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Plan seeks alternative to 'rigid' city schools

By Suzanne Malich
Associated Press

Twin Cities teachers and administrators who feel constrained by the traditional public school system would be allowed to create their own "school within a school" under a plan recommended by the Citizens League.

The league's School Structure Committee released the final draft of the report Thursday and will seek legislative approval.

The committee is recommending that school districts or the state be allowed to grant "charters" to teachers and administrators who want to set up schools that would be "different in the way (they deliver) education, and within broad guidelines, be autonomous."

"We feel that the current system has become ... rigid in its structure and has not responded rapidly enough to changes in the world, and specifically, in the metro area," committee Chairman John Rollwagen said at a news conference Thursday.

The report said the chartered — or cooperatively managed — schools would have a better chance of devising the right approach to education and seeing it put into place than they would have "in the rigid, top-down conventional system."

The report recommends that the Legislature authorize creation of chartered schools by the Minneapolis and St. Paul school districts in 1989 and by the state Education Department in 1992.

While Minnesota does a better-than-average job of educating its students, the report said, "quality must improve if our children are going to be prepared for satisfying lives, socially and economically."

The schools would be open to students from the suburbs, but would be located in Minneapolis and St. Paul. "We don't recommend it going statewide, but if it proved to be successful it could be used elsewhere," said Jody Hauer of the Citizens League.

The report said state and local per-pupil dollars would be distributed to the chartered schools in the same manner they are distributed to the traditional schools. The committee also will seek start-up funding from the Legislature, but Rollwagen said the amount was not known.

Rollwagen said criteria for the chartered schools to operate would include that they be operated by licensed teachers, that they operate as public schools, that they appeal to a diverse student body and that they be locally controlled, taking direction only from the school board.

The report, which took nine months to put together, was approved by the Citizens League board of directors on Nov. 17.

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