review systems for teachers and administrators.

As for Koppich’s observation that the teachers are not the only ones facing change from the national reform discussion, in a Minneapolis union official replied that “If that is true, it is because we haven’t been invited to the table. Many of us think this is because there is an agenda among many of the reformers to do away with teachers and what we see has happened is that they have in the private sector. By keeping us away from the table, the unions have been unable to undermine the public with saying we don’t care about reform.”

“We care about reform, and we’ve been working on it in many ways for many years,” she said.

Koppich took questions on the day during the effort to do, “Do you think the teachers role needed to change like you propose?” She replied that her colleagues, while realistic about the difficult changes, remain optimistic. “Remember, 35 years ago, the public schools could join a union or stick together to bargain for fair salaries and benefits in a system about as unstable as today’s conditions.” She added.

“Much of what we suggest in our report can begin tomorrow if the unions decided to end their defense of the current education system, as they have recently suggested.”

The new role would involve teachers in the decision-making process, and would involve the teaching profession in the operation of the schools. Shakespear would join a union or stick together to bargain for fair salaries and benefits in a system that is about the same unstable as today’s conditions.

"Bingo!...Here's a teaching job that fits me to a tee! It's in Alaska, however..."
Gender

Continued from page 1

- What they would add or delete from each vision; and
- How they would recommend the county get started in addressing key critical issues.

Findings

In several key areas women and men showed statistically significant differences in their answers.

1. Selection of vision topic areas. Respondents were randomly assigned two vision topics to review and were then allowed to select others. The top five most frequently reviewed topics were parks and open spaces (62 percent) and women were more frequently reviewed vision topics in human services (62 percent). Females were more likely to focus on issues of cost, efficiency and limiting the role visions could have for citizen participation. Males were more likely to focus on issues of cost, efficiency and limiting the role visions could have for public and eldercare.

2. Level of agreement with visions. The overall agreement with all of the vision statements was moderate (42 percent or above on each of the 15 topics)—regardless of gender, income, resi- dency or opinion about county budget hold. Women, however, were more likely to strongly agree with the visions and men more likely to disagree and strongly disagree. The gender difference regarding level of agreement is consistent for each of the visions.

3. Adding to or deleting from the visions. Males were more likely than females to have made comments suggesting additions to or deletions from the vision state- ments. Men were more likely to suggest additions or deletions related to the following themes: taxes, efficiency and cost effec- tiveness and limiting the role of government.

4. Getting started on critical issues. The survey asked for sug- gestions on how to start getting to the critical issues. In general, pop- ular suggestions were based on stu- dents and public informa- tion and education (54 percent). However, males were more likely to have suggestions about achieving mean- surable goals; about taxes, effi- ciency and cost effectiveness; and about limiting opinion of the achieve- ment they believe has already been made and the role visions have for citizen participation.

Ramsey County males were more likely to focus on issues of cost, efficiency and limiting the role visions could have for public and eldercare. Women were more likely to focus on issues of cost, efficiency and limiting the role visions could have for citizen participation. Women were more likely to consider very high (62 percent or above) the importance of each of the visions.

In some cases differences might be related to a focus, rather than an interest, in the issue. For example, women were looking for issues of citizen participation and public education and either found them or suggested they be added. Men were looking for a reduction in government and cost savings and made sure they were added if the visions did not already contain them.

In some cases the voice and opinion of women is a differ- ent way of looking at the issue and perspective that public officials should want to include more effectively.

Barbara E. Raye is director of policy analysis and planning for Ramsey County. This article is adapted from a paper delivered at the Upper Midwest Conference on "Democracy for Policy Makers" on April 7-8, 1997.

Population

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the next and some of the popula- tion growth. The growth in rural areas thus far in the 1990s demonstrates that turnaround is possible, but will it continue? Minnesota has enjoyed unusually robust population and economic growth in the 1990s. Many feel a return to more moderate growth is in the offing. Will a downturn affect all areas equally, or will rural areas be affected more?

