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The State of Public Primary and Secondary Education in Minnesota

DR. RUTH E. RANDALL

Introduction

For decades education in Minnesota has been perceived as being the standard toward which other states strive. The kudos and compliments received by Minnesotans from people across the United States were, and are, many and often given.

The values of Minnesotans toward education are apparent as 55 percent of the high school graduates go immediately to postsecondary education and within five years 90 percent of the Minnesota students have enrolled full- or part-time in postsecondary education.

Since we now live in an economy which is international in scope, Minnesota students and workers have to compete with people from countries throughout the world. It is no longer enough to compare favorably with other states in the country.

The recruiting offices of the military forces indicate satisfaction with the young men and women from the Minnesota schools. In fact, Minnesotans are often recruited to become officers in the military as their level of education makes them eligible for officer training schools. Minnesota shares this distinction with other mid-western states.

As Minnesotans enter the work force their level of education is also touted. Not only is their academic work recognized but the character traits of the individuals are renowned. The willingness to work, industriousness, punctuality, daily attendance, and "doing it right the first time" are indicators of people who want to work; these values have been inculcated from their families, the educational system, and the ethos of the community.

Students from Minnesota who compete at the national levels in contests in mathematics, spelling, citizenship, and the like all do well. They place at or near the top of competitions and have done so over a period of years.

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Change is Needed

Even though we respect and are grateful for the past achievements of the students who participated in the educational system of Minnesota there is need for change today. The performance and productivity of all learners must be improved.

With the shift from the industrial age to the information age the system needs restructuring rather than improvement. Since we now live in an economy which is international in scope, Minnesota students and workers have to compete with people from countries throughout the world. It is no longer enough to compare favorably with other states in the country. Governor Rudy Perpich often says "We can no longer depend on nimble fingers and strong backs. Our resource is brainpower."

Even though statistical comparisons of achievement levels of students in the United States and other countries in the world are few, the United States, including Minnesota, does not rank near the top of the measures presently available (1).

As Minnesotans make changes necessary for our students to achieve at the level of students from other countries, we can expect other states to follow our lead.

Restructuring Efforts

The restructuring efforts under way at the present time in Minnesota include the following:

1. Changing from inputs to outcomes.
2. Changing from ad hoc programs to a comprehensive policy for children at risk.
3. Changing from kindergarten through grade twelve to lifelong learning.
4. Changing from monopoly to choice.
5. Changing from a few leaders to many leaders.
6. Changing from school as a single delivery system to education in the community.

Changing from Inputs to Outcomes

A September 1988 publication *Minnesota Education: Directions for the Future* (Minnesota Department of Education), provides information about the values, philosophy, mission, vision, and goals of Minnesotans. Questions are raised and answered on "What do we want our students to be", "What do we want our education system to be", "What do we want our educators to be", "What direction do we want education to go", and "What do we want students to know." This publication lays the framework for our restructured education system.

In August 1988, a task force of 15 Minnesota educators and citizens made recommendations to state policymakers on possible changes in graduation requirements and course offerings for the high schools in the state. Significant in their recommendations was the shift from requiring "seat time in a course" to "mastery of outcomes in a subject area." Action on the recommendations will follow hearings held around the state and in the Legislature.

The triad of curriculum, instruction, and assessment is used by teachers as they plan and prepare for the act of teaching. Diagnosis and prescription of each student's learning determines the instructional design and the curriculum materials needed by the teacher to assist the student in learning.

Outcome-Based Learning Core Curriculum

Outcome-based learning is described as every student being responsible for mastery of a body of knowledge and a set of skills as he/she moves through the system. Portions of the body of knowledge and set of skills must be mastered at various levels. Education becomes outcome driven, rather than input driven.

Mastery of the core learnings in the elementary and secondary schools will change the remediation needed in the postsecondary institutions and in the work place.

In order to make outcome-based learning viable in the state, a determination must be made as to what students should know and be able to do. In 1987, the Legislature mandated a core curriculum for the state of Minnesota. The mathematics core curriculum has been identified by committee composed of educators and citizens and is available for schools to use. Science, social studies, and communications will also have an identified core curriculum. Assessment of the core curriculum in each of these four subject areas is, or will be, possible through the test item bank in the Minnesota Department of Education.

