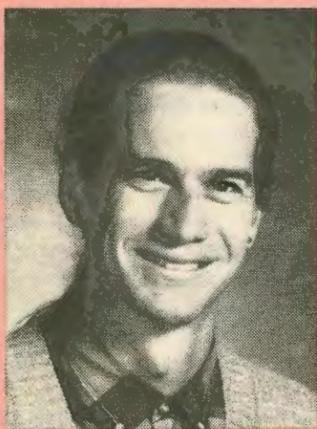


AT ISSUE:

"Will charter schools improve education in Minnesota?"

YES



Al Jones teaches at the North Branch Intermediate School as part of the creative arts/global option. He has served his local association in a variety of roles, most recently as president in 1988-89.

While it's difficult to give unequivocal support to the proposition that charter schools *will* improve education in Minnesota, it's also hard to deny that these schools have the potential for accomplishing just that. I believe that the introduction of the charter school will lead to reform and dramatic changes in educational delivery systems. I feel confident in saying this because this new form of school relies primarily upon the expertise and creativity of teachers.

The charter school legislation which initially provides for a limited number of outcome-based school sites is at its very core a teacher empowerment law. Teachers need no longer dream about how a school might operate if they "ran the show." Indeed, that opportunity is now available to those with the desire and determination.

I appreciate the respect accorded teachers through the charter legislation. It's founded on the premise that substantial educational change can be properly spearheaded by teachers. Most of us have had plenty of experience being told what to do, i.e. district curriculum and textbook adoptions, school-wide discipline programs, workshop day schedules, etc. I find it very exciting to consider working with my *peers* to make important educational decisions.

Parents, too, stand to benefit as they become more integrally involved in the day-to-day operation of the charter school. Each school or site would be operated by a board of directors, and while teachers must, by statute, constitute a majority, it is assumed that other members will be parents of students attending the school. This important prov-

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NO



Carol Ackerson is an English teacher at New Ulm Senior High School. She also serves as an MEA and NEA Board member.

"Charter Schools" - an idea which at first glance seems interesting. Who hasn't thought "If I were running the schools I would do things much more sensibly than they are currently done!"

Of course the thing that stops most people from beginning their own school is the problem of funding. Yet, as a result of action in the last legislative session, groups across Minnesota may now apply for state funds to create their own "Outcome-Based" schools.

The power to accelerate change is always appealing to people dissatisfied with the current state of things. However, as with all change, both the negative and positive effect of that change needs to be examined, as well as how the change will affect the philosophy of what we do.

I have no doubt the concept of charter schools is another step in the direction toward private schools being funded from public taxes to provide "public" education.

Although there are guarantees in the Minnesota Charter schools law preventing white-only academies or schools based on religious beliefs, there are no guarantees that will prevent schools from being set up as a private business run for profit, as Chris Whittle of Whittle Communications and Channel One has proposed; or as an extension of a marketing tool as the Sears company proposed about five years ago when they had a plan to place elementary schools in shopping centers.

Perhaps the basic question that needs to be asked about the use of state money for this experiment is whether there is enough money to fund experimental schools, when such basic things as lowering class size and keep-

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