

21 December 91

Recent (and forthcoming) developments:

**Lynn Olson at Education Week is at work on a major piece about the charter schools idea.** She is looking both at the history -- and now implementation -- of the idea in Minnesota and at the spread of the idea to the policy discussion in other states. The piece should run in early January. She is calling around quite extensively; talking to people on all sides of the question. If you want to talk to Lynn you can reach her at 202/364-4114.

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There'll be a **criticism of charter schools** in a book by Lew Perelman coming out early in '92. His argument is that only for-profit schools will be able to attract the capital needed to develop a significant alternative to the existing system.

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The MN Federation of Teachers (**MFT**) **proposes repeal** of the '91 law in its new legislative program for 1992. The MEA Advocate ran a balanced pro-and-con piece in its most recent issue: Alan Jones from North Branch wrote the pro position.

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The application from **Winona** to turn an existing Montessori into a charter school **was approved** by the State Board of Education. Both Rep. Kelso and Sen. Reichgott were at the meeting.

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The other serious, and promising, **proposal** -- for a new middle school -- is **coming along in Northfield**. After an initially noncommittal response the superintendent said some things about how this would 'hurt' the district. Sponsors have made two important points in response:

\* The Northfield community will have for all practical purposes the same number of kids and the same total resources with the new school as before. In approving the application the board will be distributing its resources in a slightly different way. The community does not lose: The community gains an innovative school.

\* The redistribution impacts the district. The superintendent has to decide how that impact -- estimated at about 1.5 per cent

of the present district budget -- should fall. Nothing requires him to concentrate the impact on any particular group of kids and/or teachers (say, on the district's middle school).

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The **Milwaukee** board of education was to decide last week whether to **ask the Wisconsin Legislature for authority to charter schools**. The draft legislative position (attached) sounds like it might be modeled on the Minnesota legislation; though, note, it would be open for the board "to contract with a group or individual . . .".

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**The charter schools idea will be in the Massachusetts Legislature, probably in Florida and Connecticut and perhaps in Tennessee in '92.**

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The **charter schools idea is likely to benefit from the continuing and strengthening push for vouchers -- public funding of existing private/parochial schools -- and from frustration with the unsuccessful efforts at "school site management"**.

'Site management' just is not turning out to be a way to produce different and better schools. Even where superintendents and boards of education push it (Miami, New York, Detroit, Hawaii, Minneapolis) it doesn't take. It may be that 'empowerment' requires the school to be a legally distinct organization.