Some individual schools and school districts have identified goals and objectives for their particular districts and have already moved to outcome-based learning.

Humanities and Sciences

Every student needs a strong background in the humanities and the sciences (including mathematical sciences) to function as a literate person and to enjoy life to the fullest. Programs for children and youth must also include health and wellness, and work readiness. The 1988 publication, *Work Readiness: Report of the Commissioner's Task Force on Education for Employment* (Minnesota Department of Education), states, "The unshakable conclusion reached by the task force is that work-readiness is a critical teaching element that must take root in the pre-K-12 educational curriculum as integrated, experience-based learning. This is the new promise we feel that the Minnesota education system must make to its young people."

Higher Order Thinking — Learning How to Learn

The core curriculum will include higher order thinking and the learning how to learn skills. Problem solving, decision making, creative thinking, and critical thinking will be considered basic skills. All students will have to be able to think in these ways if they are to be contributors to the economy (2). Assessment tools will have to be developed to measure both the quantity and quality of higher order thinking and the learning how to learn skills. It is certain that

the curriculum in a restructured educational system will be different and at a higher level.

Community Service

"Everybody can be great, because everybody can serve," a quotation from Martin Luther King, Jr., is the theme for the community service curriculum and programs in Minnesota schools. New opportunities for young people to serve their communities and the people who live in them are being developed. Citizenship in a democracy depends on our caring for, and working with, one another.

Minnesota in the World and the World in Minnesota

Children in our schools are learning more about global systems such as economics, technology, ecology, and environment and how their interacting parts work together. Other aspects of international and global education programs include: understanding diversity, developing relationships, understanding the nature and process of change, understanding prevailing world conditions, and understanding emerging international and global trends.

Learning languages of other people and the cultures of their countries enhance the communication skills of our students and build a base for understanding our similarities and differences from other people.

Outcome-based learning will radically change the education system when individual students can move at their own pace through the required and elective learning. Rules and regulations for clock hours and seat time will be abolished.

Individual Learning Plan

The ideal situation would be for each student in the state to have an individual learning plan; the students, teachers, and parents would identify what that particular student should know and be able to do beyond the core curriculum. An instructional design would be determined for each student in order to meet his/her particular learning needs and styles. He/she then could progress through programs as determined by the plan; seat time and clock hours would be modified for individual students.

A precedent for individual learning plans is set through the work done with special education students. The plans for regular education students are different in that a deficit is not identified which needs to be remedied. Therefore, the development of the individual learning plan is different from the manner presently required for special education students.

Outcome based learning is modeled after vocational education classes where outcomes are predetermined by the teachers and students must achieve a certain body of knowledge and a set of skills to complete a particular course.

Outcome based learning will radically change the education system when individual students can move at their own pace through the required and elective learning. Rules and regulations for clock hours and seat time will be abolished. Social promotion will not be necessary. Instruction will be tailored to the particular needs of the students. Students will be taught individually, in small or large groups, or in multiage groups.

Technology makes it possible to manage individual learning for each of the students. Already computers are used as a tool for the use of instruction delivery, for learning management, and for administrative purposes. The use of telecommunications for instruction delivery to students and for professional development of teachers is in wide use across the state. A comprehensive plan for the use of technology in education in Minnesota is being developed.

Preparation of Teachers

Teachers need a higher level and different kind of teaching, just as the students need a higher level and different kind of learning in the information age. Colleges and universities need to make significant changes in the programs offered to individuals interested in the teaching profession (3). Teachers need continuing professional development; the 1987 Legislature especially designated funds to meet this need.

Changing From Ad Hoc Programs to a Comprehensive Policy for Children at Risk

The general education system graduated about 25 percent of all students in 1925, 50 percent in 1950, and 75 percent in 1975. Now there is the Governor's challenge of 96 percent graduation rate by 1996. Since 91.4 percent of our students graduated from high school in 1987, it is possible to meet that challenge. The reason is a comprehensive policy for children at risk.

