

THE STATES WILL HAVE TO WITHDRAW THE EXCLUSIVE

Public Services Redesign Project — July 1990

Seven years after the Nation at Risk report this country still lacks a strategy for school improvement. We are serious about improvement. But we do not know how to make it happen.

In the first effort, following the **Nation At Risk** report in 1983, we tried several things. We tried demonstrations, in the hope that good practice would spread. We tried mandates. We tried money: Real spending per pupil rose again in the 1980s after having risen by a quarter during the 1970s. Basically we were trying to get better performance out of the existing schools. It was not a great success.

Out of it came the conclusion that, if student performance is to improve, the schools will have to be changed. More than this: radically changed.

And out of this conclusion has come the current effort at "re-structuring". Nobody quite knows exactly what it means. But at its core there is a fairly coherent (and in a sense radical) vision: districts with professional teachers in "site-managed" schools, assessed and rewarded for the progress of the school in improving what students know and are able to do. This idea now dominates the conventional policy discussion about system-change and school-improvement.

But it is only a vision. It is not a strategy for action.

Institutions do not welcome change, especially radical change. They need a reason to change. And "re-structuring" does not give the district a reason to change. It assumes, as Jack Frymier put it in 1969, that "altruism is an adequate motivational base for change." It expects that boards, superintendents and teachers will do things they find personally difficult and institutionally unnecessary because these things are important for the country and good for kids.

This is not very realistic.

There have been some successes. There are important demonstrations in many schools. A number of districts have "restructuring" contracts. There is now a state (Kentucky) in which the program will be tried state-wide. All of these are widely reported. The media create the impression of a changing system.

But change is more than getting words on paper, in contract or in law. Change must get established. It must last. And it must spread. The concern is that even in the most-noted "restructuring districts" the implementation is proving -- as the superintendent in Rochester NY, Peter McWalters, said recently -- "damned hard". In some districts the educators do not want to use all the authority they are given. In others the changes made may now be slipping away. The much-praised re-structuring in East Harlem, in New York City, has been in real jeopardy. Strenuous efforts by its friends may save it. But how many such defensive battles can be fought and won? For how long?

Above all there is the problem of scale. This country has 40 million kids and 2.2 million teachers in 84,000 schools in 15,000 districts. The problems are general, and serious. The change has got to be systemic. "Re-structuring" is simply not moving fast enough for the job that has to be done. Privately there is real anxiety among those most committed to the cause.

"Re-structuring" improves on the old prescription: higher salaries, smaller classes and better training. But as it stands it does not go to the heart of the problem. It is trying to persuade districts to change, while accepting as given the system of public education that makes it hard for them to change. This makes no basic sense. We need a new approach. We need to examine the givens of the system, find what makes it so hard to change, and change that.

Why Education Resists Change

The critical given is the idea of districting itself. The state does not deal with schools; it deals with districts. Legally schools do not exist: Districts exist. The district is defined by its boundaries. These create an area in which there is one and only one organization offering public education, to whose schools the kids who live in that area are assigned. Public education is organized as a pattern of territorial exclusive franchises.

That exclusive franchise is the heart of the problem.

o It means the state agrees the district will have the final decision about improvement. Governors and legislators like to talk as if they control improvement.

They don't. They can propose and promise, plead and threaten. They can give money. They can issue orders. And often the districts do respond. But whether they do or not in the end is up to them. If the district does not give the kids a good education the state does not send in another organization that will. It accepts the pace of improvement at which the district is able or willing to move.

o The state also agrees to accept whatever reasons the district has for its decision to change or not to change, even if those reasons have to do mainly with the private and personal interests of the adults involved, as they sometimes do.

o And the state agrees to accept those decisions and the reasons for them, whether or not the students learn. Within very broad limits the state assures the districts their material success -- their existence, their students, their revenues, their security; everything except their annual increases -- independent of the level of student success.

Nobody should wonder why in public education "the cards are stacked against innovation". An organization with that kind of exclusive franchise feels no need to change.

David K. Cohen put it gently when he wrote in 1986 that education contains "weak incentives for the introduction of innovations that would cause internal stress". And proposals for radical change surely do cause internal stress. Change disrupts settled routines. It upsets people. It causes controversy. It threatens the real interests of powerful organizations.

As they consider proposals for change the superintendent, board, principal, union and teachers weigh the potential benefits to the kids against the risk of creating "internal stress". They want to help the kids. But upsetting people might cause controversy. It might produce a grievance. It might lose an election. It might cause a strike. It might damage a career.