Interviews with informants pointed out several potential barriers to continued rural growth. The most frequently mentioned were housing and labor shortages. Most of the jobs at Swift have remained an option, though accurate data on mobile homes are hard to come by. Labor shortages are also becoming a constraint in some areas, though this varies by indus- try and job skill requirements. The result of right labor and housing markets, many workers drive long lengths to work. Communities of 30 miles or more are common, par- ticularly for better-paying jobs.

Continued growth in rural popula- tions will affect the balance between the Twin Cities and other areas of the state. The historically high-income counties in rural Minnesota have enjoyed years of growth and a recent increase in the birth rate. Rural areas thus far in the 1990s have shown much economic growth. The result would probably be a larger total state population, more rural and ethnic diversity, and more socioeconomic balance among the state’s regions.

Barbara E. Raye is director of policy analysis and planning for Ramsey County. This article is adapted from a paper delivered at the Upper Midwest Conference on "Democracy for Policy Makers" on April 7-8, 1997.
Metro residents losing confidence in our quality of life

Not exactly Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood: For the second year in a row, residents of the Twin Cities metro area appear to be losing confidence about the region’s quality of life.

Every year, the University of Minnesota and the Metropolitan Council survey residents on their impression of life in the Twin Cities. On the surface, everything looks rosy: 95 percent of residents in the seven-county region believe the Twin Cities is a good place to live compared to other metropolitan regions.

However, those residents who believe it a “much better” place than other metro regions dropped from 56 percent in 1994 to 48 percent in 1995 to 45 percent last year. This decline was offset by an increase in people who said the Twin Cities was “slightly better” than other regions. More than one out of four survey respondents believed that the region’s quality of life has gotten worse in the last year or two, while only about 10 percent said it has gotten better.

It appears that this drop in confidence is related to an increasing fear of crime in the region. For the sixth year in a row, crime was cited as the top concern among residents—more than three out of four saw it as the number one problem facing the region.—Ron Wirtz.

Opponents of any new initiatives for site-based funding and management for schools say we already have site-based management of public schools in Minnesota. In name, perhaps. But the recent experience of the Leadership Council at Southwest High School in Minneapolis—the school’s site-based management group—shows what many schools have instead is a frustrating process for nibbling around the edge of real decisions.

Southwest decided to experiment with a new schedule this year, combining the traditional six-period class schedule with two days a week of three 100-minute class periods. To monitor the response to the new scheduling, the council surveyed students, parents and teachers, presented forums at parent meetings and sponsored faculty meetings.

Council member and teacher Richard Schwartz said opinions on the new scheduling clearly were split among all groups. He said after considerable study the Leadership Council recommended continuing the new scheduling next year, with some modifications and with extensive staff development to help teachers use the block periods effectively.

A model exercise in parent-teacher-student-administrator democratic decision-making? Perhaps. But it meant nothing. The faculty, citing a clause in the union contract giving them the right to vote on any scheduling change that affects their prep period time, turned down the proposal to continue the block scheduling on a 47-to-36 vote just days after the Leadership Council’s vote. (A bone of contention for some faculty members was that on one block day each week they had no prep period, although on the other block day they had a 100-minute prep period.)

“If a decision affects the whole school—like this one did—isn’t the council the proper place to discuss it?” asked Leadership Council cochair Denny Schapiro, a Southwest parent and long-time observer of the Minneapolis schools. “Should the Leadership Council be at the union organizing table saying we should be able to make these decisions?”

The lesson? Site-based management doesn’t exist if the supposed decision-making body isn’t given real authority and real decisions to make. Recommendations that can be voted down by the faculty are not real decisions.—Dana Schroeder.

News item, from the Pioneer Press: “A bill for a unique school voucher plan—targeted to poor students locked into the public school system—was introduced Monday in the Minnesota Legisla-
We face a crisis of citizenship.

When the role of citizens in public life becomes secondary, we become a nation of complainers, consumers and special interests. We must talk about citizenship and how it applies to addressing community issues.

The Citizens League and the Active Citizenship School for Young Adults will cosponsor a quarterly series of four evening events to explore and discuss civic revitalization: Citizenship Matters.