Research indicates that for every dollar spent on three- and four-year-old children who are at risk for learning, there will be \$4.75 saved before they become adults.

Children having children, i.e. the teen age mother with one, two, or three children, perpetuate the cycle of poverty and welfare from one generation to another. To break this cycle, a comprehensive policy for education of pregnant minors and minor parents has been put in place. The policy includes mandatory school attendance for minor parents receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), provisions for transportation aid and child care so the minor parents can attend school, and career planning with minor parents through social services.

Other components of the comprehensive policy include:

1. Extended day programs.
2. Area learning centers.
3. Acquired Immune Deficiency System (AIDS) education.
4. Early childhood health screening.
5. Child abuse reporting.
6. Youth development plans in every community.

Partners in Learning, a program of the Education Commission of the States, a national policy organization chaired by Governor Rudy Perpich, calls for one million students from postsecondary institutions in the United States to mentor one million fourth- through ninth-graders over the next three years. The purpose is to help these young people "through the pipeline" of learning before they fall behind in their schoolwork and become dropouts. In Minnesota, some businesses, postsecondary institutions, and nonprofit organizations are providing help for some children in junior high and high school so they will not fail.

Changing from K-12 to Lifelong Learning

Special Education

Policies and programs are in place to assure an orderly transition for special education students in secondary school to move to postsecondary institutions or to employment.

Special education services are provided to 83,000 Minnesota children and youth who have handicaps and are between birth and age 21. Gifted and talented students also receive assistance.

Early Education

Early education for handicapped children from birth to age five and prenatal care for expectant mothers are examples of collaborative programs among the departments of education, health, and human services.

Early Childhood Family Education programs in 300 districts are designed to strengthen families by helping parents provide effectively for their children's learning and development. Early childhood screening for health problems is carried out in every district.

Research indicates that for every dollar spent on three- and four year-old children who are at risk for learning, there will be \$4.75 saved before they become adults. Early childhood family education, preschool and day care experiences, as well as educational programming for children on television, provide learning for some children prior to entering kindergarten.

Minority Citizens

Governor Perpich was a member of the commission which published *One-Third of a Nation: A Report by the Commission on Minority Participation in Education and American Life*, 1988, (Education Commission of the States and American Council on Education). Challenges are made regarding efforts in America to achieve full participation of minority citizens in the nation's life and prosperity; Minnesotans will need to determine how they will respond to these challenges.

In June 1988, the Task Force on the Black Learner made six recommendations to the State Board of Education and Minnesota Department of Education on ways to improve the teaching and learning of the black students. Task forces are anticipated for Hispanic and Asian-American learners.

Improving the education of American Indians in Minnesota is the goal of the American Indian Language and Culture Program, Postsecondary Preparation Program, and Indian Social Work Aides program.

Other Special Programs

The Limited English Proficient Education Program delivers services to 9,500 students who lack the language proficiency to learn in the English language.

Chapter I monies from the Federal Government are used for compensatory education in reading and mathematics for 62,000 students in the elementary and the secondary grades.

Adult Learners

Displaced workers from Minnesota mines, farms, and homes demonstrate it is often necessary for people to be retrained and reeducated several times during their working careers. The public libraries, community education, adult basic education, and veterans education are examples of institutions and programs in addition to the technical institutes, colleges, and universities which make lifelong learning possible in Minnesota.

As we move toward lifelong learning, the lines are blurred between early education and kindergarten. Lines are also blurred between grade twelve and postsecondary education.

Changing from Monopoly to Choice

Increasing choice opens possibilities for change in the structure of the schools. Parents and students now make school enrollment decisions which were previously made by the local school board upon recommendation from the superintendent. This shift in decision-making power is one change in the structure of the educational system. The four choice programs which the Minnesota State Legislature has recently approved are Programs of Excellence (1983), Postsecondary Options Act (1985), High School Graduation Incentives (1987), and Open Enrollment (1987 and 1988).