The risks are real. There is nothing countervailing: nothing that requires kids' interests to be put first; nothing very bad that will happen if the decision is to say 'no'. As things stand a 'no' is the end of the matter: The principal who wants to change has nowhere else to go; the teacher has nowhere else to go; parents and students have nowhere else to go.

There is almost nothing anyone can change without getting someone else's permission. Yet almost everyone has the power to check everyone else.

And practically nothing depends on making the improvements for which the public is pressing: clear objectives, measurement of performance, new technology or

better learning methods. Unless something quite unusual happens the students and the revenues will be there anyway. Good educators tell their colleagues, "We have to change". But that is not true in any real sense. They do not have to.

The kids get what altruism, courage and the random appearance of exceptional individuals provide in the way of improvement -- which is often a lot. But the system puts them second. The system puts adults first. As Albert Shanker told the Itasca Seminar in Minnesota in 1988: "This is a system that can take its customers for granted".

Why the State Will Have to Act

For a country serious about improvement this is an absurd arrangement. We can hardly expect the district to do the hard things involved in change if we guarantee it its success whether it does these things or not.

This unproductive situation is not the educators' doing. The system is not one they created. Many might like to see it changed. Ted Sizer remarks near the end of **Horace's Compromise** that "the people are better than the system". That's true The people are as good as any. They are working in a bad system.

It is time to say this: Our system of public education is a bad system. It is terribly inequitable. It does not meet the nation's needs. It exploits teachers' altruism. It hurts kids.

We ought to change it. It is unproductive and unfair to put people under incentives that are not aligned with the mission they have been given to perform. That leads to blaming the people for failures that are the fault of the system . . . and we are now deeply into blaming people for the failures of public education. Parents blame teachers and administrators. Educators in response blame parents, and kids. It is all wrong. We should stop blaming people. We should fix the system.

We can do this. We do not have to take the system as given. The system is a policy-construct.

But to change it we will have to go beyond the district. "We can never turn around enough districts," ECS President Frank Newman said in a "Statehouse to Schoolhouse" discussion, "without changing the incentives in the system".

Changing incentives means providing reasons and opportunities for people to do in their own interest the "stressful" things that change requires. Changing incentives in the system means re-structuring the environment in which districts live.

It means withdrawing their exclusive franchise.

Only the state can do this. The districting is in state law. The responsibility for action rests with the legislatures, and with the governors whose proposals begin the legislative process.

The state's job is not to run the schools. The state's job is to provide a workable system for those who do. It owes boards, teachers and administrators -- and the public -- a system in which those who do change and improve are supported and rewarded, and in which those who do not are the ones put at risk.

Everywhere in this country the state is in default on that obligation.

What would it mean to "withdraw the exclusive"?

Districting is (a) the assignment of students to (b) an organization that has an exclusive franchise both for policy and for school-operations. It can be changed in two steps.

- Step One: The state transfers the attendance decision to the student (as Minnesota, for example, has now done). This is choice. The student can now move from one franchised area to another.
- Step Two: The state makes it possible for new public schools to appear; sponsored by some public organization other than the district. This is diversification.

At this stage the schools of the district remain, unchanged. But certain dynamics will have been introduced which were not there before. Suddenly, for the district, a decision not to change and improve would not be without practical consequences. No district would have to do anything. But if it did nothing a new and different and perhaps better school might appear. And the students would be able to enroll with whichever organization they chose.

The idea of the alternate sponsor, the 'somebody else', is absolutely critical to the effort to produce schools operating in new and better ways.

The local district will not want new schools appearing in its territory. It will be anxious to preserve its exclusive. It will argue that if new and different schools are necessary, it should be the organization to start them.

The district's ability and willingness to start new schools is bound to be limited, however, by its desire not to threaten the other schools it owns. The result would be what we see today: selected demonstrations, and waiting lists -- always the visible evidence of a reluctance to let change "cause internal stress".

A district fears new schools; even its own. Its interest is entirely in re-structuring existing schools: "Help all schools" is the cry. Governors and legislators will need to resist this. They cannot let their options be limited to actions that begin

with "re-": Re-structuring, re-vitalizing, re-forming and retraining old institutions is the slowest way to change. There must also be a way to create different and better schools new.

