

88-CLCaw?

OPPORTUNITIES, NEXT, FOR TEACHERS, SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS

1. In the last three years we have opened up new opportunities for students. The Access to Excellence program has made great progress. It was controversial when proposed; as all significant changes are. But it is now established, and increasingly accepted by educators. Public support has climbed steadily, from 30 per cent in 1985 to 47 per cent a year ago and to 56 per cent by late last spring. Other states, discouraged with their efforts to mandate improvements, are now looking to Minnesota's strategy of expanding opportunities.
2. Now it is time to open up comparable opportunities for those who teach in and administer the schools. Once again this will require pushing out the limits of what education has traditionally taken as given. Once again there will be controversy. But the change is necessary. The test must be what is good for students. Education must be restructured. The basic relationship of districts, schools and teachers, unchanged since the beginning, offers too few opportunities. It is itself the principal barrier to improvement.
3. My proposal is built around one simple, central idea: That the state proceed by giving educators the opportunity to restructure their system themselves, from the bottom up. The state should do this by combining the opportunities extended to students with dramatically expanded new opportunities for teachers and schools to put into practice the good ideas so many of them have for improving student learning. It is incentives, not mandates, that will move education toward excellence. The state's job is to create the incentives, by creating the opportunities.

Nobody will have to do anything. But students looking for better programs and educators who want to offer better programs will have the opportunity to come together to set a new standard of excellence.

4. Five critical actions need to be taken in <sup>1989</sup>1988:
  - a) Schools must be given a better chance to secure from their boards the opportunity to decide, at the site, how to use their resources and to be held accountable to the district in terms of results (financial management and student performance).

No school would have to seek and no district would have to grant this decentralization of decision-making. But those that wish will have the opportunity to do so.

- b) Teachers should be given the opportunity to run schools; and, if they wish, to start schools. It should be clear that a 'school' is an organization of people -- teachers, administrators, students, parents and staff. A school is

not a building. A school may occupy only a part of a building. So schools can be small. Several schools may operate at the same time in one building.

No teachers would have to move into these new and expanded professional roles. But those that wish will have the opportunity to do so.

- c) Other public bodies should be able to open public schools headed by qualified and certified professional educators. Cities, counties, intermediate school districts, ECSUs and the state itself should be able to charter new public schools proposed by teachers or school administrators.

No public body would have to offer these opportunities to teachers and administrators. But those that wish will have the opportunity to do so.

- d) The public organizations responsible for schools should be given the opportunity to secure instructional programs from a variety of teaching organizations, including programs formed and run by teachers or school administrators. Districts presently contract with other districts and with private teaching programs. A school board should be able, as well, to contract with its own school administration (the board remaining responsible for objectives and for outcomes). A school permitted to make decisions at its site should be able to buy a learning program it thinks will improve education for students. So should the other public organizations sponsoring schools.

No district or school would have to buy any part of its instructional program. But those that wish will have the opportunity to do so.

- e) Districts and schools should be given the the opportunity to offer their programs at locations beyond their own borders. Choice, and access to excellence, need not and should not always require students to travel. They should have the opportunity to attend the schools of other teaching organizations near where they live. So the schools must be able to move. This will be important both in the small communities in rural Minnesota, and in the Twin Cities area, faced now with the challenge of racial integration on a metropolitan basis.

No district or school would have to open a program outside its own borders. But those that wish will have the opportunity to do so.

4. If any state and any community in America ought to be able to deal successfully with the challenge of racial integration it is Minnesota and the Twin Cities area. Our approach to this challenge should be along the path of open enrollment which

we have been following since 1985. We do not need and we do not want either the compulsion of a court order or drastic legislation creating county school districts in the seven-county region. We should continue simply to take down the barriers between districts, allowing students access to programs while affording districts, schools and teachers the new opportunities I am now proposing, to improve and expand their programs. This does mean we must extend the principle in our Post-secondary Option and our High School Graduation Incentives program and now give all students the opportunity to make their enrollment decisions without having to secure permission from the district in which they live.

No families or students will have to enroll in the schools of another district. But those that wish will have the opportunity to do so.

5. Only one thing will not be optional. The state must set standards for student and school performance, and must measure and report that performance. Choice depends on good information. Both students and their families and the people of Minnesota deserve to know how well the students and the schools are doing. The state must ensure that this information is available. The required outcomes should be simple; limited at the start to language and science/math. They can be expanded and refined in the future as and if necessary. They should be performance standards; not process-requirements. Student progress should be measured at appropriate intervals through the elementary and secondary grades. Schools should be free to supplement the test results with whatever interpretation or other information they believe will be helpful in evaluating their and the students' performance. Like the other changes I have proposed, this will be controversial. But Minnesotans' support for such a program of measurement is overwhelming. It is time for the state to respond. I think measurement will not be resisted by districts and schools that seek to attract students and that will want and need, themselves, to know how well they are doing.
6. In conclusion: We must make schools truly excellent for all the children of Minnesota. This means we must make a career in education competitive with the other career opportunities now available to young men and women. To do this money will be important; but money will not be enough. People want to be able to grow in their careers. So education must be able to offer that opportunity. That is our job this year, building on what we have done so far. Happily, the opportunities we will create for teachers and schools to offer improved programs will be opportunities also for students; just as the opportunities we have created for students to choose their schools will represent opportunities for educators who have the desire to innovate and to grow in responsibility.