

Aug '89

ACCESS (PHASE ONE) TO EXCELLENCE (PHASE TWO)

1. Access . . . open enrollment . . . is now in law. But the attacks on it will continue. It can be defended. But a defensive strategy is not enough.

As things stand, there aren't enough innovative schools for kids to choose among. Choice involves transportation. And the pressure is weak on districts to respond with improvements.

2. The way to defend choice is to be as aggressive in 1990 as in 1985 . . . this time, pushing to get the excellence that has to go with access.

Critics like to say, "Choice alone is not enough." This is a bit like saying to farmers, "Rain alone will not grow corn." But it is true.

There do need to be more good schools . . . better schools, because they're different schools . . . for kids to choose among.

3. That's the agenda. The question is the same as it's been before: How do we get the system to produce those better, more different, new schools for kids to choose among?

4. The general themes will be consistent with what's gone before:

- \* Put the neediest kids first. Which means:

- \* Go after the big districts. That's where most kids are. That's where the educationally-needy kids are. Kids in the central-city districts especially. Open enrollment means practically nothing for them: Not many of them can move (legally or practically). And their districts are the most bureaucratic.

- \* Change what goes on in the classroom. Cut down the teacher-talk. Cut out the competition among kids. Use a problem-solving approach. Get kids to help each other learn . . . to work cooperatively. That's a 'new learning technology' just as much as computers (which should be used more, too).

- \* Put kids first. Not adults' interests first. Not superintendents' convenience. Or teachers' security. Or school boards' 'rights'. Kids' interests first.

5. So: How? How get more different, better, new schools where the kids live?

- \* Not just pay them more, and hope for the best.

- \* Not mandates ("shouting louder").
- \* Stay with present strategy: "No district has to do anything. But the state will make it possible for schools to change and improve. And the kids will be free to choose".
- \* It's all incentives and opportunities -- this time, for educators.

6. Only two simple and strategic actions are needed, to create tremendous dynamics (when combined with choice):

- \* The state will authorize some other public body to create an innovative new school if the local district does not.

And:

- \* The state will clear away its regulations, to make real innovation (and a focus on outcomes) possible.

If applied to the central cities first this would amount to a proposal for an "Educational Enterprise Zone".

7. Two elements are needed, for these new and different schools to appear. One is a group of educators to be the operator of the school. The other is a public body to be the sponsor.

8. The operator:

- \* Can be either:
  - o An existing school (i.e., instructional program) or a new organization.
  - o A single group or a "group of groups". (Like the various contractors and crafts that put up a building.)
  - o A non-profit corporation or a for-profit business. Public-school teachers would have first option to form the new schools/departments. But the door would be open also to others.
- \* Would be given the authority to organize the classroom and school -- to use the resources of time, money and people -- as it thought best.
- \* Would be evaluated (would have its contract renewed, or not) based on performance/outcomes . . . which would be defined in terms of the progress the school makes with kids over time.
- \* Would be 'capitated'. Would be paid a lump sum, and allowed to keep what it did not spend.

9. The sponsor could be:
- \* Another public school district, permitted to open a school outside its own boundaries and to enroll students through open enrollment.
  - \* A public college or university. State universities and the University of Minnesota used to run public schools. They closed those "lab schools" for reasons that had to do with the School of Education's budget. Today those K-12 schools could be financed through open enrollment.
  - \* The State Board of Education.
  - \* The Legislature -- as with the Center for Arts Education.
  - \* The federal government. (The "yardstick" concept of TVA)
10. The state would authorize (e.g., the State Board to start up) a few such schools each year. The number to be created would basically be controlled by the local districts -- in terms of how long they took to respond with innovations of their own.
11. It would be logical to authorize some or all of these alternate sponsors during the 1989 Special Session, as a part of the effort to change the state-aids system in ways that would constrain the growth of state spending (and, in the process, improve education).
- \* Education is a classic candidate for 'sorting-out': The constitution requires the state to provide a general and uniform system.
  - \* Neither the state's budget objectives nor its education objectives is advanced by allowing local districts to pass off raising taxes as improving schools. Excess levies should be prohibited, and the state should take full responsibility for the dimension of improvement that requires additional resources. The state should force local districts to improve education by the way they spend money, not by the way they raise it.
12. Governor Perpich might want to put this strategy of state innovation on the table at the governors' "Summit" meeting in Washington September 26-27.
13. The proposed state school of math and science might be designed along these lines, with:
- \* Different groups competing to sponsor it.
  - \* Different groups competing to design it.
  - \* Different groups competing to run it.

## ACCESS (phase one) TO EXCELLENCE (phase two)

### The Problem

In 1990 Minnesota's reputation as the leader in education-improvement strategy will either go backward or go forward.

- \* Opponents are chipping-away at open enrollment. They will continue if they feel they can get away with it. If they succeed, choice will go back to being just for the people with money.
- \* Even if choice remains, its promise will remain unfulfilled. It requires travel. Most people want quality schools where they live. There are not enough quality choices where people live.

### The Conclusion

You should challenge the system in 1990 the way you did in 1985 -- this time, to create the excellence that the kids can have access to. Again: Push out beyond what's been traditional.

### The Proposal

Build off the contract program that has been developing (mainly within the High School Graduation Incentives program) since 1987:

- a. Give kids the choice of contract schools in other districts. (That is: Connect the 1989 program with present open-enrollment legislation.)
- b. Give the schools a choice as well. Make it possible for educators to contract either with their local school district or with some other public agency (another district, a college/university, the State Board, etc.). Or let these agencies run schools directly.
- c. Begin in the cities where the largest number of the most educationally-needy kids live. Make the cities a kind of 'enterprise zone' for educational innovation.

Again: Nobody will have to do anything. But the prospect that somebody else may open new schools in their territory, when combined with the opportunity for kids to choose, will put enormous pressure on the district to change and improve.

### Decision/Action

1. Do you want to take this initiative in '90? Can work begin, to put the idea in bill form, (quietly, for the time being)?
2. Should there also be a bill in '90 to clear away the restrictions imposed on open enrollment since 1985?