This can happen only if the state opens up the opportunity for some public organization other than the district to start a public school. New sponsors are more important than new schools, because new sponsors are the key to the appearance of new schools. Innovation almost always moves faster between organizations than within them.

It is critical, too, that the sponsor not own the school. If it did it would control through process, as the district does now. It should be required to control through performance. Then it will set objectives and measure results. The school must be separate.

What Would Such a Policy Look Like?

It is not easy to have a useful discussion about policy proposals that go outside the traditional givens. People in such a discussion start from different premises. So their arguments usually do not meet.

Typically the proponents attack the reality of the existing system and offer a new idea to replace it. The opponents defend the theory of the existing system and envision terrible things that could happen if it were *to* be changed. They spread fear and doubt. This makes the proponents defensive, and they fall into the trap: They accept that all the specifics and details of the new plan must be worked out in advance, and that it must solve all the old problems and create no new ones. This causes them to overpromise and to minimize the risks. The possible problems of the new system get more attention than the real problems of the present system. Inevitably, people do see problems and risks. So the opponents seem proved right: The change should not be made.

We should have a more realistic and useful discussion.

Any strategy can be implemented in different ways. A strategy of changing education, to create incentives that will cause improvement, can clearly be implemented in different ways. It is all right for different states to take different routes. It is all right, too, to leave some decisions until later and to work out some problems as they go along: Everybody does. It is not essential to have an answer in advance for every conceivable question: Nobody does. Or for every question to have a perfect answer: The existing system does not have perfect answers.

We should not assume a fixed plan, which must be accepted or rejected. Change is a design question. We should ask: What are we trying to do? What are the various ways we might do it? Which seem best? Which are least risky? How can we work it out?

Here is an outline for a discussion along those lines.

Step One: Choice

A State wanting to create incentives for improvement will want first to withdraw from the district its ability to "take its customers for granted". The state would transfer the attendance decision from system to student . . . shifting from assignment to choice as the basis on which the student arrives at the school. It's true: Choice alone is not enough. But choice is essential. Choice is not an improvement: Choice drives improvement.

All discussions must begin from the fact that choice exists. The legislature does not enact choice. Every state has had a choice plan since the *Pierce* decision in 1925. Its provisions are simple: Parents can fulfill the requirement for education in any public school, by moving their place of residence, or in private school, by paying the tuition. It has been a popular plan. It is unfair. It discriminates against the poor. As it stands choice is means-tested. A family with a lot of money has a lot of choice; a family with little money has little choice. The equity problem, with choice, is in the plan we operate today.

What legislatures are doing is to *extend* choice, using public resources to offset the inequalities in family wealth.

Not every choice plan does that well. Choice is a design question. You can design a choice plan to do whatever you want. Everyone discussing choice has to decide: (a) What students are eligible? (b) What schools are eligible? and (c) Under what rules do they come together? Everything depends on how you answer those questions. You can create an elitist, segregated system. Or you can create a much more equitable system than the one that exists today.

The state that has answered these questions most fully -- Minnesota -- improved the equity in the system as it decriminalized the act of enrolling in a district in which you do not live. Minnesota made all kids eligible. It made only public schools eligible. It set up a set of controls on choice: for racial balance, against selectivity, etc.

But again: Choice alone is not enough. In a discussion recently at the National Governors Association David Hornbeck noted that in the last 30 years large numbers of families have exercised their power to choose, and have left the central cities. Yet their action did not improve the schools of those districts. Precisely. There was choice, but still the exclusive franchise -- no opportunity for anyone else to offer public school in that area. Choice makes an alternative (as the healthcare people say) legally and financially

"accessible". But not practically "available": The other organization the student wants to attend is always in some other place. So 'choice' becomes an argument about the feasibility and cost of travel.

For choice to work -- to help the student and to stimulate the district to change -- the state will have to provide both choice and choices: different schools for kids to choose among, where they live. It is like the epoxy kit you buy at the store: Neither tube has an effect alone. In education, too, the dynamics appear when choice and innovation mix.

Step Two: Diversification

In opening up the opportunity for more than one organization to offer public school on the same piece of ground the state will again have to answer some key design questions.