The inaugural program, “Doing Well & Doing Good: To the Ends of the Cubicle—and Beyond,” will address issues of work and citizenship.

The first session will be held Wednesday, May 28 from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. It will be hosted by General Mills, located at the intersection of I-394 and Hwy 169.

Citizenship can’t be a set of fuzzy concepts. It is critical that it be defined clearly. Conversations about citizenship need to cut across generation lines and involve partnerships with people of all ages.

These issues are simply too important to ignore. In order to bring more attention to the idea of active citizenship, the Citizens League is uniting with the Active Citizenship School, a civic organization devoted to developing the leadership capacity of young adults in Minnesota by creating personal and political strategies to address public problems, build a strong community, and create democratic change in the institutions that matter to them.

For young adults, the workplace probably has as much influence on them as any other institution. But many young adults are ambivalent about the meaning of work. Where do democracy and capitalism work together? How can young adults become leaders in this effort? What is “entre-
preneural citizenship?” At the program, members of ACS will talk about their work to address citizenship issues from within their workplaces—what they’re learning and what they’re trying to do.

The second program of the series, “Citizenship & Civic Involvement: An Intergenerational Discussion,” will examine how different generations relate to and perceive citizenship.

What can civic leaders from the GI generation, baby boomers and young adults teach each other? Are the leadership responsibilities distributed “fairly” across the generations? Are the notions of citizenship different for each generation? Public leaders from across the generation spectrum will share their thoughts.

The date and time of this program will be announced. Watch your mail for details.

All four meetings in the Citizenship Matters series are free and open to the public. Donations are gladly accepted. The League and the ACS encourage you to bring your children or grandchildren, or your parents or grandparents.

Catch a wave:

Ride the surf to the CL Web site

In the course of your Web surfing, have you stopped by the Citizens League Web site yet? The site has constant features, like our link to WCCO’s Channel 4000, as well as changing highlights, like transcripts of Mind-Opener meetings. This month, check out:

- The complete League research report on K-12 education, “Straight A’s for Minnesota’s Schools: Achievement, Assessment, Accountability.”

- Transcripts of Ted Kolderie’s and Art Serotoff’s K-12 education presentations from the Mind-Opener series on Closing the Education Gap; and the May 6 presentation by Deborah Huskins on welfare reform.

- The League’s monthly calendar of events.

Breakfast season ends with welfare reform

May was welfare reform month at the Mind-Opener series. The four sessions explored both the effects and effectiveness of proposed changes in Minnesota’s welfare system.

“Welfare Reform: Making it Work” centered on a bill authored by Sen. Don Samuelson (DFL-Brainerd), the series’ first speaker. The bill, which was signed into law on April 28, implements on a statewide level the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP), an experimental pilot program begun in 1994. The new program will replace the federal welfare program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), which Congress abolished in August.

MFIP will take effect statewide on January 1, 1998. It limits welfare recipients to a five year lifetime limit on benefits. Under the new law, people on welfare must begin work within strict time limits.

The series concludes on May 20, with Carole Mae Olson, Executive Director, Episcopal Community Services, who will speak about the impact of reform on current recipients and service providers.

Other speakers included Deborah L. Huskins, Assistant Commissioner, Economic and Community Support Strategies, MN Department of Human Services and Marcia Keller Avner, Public Policy Director, MN Council of Non-Profits. On May 6, Huskins discussed the state’s role in welfare reform wraps up Mind-Opener season

New intern at the League

Lila Foldes, a high school senior at Saint Paul Academy and Summit School (SPASS), will join the League staff during the month of May. All seniors at SPASS have the opportunity to develop their own “Senior Project,” a month-long, self-designed program of internships and volunteer work. As part of her Senior Project, Lila, whose father is a member of the League, is interning at the Citizens League. At SPASS Lila is an editor of the school newspaper, the Rubicon. That experience is already visible in her work here at the League—she designed and wrote this month’s “Matters.” Lila will attend Barnard College this fall.