

1 March 1992

It time (more than time) to round up some of the developments re: charter schools. Probably nobody has a complete picture. But here're some assorted notes in no particular order.

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Proposals in Minnesota

The proposal in Northfield MN was not-approved by the board, 5-2 February 24. Sen. Reichgott went to Northfield for the meeting. It's the first proposal we know of to come to a vote and not be approved. Griff Wigley and the others did a very skillful job. The new middle school was opposed by the superintendent, Charles Kyte, and that proved too big a hurdle.

Griff says they saw several indications during the discussions that just the existence of their proposal was causing people in the district to be more aggressive about change; and some major proposal from the superintendent for a reorganization may now follow. It's the sort of 'second-order' effect we've seen also from the post-secondary options program.

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There's a proposal currently before the Minneapolis board. It comes from Bob DeBoer, who has been contracted to Minneapolis for a program called Way to Learn and now wants to come under the charter law. It serves brain-damaged children with a non-traditional approach that has drawn opposition from some in the special-ed community. It was laid over by the board February 25. There will be a public meeting March 11. It should come back to the board March 17. This proposal has the approval of the superintendent, Bob Ferrera.

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In Mounds View the area learning center (ALC) has proposed to switch to charter status. The staff voted 32-2 February 27 to request the change. The matter should come up on the board agenda March 9.

Because they deal with kids who haven't 'fit' in regular school the ALCs tend to do school differently. This sometimes brings them into conflict with district-administration. (This is what seems to have happened in Mounds View.) The organizational independence provided by the charter law provides the opportunity these programs require to meet the different needs of at-risk kids.

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The board in Rochester is having an 'educational session' March 9. An existing Montessori proposes to come into the public system on the charter model.

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There continues to be no pattern to the proposals appearing in Minnesota. Every application is different: existing, new, metropolitan, rural, from teachers, from others with teachers, for mainline kids, for 'different' kids; in various combinations.

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A lawyer friend in Minneapolis has suggested a variation that might be worth considering, in organizing a charter school.

The lawyer suggests the full group of teachers who will be working in the school form a Chapter 323 limited partnership. This entity would contract with the board of the school to operate the instructional program of the school. The contract would be for a defined amount. The overall board would be mainly responsible for the non-instructional functions. The teachers, within their partnership, would decide how to spend the money they receive to produce the instructional program. They would design the curriculum, select the materials, decide who teaches what, plan the training, evaluate teacher performance and set the compensation.

Other Developments

The proposal top-rated for the New American Schools Development Corporation competition, endorsed now both by the state (Gov. Carlson and Commissioner Mammenga) and by the Minnesota Business Partnership, is a proposal from Public School Incentives which builds heavily on the potential of the choice and charter school laws in Minnesota. Applications closed February 24. Winners are to be announced in May.

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Charter schools bills have been introduced in California: See the Education Week clip, enclosed. These might move this year. It depends partly on how much a threat the private-school voucher initiative presents. Clearly the charter school bills are to some degree a defensive measure against that threat.

But they're more than that. Both Sen. Hart and Assembly Member Eastin are reported to be interested in becoming State Superintendent of Education in California -- a job which would open up in 1994 if Bill Honig decides (as now predicted) not to run again -- and this new-public-schools idea may be a foundation of their strategy for system-improvement.