Who would the sponsors be? There is a variety of public organizations among which the state can choose.

a) One local district could offer school in the territory of another. A city district could set up (say) an alternative school for at-risk kids in a suburb. The kids would enroll in the city district but attend in the suburb, where they live.

b) Many colleges and universities once ran K-12 schools, and could re-open these. Some colleges and universities already admit 11th- and 12th-graders as a "post-secondary option".

c) Units of general local government. Most states have a 'joint powers' law. Some let two governmental units do together what either one is allowed to do separately. This means a city, county, housing authority, etc. could through agreement with a district acquire the authority to sponsor a school.

d) The state itself. The legislature could create schools directly -- as some have, for the arts or for math-and-science. Or it could give the state board of education general authority to sponsor new schools. Or set up a new agency for this purpose.

e) The federal government. Instead of writing checks to states and superintendents it could open schools on the TVA principle, as a 'yardstick' for local performance. The District of Columbia might be an appropriate and useful place to begin. Congress is in effect the 'state legislature' for the District.

What would the school be? Some kind of separate and independent organization. It might be a public corporation. A non-profit. A 'professional association'. Or a co-operative.

Who would form the school? Perhaps a business firm. Or an investor group. Or a group of parents. Or perhaps educators; administrators or teachers. A state might be open to all of these; or might not. It might think "affinity-group" schools are OK; or might not. (Minnesota worries a lot about schools attracting hockey players.)

How would the school be accountable? In two ways: To its sponsor, through the contract and to its families, through choice.

Contract relationships force accountability in ways that employment relationships do not. The sponsor has to know what it wants. The school, like any independent contractor, would decide how the job is to be done. An evaluation is required. So there is measurement. And there are consequences. A contract can be terminated for cause. Or not renewed.

Both sponsor and school would be operating under general requirements set by the state. These would cover civil rights, health and safety and in a general way what students ought to know and be able to do.

The state might write new performance standards for these new schools. Or it might adopt the solution worked out by Minnesota for its home-schooled students. Students in the new schools would have to meet whatever standards the local district is willing to impose on its own students.

What about liability? Accidents happen. People sue. Somebody has to buy insurance. It could be the sponsor. It could be the school, with money built into the contract payment.

Where would the school find space? It seems unlikely the new school would build or buy its own space. Probably it would get up in space it leased, from the district or in the community.

On what basis would kids be admitted? The laws against discrimination would be respected. Beyond this, a state might let the new schools select the students most interested in or best fitted for the program it offers. Alternatively, the state might require the school to give everyone who applies an equal chance of being admitted. The state might itself limit eligibility: to students of color, or to poor kids, or to those living in a certain area. Whatever, it should require that good information be made widely available.

What is the revenue-mechanism? This will depend on how the state pays for education today. A state with a foundation program (which most have) could simply deduct the full cost from aids it pays to the resident district and send that amount to the new school or its sponsor. A state might want to give a new school slightly less than what a district spends. Or it might decide to pay more for the education of less-advantaged kids. States without foundation programs could perhaps require the

resident district to transfer its revenue directly to the new school. Some states might need to enact a foundation program.

How would the school be organized? On this the state should be silent. The whole point is to leave to the school decisions about the use of time, the method of instruction and the roles of the teachers and administrators.

Could the district schools have this opportunity too? Yes. The state should provide a way for an existing school to get the same opportunity to innovate and to decide its own program and administration. This was Jack Coons' notion of the "new public school". It is the "site-management" idea, essentially. A state could put in law a 'standard plan' for the authority that would be delegated, and the procedure by which this would be accomplished.

A variation: Divestiture

A state that wanted to act more decisively on the problems of its big-city schools might take a somewhat different approach. Diversification is an in-direct strategy. And in-direct strategies take time. To get improvement faster a state could introduce opportunity and incentive directly, by spinning off the ownership of the schools into an independent organization.

There is a real case for this. The school board sits in a fundamental conflict of interest. It represents the parents and the public, to whom it promises the best possible education for the kids. But it also sits as the board of the only teaching business in town. This is a self-dealing arrangement. And because it can take the kids for granted the board is inevitably led to spend most of its time and energy worrying about its staff.

Divestiture would clarify the board's role dramatically. The program of instruction . . . the old school administration . . . would be spun off and organized separately, on contract to the board. The board would become a policy body, much like a sponsor under 'diversification'.

- o The board would see its policy role expand substantially. It would decide what the kids should know and be able to do. It would decide how much to tax and spend. It would become a buyer; selecting the organizations rather than hiring the individuals to teach the kids for whom it is responsible. It would have an official to 'superintend' instruction: literally, to watch how well the job is going. It would assess and report performance.

