

25 March 91

This Gallup Poll from the 1989 Kappan bears on the legislation this year: a radical change in the system. It's always nice to know the public is with you.

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Friday discussion was important. The issue joined on a key question, as Tom said: Who's helped and hurt. Those 'outside forces' are always representing as hurting other schools and other kids. Tom and Doug and Joe and Mike Damyanovich argued they're essential to helping the other schools and other kids.

Barry's agreement with that . . . maybe Louise's too . . . was important.

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The Westonka superintendent's story, about what caused improvement there, is right on point.

"Perfect evidence for your case," Mammenga said when he saw it.

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The MEA clearly does not accept it. The state office has put out the word to the local leadership to tell their legislators, over the Easter recess, to defeat SF 630.

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There was a chance to fill Todd Otis in on the bill this morning. He authored a site-management bill about 1986-87, which the MSBA killed. He still likes the idea. He understands how charter schools is site-management too. He sees a lot of people. If he could pass along Tom Nelson's feeling . . . that this is the most important innovation in education policy this session . . . that would be helpful.

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Local officials might find an interest, too, in the state's opening up a non-financial route to school-improvement.

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Here's a memo I drafted over the weekend, which I may send around the state and to some extent beyond. I'd appreciate your comments. I'd like to move it in the next couple of days.

Confidential

**Charter Schools:**

Meeting 22 March 91. Present: Sen. Reichgott, Rep. Kelso, Tom Nelson, Superintendent James Walker, Louise Sundin, Elaine Salinas, Rose Hermodson, Barbara Schmidt, Doug Wallace, Ted Kolderie, Mike Damyanovich, Pete Vanderpoel, Barry Noack, Betsy Rice, Cheryl Fuhr and another MEA representative.

Sen. Reichgott introduces the meeting. Tom Nelson recalls the debate on choice 1985-88. It's been a good program, now accepted. It hasn't hurt public education. It's encouraged districts to improve. The new work on charter schools started last summer. (He lists members.) It produced a draft bill. This is the major innovation for education this legislative session. I hope it can go forward without being too burdened with restrictions. It's tough to carry these bills but sometimes they're necessary.

Jim Walker: I'm excited about the potential of this. We've had teachers managing their budgets for some time. Now we have a school running without a principal. This bill will further empower teachers. I wanted to be sure a board could be a chartering agency; that teachers could stay in TRA, etc. Some North Branch teachers are excited, too. Some are anti. The board is basically supportive.

Barry Noack: I share a lot of your concerns. We've worked with Shanker on change. It is really hard to get change. There's a lot of inertia, no question about it. We've got to do some new things. I do part company with the bill on the question of sponsors. It's OK for it to be a school board. My question is with the state board and the post-secondary boards. They have their own, different missions. Bringing them in would be a major change in public schools. Also, teachers in the charter schools should be part of the same bargaining unit. We can make change within the system. I have a problem with others sponsoring schools, taking money away from us.

Nathan: There are a lot of good things going on. But way too often the middle management in districts is blocking change.

Nelson: The 'first four' sponsors you mention -- boards, education district boards, intermediate district boards, joint powers boards -- are all basically the same people: local board members. The State Board really is 'somebody else'. That's an essential part of this. Noack: Maybe the State Board is OK. Kolderie: The working group talked about general local government too: cities and counties.

Sundin: Adding other sponsors adds bureaucracy. I'm reasonably comfortable with the state board. But the University running a school? Alice Rainville? If we're concerned about middle

management we ought to do something about middle management. We shouldn't just try to go around the problem. We've been trying to get people to innovate . . . challenging people to work within the system, to help all schools. Not to 'exit'. MEA: We hear the same thing from teachers. Don't build a parallel structure.

Nathan: We've been trying this kind of thing for decades. It's just too hard. We have to create some programs new. And that helps everybody, because it causes other schools and districts to respond.

Wallace: For real change there has got to be outside pressure. Of course, you also work from within. But you've got to have that pressure from the outside . . . that leverage on the district bureaucracy. You've got to do both.

Nelson: This is the key. This is the catalyst. Even if we could have even 10 charter schools, and I think we would not have more than this in the first few years, all districts would begin to respond.

Rep. Kelso: The University wouldn't be running a school. It might be a sponsor. But the idea is for the sponsor not to run the school. Kolderie: That's right. Hermodson: Maybe the unions ought to run the teacher-training programs.

Damyanovich: I'd like to speak to the question of outside change. I've been in my district 27 years. My job is to be a change-agent. We have about \$50,000 a year to fund innovation. We try. But it's fringe stuff: Nobody really wants to bump the system. Originally I worked with technology. Now we're moving to curriculum/instruction. That may go better. But it's caused by the new external forces. The culture of education is fear of taking risks. Kolderie: I remember that last spring you told me about the district putting in 'the whole schmeer' of post-secondary programs, and you said: "As soon as our people saw those kids walking out the door, and we couldn't stop it, we knew we had to do that." Damyanovich: That's right.