Choice — Programs of Excellence

Parents and students can choose a special program that the student will attend. District officials submit an application to the Minnesota Department of Education to have a specific program in a high school be named as a Program of Excellence. Their applications include orchestra, international baccalaureate, farm and ag business management, advanced placement chemistry, and others. A screening committee at the Department determines whether the program will be named as a Program of Excellence. Each year up to 100 students from across the state of Minnesota can apply to attend a Program of Excellence; if chosen, the student lives in the home of a family within the resident school district of the Program of Excellence. The state foundation aid follows the student to the district of enrollment.

Choice — Postsecondary Enrollment Options

Since the fall of 1985, eleventh and twelfth grade students have been able to choose to attend a public or private postsecondary institution for all or part of their education. The purpose of this program is to promote rigorous academic pursuits and to provide a wide variety of options to high school pupils. The student makes application to the postsecondary institution of his/her choice; entrance requirements are set by the postsecondary institution. If accepted, the student can choose either college or high school credit for the work which is completed. The state foundation aid follows the student to the postsecondary institution that he or she has chosen.

Choice — High School Graduation Incentives

Students who have dropped out of high school can choose to attend any high school or alternative program in Minnesota to complete their education. A student who is in danger of dropping out of school, who is between the ages of 12 and 21, who is two or more years behind in achievement or one year behind in graduation credit, or pregnant, or a parent, or chemically dependent, or has 15 consecutive days of absence may choose any other public school, alternative learning center, or alternative school which has a contract with a public school to complete his/her education. The state foundation aid follows the student.

Choice — Open Enrollment

In the fall of 1989, students who live in districts of 1,000 or more pupils will be able to attend the school district of their choice. In the fall of 1990, all students, in a district of any size, will be able to attend the school district of their choice. No one in the district of residence can deny the student an opportunity to choose another school. However, school

districts can still refuse to admit any students from another district, even though they cannot refuse to allow students to leave their district.

A district participating in the program must have space and must maintain desegregation. Needy students are provided transportation; parents of other students must arrange transportation to the boundary of the receiving school district. The state foundation aid follows the student.

Choice — Summary

New roles for parents, students, teachers, counselors, principals, superintendents, and local board members are being determined and defined in the early stages of the implementation of choice.

Information to the consumer about schools and learning opportunities for children and youth in Minnesota is essential for parents and students to be able to choose wisely and well.

Parent involvement in decision making about the use of resources for education, as well as in decision making about the learning of their children, is increasing in Minnesota.

These four choice programs allow students and parents to make decisions about the programs and schools they would most like to have the student attend. It is a major change from the local board of education and superintendent having the power over the school attendance of all children and young men and women. Choice changes the power structure of the educational system.

Changing from a Few Leaders to Many Leaders

School-Based Management

School-based management is an effort to shift authority and decision making to the teachers, parents, and principal in the local schools. These individuals become responsible for the financial resources, human resources, time resources, and space resources for the school (4). School-based management implements the principle of decision making which states that those most affected should be involved in the decision making.

School-based management is currently a reality in selected Minnesota schools. As a component of the Educational Effectiveness program, 24 schools report that budget, curricular, and extracurricular decisions have been delegated to the school site and that parents and community members are involved in school site committees. Seven schools report the delegation of limited budget management to the school site (5).

Authority and discretion at the school building level with accountability at that level will continue as parents and teachers ask for, or demand, to be included in decision making. Technical assistance will need to be provided for the teachers, parents, principals, superintendents, and local board members as they make this change in the power structure of the schools.

School Staffing

As we move to different and higher levels of learning in a system in which there is decision making by teachers, parents, and the principal at the local school, staffing of the schools is done in a different manner. The workforce is restructured; the responsibilities of the staff are differentiated.

A team of lead teachers, teachers, instructors, paraprofessionals, aides, and volunteers will be common. The lead teachers' responsibilities will be different and greater than in most of our schools today. These leaders will be responsible for individual learning plans for all students; for working with

teachers and parents in decision making about the financial, human, space, and time resources; and for outcome-based learning for all of the work done at the school site (6).

Accountability

The individual school will be held accountable for providing the necessary learning experiences for each child to grow and develop. All of the school staff will be responsible for the learning of all the students in that building. This means that the people at the individual school will determine the instructional design to best meet the needs of the students; the curriculum materials, the assessment measures, and the need for professional development for the staff.