- o The board could also continue to own the buildings and the central support organization. These facilities and services would be organized as an enterprise, from which the instructional groups could buy space and service if they chose.

The staff who had worked in the schools -- principals, teachers -- would form into two or more instructional groups. (In Minneapolis this might mean four groups, each with about 20 schools. Each would be an independent organization; a public corporation or (if the educators preferred) a private organization; perhaps a professional association or co-operative.

o Each of the groups would operate district-wide. And there would be no attendance areas. So parents in every neighborhood would have two or more different organizations accessible and available. Two or more groups might even set up school in a single building. Elementary schools especially might become smaller; their locations more numerous.

o Schools, and individual teachers, could shift between groups. They could form a new group and seek a contract from the board. Or form a new school and seek a contract with a group.

o Each group could organize its learning program in whatever way it thought best. One might use conventional instruction; another, cooperative learning, or electronic technology.

o Each could also arrange its own administration. One might re-create the model of a traditional, centralized district. Another might prefer site-managed (i.e., contract) schools. The multi-school scale of the group is important: The individual school would not have to become the unit of administration.

This is an unfamiliar arrangement. We are used to thinking of schools organized on the public-bureau model of the Army, or the Postal Service, or the Fire Department. But it is a conceivable arrangement.

How Can This Benefit the Teachers?

Withdrawing the exclusive franchise would put at risk for teachers, as for districts, the security of the traditional arrangement. This is necessary: No more than anyone else should educators be able to "take their customers for granted". But as the state makes this change it should in fairness offset the risk it creates for educators with some opportunity for reward.

That 'reward' could be the opportunity for the teachers to control the schools: to grow in professional responsibility and perhaps to increase their personal income.

The "schools" would not be the buildings, of course, but the instructional program. Educators might have charge of one of the groups of schools, or a single school, or a part of a school: the math or language or science department, say, or the music program.

This option is not available today. If you want to be a teacher you have to be an employee.

Some teachers (and former teachers) are likely to sense the potential in the idea of taking charge of the school. Customers are required by law to use the service and have universal coverage, tax-financed. The public wants improvement. The kids are disaffected. The employees are frustrated, and leaving. There is real potential to do better: There are good ideas about how to get kids to learn better and there is a good deal of expensive overhead that could be cut. The capital costs are low. All that has been missing is some public organization willing to contract with educators who "have a better idea", and the opportunity for those teachers to get the benefits of their idea if it works.

Educators who want to own their group, school or program would receive the per-student cost for the total enrolled. They would set up their program as they thought best. They would employ (or contract for) their administration. They would be accountable for results, and they would have to persuade their students to come and to stay. But they could keep either for use in the program or as personal income what they did not need to spend.

The employment option would remain for educators who prefer to be employed, as many will.

The union could serve both employee-teachers and own-teachers. It would bargain only for the former: Teachers who own their organization would obviously set their compensation themselves. But it could have the owner-teachers as dues-paying 'affiliate' members, and provide other services they require. The concept of 'affiliate membership' has recently appeared within the AFL-CIO. Its author is Albert Shanker.

Can It Happen?

Perhaps nothing like this could be done. Diversification and divestiture would threaten the system. The decision would have to be made in the legislature. The education organizations would probably resist. They are powerful politically.

But perhaps it could be done. Improvement is necessary. Re-structured schools are necessary for improvement. And districts need incentives, to produce re-structured schools. Things that are necessary do happen, in time.

o Diversification and divestiture might offer a middle way between the 're-structuring' idea that accepts too much of what now exists and the voucher idea that accepts too little.

o An 'alternate sponsor' would create the opportunity to start new schools more quickly than the district would ever do itself, while still maintaining a real public accountability.

o The contract relationship -- between state and sponsor and between sponsor and school -- would create a need to define objectives and to measure performance.

o The idea of teacher-ownership would open up an incentive for teachers (and for administrators, who could start schools too) to accept change. We do need to find some way out of the present stalemate.

The public wants accountability. Educators refuse to accept it. Many teachers argue they are responsible only for their professional practice; not for what students learn. They will not agree to measurement if it involves published comparisons of performance. And they will not agree to sanctions for poor performance. (The concept of accountability in the 'restructuring' discussion is essentially that if you do well you get more money; if you do badly you get more training.)