Sen. Reichgott: Let's talk some more about this question. Inside, outside . . . and if we work outside, are we hurting those within. I never felt we did, but let's talk about it. Will someone from the teacher groups speak to this question?

Sundin: There isn't time to create new models. We don't want to bring our present efforts to a halt. Sen. Reichgott: The charter schools idea doesn't ask you to slow what you're doing now. Sundin: None of these new schools can operate on what it gets from the state; all of them require private dollars. That competes with our fund-raising.

Noack: I agree with Doug about outside pressure. But the new schools may present an economic problem. There's now an oversupply of teachers. People could start schools with teachers paid lower, and undercut our efforts all these years to raise

salaries. Maybe with the State Board this would not be a problem. Sen. Reichgott: It's possible teachers in new schools might end up earning more. Sundin: That's not the case today. Nathan: The St. Paul Open School costs less than a regular school.

MEA: The question is getting permission to change. Teachers are interested in schools-within-schools. But they want to know if the state is serious. Sen. Reichgott: Charter schools is not a mandate. But it would give teachers this opportunity. What's to lose, by trying it? MEA: We could lose time, and resources for other schools. Hermodson: Some things that seem like good ideas end up hurting teachers later. Ten years or so ago somebody thought special-ed co-ops were a good idea. Now we're dismantling these. And the districts are unwilling to take the teachers back. MFT is in court about this. I need to talk to you about this bill. If charter schools fail be sure the teachers are protected. Sen. Reichgott: No teacher would be assigned to a charter school. It's voluntary. And there are other kinds of failures. I think about some of my colleagues in college, who went into teaching, and have all left now because there was no opportunity to do what they thought needed to be done. We just want to give teachers chances.

MEA: In addition to this 'overhang' of teachers on leave there is the problem with the provision about licensure. That is very offensive. Sen. Reichgott: You understand, in the bill, there can be unlicensed teachers only at the request of the teachers in the school. I insisted on strengthening the licensing provision of the bill. MEA: Maybe we should provide for unlicensed doctors. Kolderie: Nurses are now doing all sorts of things that used to be done only by MDs, including delivering babies.

Hermodson: Who's going to oversee all this? I have a real concern about all the shysters out there. Wallace: That was our first concern in the working group. We built in lots of safeguards. Nelson: It's been the state's effort to write into law a protection against every possible abuse that's created all this regulation and bureaucracy we complain about.

Sen. Reichgott: Other concerns? Noack: What is this advisory committee to the state board. It looks like reverse racism. Kolderie: It is a piece of affirmative action. That was exactly the intent. Vanderpoel: To balance out other folks, you might say, who are mostly white. (Elaine Salinas explains the background and intent.)

Hermodson: The pension folks might have a concern. The bill would let teachers contribute quite a while at a low rate. When you go on leave you contribute at the salary rate you had at the time you left.

MEA: Look at situations outside the Twin Cities area. Nathan: There's a lot of interest in this sort of things, here. Folks in Cyrus, for example, are facing consolidation and they are very

upset about the forces that might cost them that good school they have. There're lots of frustrated people out there.

Sundin: Then why not just require a board to grant a charter, if certain criteria are met? Sen. Reichgott: Do you really mean that? Walker: I'd like to see proposals brought to the board, with a right of appeal for people if the board doesn't act favorably. Kolderie: The working group started with the idea of setting criteria, but gave it up. There's always the risk you'd rule out some good improvements. And the risk some crazies would get to start a school. Instead, the group went for the idea of the sponsor. Nobody gets a right to start a school: You have to persuade a common-sense public body to charter you. That's a key different from the voucher approach we're hearing so much about these days, where the state says OK based on somebody meeting criteria, and the school's accountability is entirely to parents.<sup>7</sup>

Noack: Maybe there's not a problem if sponsorship is limited to the first five, and exclude the post-secondaries. (To Wallace): You've sold me. But if the State Board is in, we should give them the resources to do it right. Kolderie: There're some other dimensions of 'doing it right', too; like resources for outreach to people who might want to form schools, or need to hear about them once they're formed. Nelson: If you give the department the charge to do this, they'll find a way to finance it.

Sen. Reichgott: Anything else?

Noack: Subd. 7; the exemption from rules. Is that too broad? Wallace: We need that. Absolutely. It's the tradeoff for being accountable in ways the present schools are not. Nathan: Tell the public school educators they can apply for these exemptions too. Noack: I support this.

Sen. Reichgott: It's almost three. The hearing resumes Wednesday. We should draft what seems reasonable in the way of changes. That doesn't mean there won't be further opportunity to raise questions. There's a long road ahead of us yet.

→ March 27<sup>th</sup>