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**Outcome-based Charter Schools  
Meeting June 26, 1991**

This second meeting of the group had two purposes: to look at the experience of persons who had been involved in starting new schools, and to get an idea of the resources available to persons interested in using the new charter schools law.

Peggy Hunter has been assigned, within the state Department of Education, to help with the implementation of the law. That is: to help both teachers/others interested in forming schools and the school boards they will approach.

Two persons involved with the **Chiron school** in Minneapolis reviewed that experience. The school came out of an impulse by a private individual, who then got ideas from educators about the form of the school, and who then persuaded the school board to take on the school, which they hired teachers to run it. It is a middle school, with 180 students. The idea was to operate in the community, at sites outside regular school buildings.

The lessons? Be clear who's responsible. Chiron ended up not clearly belong to anybody. The district is the sponsor on paper, but not in reality. (At one point the superintendent suggested the school set up as a separate organization; not as a school belonging to the district. The suggestion was rejected.) Staff turnover has been high. Get an experienced administrator. Know what you don't know, and get help. Don't try to start up too quickly. The teachers ought to be involved in the design, and need strong support. A good idea is not enough . . . is not a strategy for success. Publicity is enormously seductive; but a real risk to your success. You'll get overplayed at first; then ripped. "If we had it to do over again I'd start with teachers who had an idea about a good school and work outward from there."

Also: Look carefully at the people who come saying they want out of the bureaucracy. Some will be good folks who were just never given an opportunity to do what they could do. But some will be folks who couldn't work effectively -- and can't, anywhere.

Two others drew from the experience of social-service organizations that had set up schools for drop-out youth during the 1970s. Both of these are cases where the school developed off the base of a pre-existing non-profit.

**The City** was started by inner-city parents whose kids were just hanging out. So they brought school to where the kids were. The schools (now four, really, at two sites) are mission-drive. They believe in culturally diverse communities. They look for kids who have had significant failure in school. Their schools now enroll about 150. About 85% are court-involved. Originally they had planned to send the kids back to regular school. But they learned that the school works when kids develop strong

relationships with adults . . . and that does not transfer-back. They have also learned the importance of planning time. The staff works year-round; and meets for the afternoon after school is out at 11 a.m. on Fridays. There is some small-group work; some with groups of 25 or 30 kids. These schools also discourage publicity. If they had it to do over again they would start up the full program from the beginning: There are some disadvantages to starting small and expanding gradually.

**Plymouth Youth Center** has two schools on Minneapolis' north side. Getting kids to 'affiliate' with adults is the key. This means the student/adult ratio must be low. Their experience is that 65 kids is about right; no more. The school gets services from the parent agency. They get the ratio they need partly by having every adult teach, partly by using volunteers and partly by paying staff somewhat less (about 80% of the district's BA line).

The director of a school started up 'from scratch' described her experience. This school started with an idea -- of providing a chemical-free environment for kids coming out of treatment. It was a lot of trial-and-error. It now has about 28 kids. Find out the requirements. Use a lawyer. The decision here was to pay on a par city city teachers. There has been non turnover in the 3.5 years. Q: Do you wish now you had started up in association with some existing organization? A: Not really. Some pluses; some minuses.

The discussion then turned to where interested teachers might get help. There are good resources available, both for advice and for service. (See sheet attached.)

There was a good deal of discussion about money. Commercial bankers will be very skeptical about start-ups. Foundations have been burned badly with some grants, where school districts have simply taken the money and done whatever they wanted. The National Cooperative Bank is a possibility. Most of the money will be in the state payment; which would be about \$4,600 for a secondary student eligible for compensatory payment. Where the students are especially difficult and ratios need to be low there is more likely to be private help available. Where the students are 'mainstream' and you can't get grant money, ratios can be higher. One experienced person stressed: Every venture like this requires commitment and 'a passion'. It involves risk: There are no guarantees. What you get is autonomy. There is no way you are going to get both autonomy and security, or autonomy and normal reward. At least not quickly. Others agreed, and said there are people who prefer this trade-off. Many are not in regular schools. Some are certified; some not. They are student-driven.

The group began to talk about the different ideas people have, about what sort of student group to form-around and about method of instruction. But time ran out, and this was laid over until a later meeting.