Educators want autonomy. And the public refuses to allow that. People are receptive to the idea of teachers having professional status; and autonomy is of course the essence of professional status. ("Tell me what you want. Don't tell me how to do it. I know how to do it.") But governors, legislators, school boards, parents, taxpayers and citizens are not likely to give up control . . . are not likely to turn over the decisions about the instructional program . . . while still allowing teachers to keep the protection both of tenured employment and of union contract. That does not pass the 'accountability' test.

The idea of teacher-ownership might break this impasse. It would give teachers a reason to accept accountability. And that would give the public a reason to grant the autonomy. Teachers might soon find, as some other professionals have, that "the more accountable we are the more autonomous we are".

There are some other reasons to be optimistic.

o First is the appearance of the idea of incentives in the proposals from leaders in public education. This is recent, and still tentative; probably associated mainly with Shanker's Quest speech in 1989 and his Kappan article in January 1990.

Incentives remain controversial. Some see them as rewarding people for doing what they ought to be doing anyway. Some warn about unintended side-effects. Some think there can be 'up-side' incentives but never 'down-side' incentives: good things for schools that do change but nothing bad for those that do not. Still, the willingness now to discuss incentives at all suggests a recognition that appeals to altruism will not be enough. All of the talk, however, has been about incentives for schools and teachers. The need is to create incentives for districts.

o Second is the success of the choice legislation. That was outside the givens. And was resisted. But it succeeded. The key was to take an idea previously associated

with private schools and apply it to public schools instead. People could always choose their school: It simply had to be a private school. Today people can start a school: It simply has to be a private school. In the same way that the state made it possible to *choose* a public school the state can make it possible to *start* a public school.

o Third is the rapidly growing role of elected officials of general government in decisions about the basic organization of public education. They are the ones who can do something radical; and might. It is quite new and enormously important for the power of the presidency to be oriented now [in the 'Summit'] not toward the Congress, which does not have the power to change the structure of public education, but toward the states, which do.

o Fourth is the growing sophistication of the business leadership. This is slow. Business is still ambivalent. Many chief executives still shrink from confrontation. Some still hope major change will result from 'partnerships'. Most serious: Many still think the discussion today is about how to structure an organization rather than about how to structure an industry.

But many are impatient now with "feel good" partnerships. And more and more now sense that state action is the key. The Business Roundtable has a network of CEOs organized to work with the governor in every state. In some states the CEOs are willing to contemplate radical action despite the certainty of conflict: [The recent reform effort in] Chicago might have been a watershed, for business.

o Fifth is the possibility that thoughtful people inside education will find the change in their own interest. They will not save public education by not changing it. A bad system will not attract good people. The pressure could grow to let kids go to the non-public schools at public expense. The legislation this year in Wisconsin, for Milwaukee, was a straw in the wind.

o Sixth is the awareness of the consequences of not getting it right this time. Something like 20 million kids went through high school during the seven years after the **Nation At Risk** report. It would be a serious problem -- for educators and for the political leadership -- to have to confess, after another 20 million had cycled through, that once again the adults had not got it right.

o Finally, there is something to be said for the feasibility as well as for the desirability of state action that confines itself to a single, radical stroke: introducing simply the dynamics for change, with the districts and the schools left free to introduce improvements themselves in their own way over time. The public is ready, the Gallup survey for The Kappan reported in 1989, for radical change.

We Have Got to Go to the Heart of the Problem

It is popular today to put down strategies like this. "There are no silver bullets", some people like to say when they want to steer you toward conventional action.

But sometimes it is possible to do a single thing that will change everything else for good. Technology sometimes does it; as the satellite forced the re-structuring of the telephone industry. Business actions sometimes do it; as the money-market fund set in motion a chain of events that is re-structuring the financial industry. Public policy can sometimes do it.

It is not easy to get to the heart of the problem and to find that one action that will lead on to everything else. A lot of people do not want to go to the heart of the problem.

But surely that is what it means to "be strategic". And the effort to change schooling needs to be strategic. At the moment it has mainly an idea of what a district and school should look like, passing for a strategy about how to get there. That vision, and exhortation, is not enough; not radical enough.

The state cannot 'do' improvement. The state must do things that will cause improvement. Incentives are best: better than mandates; better than money. The state should remove from the district its ability to take its students for granted, by making it possible for new and different public schools to appear, where the kids live and which kids can choose. The district will then find improvement necessary, in its own interest.

All efforts to improve public education will fail unless the district finds improvement necessary.

We are not serious about improvement if we do not withdraw the exclusive franchise.

-- Ted Kolderie