The rewards to the school staff will be linked to the performance of the students; salaries, benefits, and working conditions will all be included in the rewards. Research and development are needed on how best to link autonomy and discretion to accountability at the school site (7).

Changing from School as a Single Delivery System to Education in the Community

Community Education

Youth Development Plans for children and youth, age zero to twenty-one, have been designed in 159 communities in Minnesota under the auspices of the community education department in local school districts. Community members look at their resources and determine how best to help students grow and develop as individuals, citizens, and workers. They also look upon the student as a resource. The student brings skills, knowledge, and attitudes to the community to further develop and enhance a partnership of the young with older adults (8).

Community education departments in 380 of the 435 public school districts are centers for learners of all ages. The adult basic education (ABE) programs lead to a general education diploma (GED) for Minnesotans interested in the equivalency of a high school diploma. The Legislature, in 1988, made a high school diploma an entitlement for people over the age of 21.

Education in the Community

Location of learning for students is changing as education is taking place in the community. An elementary teacher of gifted students uses the Science Museum as a classroom for a week. Vocational education students attend classes at a cooperative which may be in a school building or in a storefront. A student may attend classes in a work situation away from the building. Students may be assigned to shadow a professional or business person in the community to learn about careers. Students may attend a play at a children's theater where they have opportunity not only to see the play, but to interact with the actors, director, and producer of the play. Students earn credits toward graduation through community service and provide mentoring to peers or younger students.

Specialty learning centers are more frequent. Students study world languages or mathematics or work in a research institution for a few days or weeks in the summer or during the school year.

Public libraries are centers in the community for all 4.2 million Minnesotans. A single library card provides access to the visual and audio resources of libraries anywhere in the state.

Learning to work as a community and in a community are objectives; the community is defined as the neighborhood, a county, city, state, country, or the whole world.

Collaboration with Other Agencies

In the restructured school system, the people who work in education will be collaborating with other systems in government, business, and the communities. For students at learning risk, it will be necessary to work with the human service agencies, health agencies, jobs and training agencies, and perhaps the corrections system. All of these systems will have to work in concert to make it possible for all young people to complete high school and enter postsecondary education. The educational system is not equipped to solve all of the problems of these learners; intergovernmental agencies will have to share their expertise, ideas, and resources in collaboration with education (9).

Are Minnesota taxpayers getting their money's worth? To answer the question, the level of education funding needs to be tied to the quality of education our children receive.

Organization of the System

The organization of the total education system in Minnesota is undergoing serious scrutiny by the Legislature and by other interested organizations and citizens. New ways for integrating and desegregating the education systems are being discussed and designed.

Funding

Are Minnesota taxpayers getting their money's worth? To answer the question, the level of education funding needs to be tied to the quality of education our children receive. The 1987 Legislature mandated the Minnesota Department of Education to design, develop, and pilot an integrated data base containing the core elements which policymakers need to make informed educational decisions. As the integrated data base becomes operational, the information generated should make it possible for us to know how well our students are learning.

A consensus must be developed about new ways to measure performance; the extent to which we have achieved the purposes of education must also be examined. Minnesotans understand that dollars spent on education are an investment.

Needs of the Present and Future

A movement toward "a culture of achievement for all learners" is necessary so that Minnesotans expect a higher level of learning by all students, so all learners are engaged in thinking and doing while they are in school, so all learners know they must perform and produce at a high level, and so all learners use available opportunities to develop their potential.

Together with moving toward a culture of achievement in our state, efforts should be made to establish a state and national policy for children. Such a policy is necessary so that all actions taken by government, business, and education reflect the value of the child. Citizens of the United States should know that our country joins the other industrialized nations in the world by establishing a policy which values children and families.

Summary

We will continue to change and restructure the education system in Minnesota with the learner as the focal point. In Minnesota education, we infuse the idea that every individual is important, has worth, has ideas to share, and needs opportunities to develop his or her potential. We believe that each person creates his or her own destiny by using the available opportunities and only that person determines the limit of his or her potential.

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