

8 April 1992

A few recent developments:

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The board in Mounds View turned down the proposal from its Alternative Learning Center to convert to charter status. The vote was 4-3.

The principal argument offered publicly went basically this way: "The school exists. It's doing a good job now. So why give it a charter? A charter school is supposed to be innovative. No innovation here. Just a bunch of folks who want to be independent of the district." Privately the superintendent said this was "the real reason" for the proposal. There is a strong effort to portray it as a conflict among administrators.

Of course when -- as in Northfield -- the proposal is for a new school it is rejected for the opposite reason: "This is new and untried . . . unproven . . . therefore risky. A new school will take kids away from the existing school, and create problems for the district re: finances, teachers, etc."

The superintendent has told the director of the ALC he will be transferred out effective April 13.

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The developing pattern seems to be for the superintendent and board:

a) To reject proposals. (Most places, though, the board is divided.)

b) To try to show that "We (can) do this ourselves".

This suggests that:

a) Districts feel pressure about improvement even from a proposal for a charter school,

b) If charter schools are really going to appear the proponents will need the option to approach 'somebody else'.

c) If (b) happened and charter schools really did appear it might get the districts moving even faster on improvement.

If you'd like to look at any of the three documents from superintendents opposing a charter proposals, call.

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Enclosed is a copy of the national report on school boards, referred-to in an article in the Star-Tribune last Sunday.

Its main thrust is that boards need to be policy boards -- which of course they would be if the schools were separate entities, 'chartered'.

Look at the clip enclosed from Rochester NY. Only two years ago this was the shining example of "restructuring" . . . of the notion that education can be improved from within . . . that "We can do it ourselves".

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The charter schools bill passed out of the education committee in the California Senate today (April 8). It was supported by the state department. It was opposed by the California Teachers Association.

The state school boards association actually said nice things about it, but almost certainly has in mind killing out later the provision that gives the organizers of the school the right to go to the state board on appeal.

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In Tennessee the bill for a pilot 'charter schools' program came within a vote of approval by the House education committee April 7. It didn't get defeated: It will be studied by a joint House/Senate interim group and brought back to the '93 session.

It was partisan politics that got it; not issues related to the bill itself. Back at the start of the session this year the Republicans had floated a big 'choice' program as an alternative to the (Democratic) governor's conventional school-improvement plan. The governor didn't get much of his plan through. So when the charter schools bill came along -- brought along really by some private citizens but supported by most Republicans on the committee -- the governor's staff at the last moment warned Democratic legislators away from it.

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