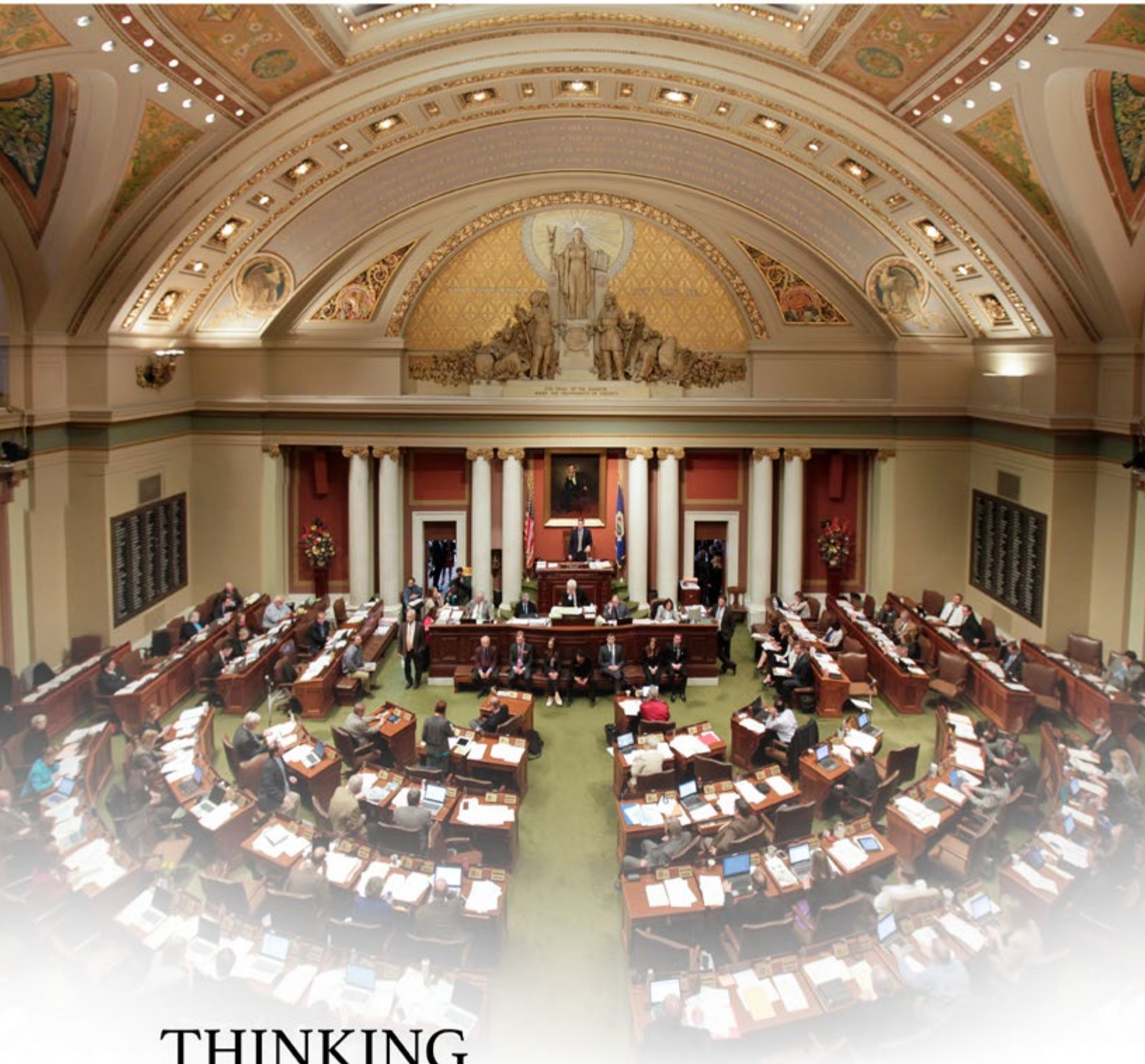


ORGANIZING DISTRICTS • TO ENABLE
SCHOOLS • TO MOTIVATE STUDENTS



THINKING
OUT THE **HOW**... PUBLIC EDUCATION

CENTER FOR POLICY DESIGN

The first in this pair of policy papers – <http://bit.ly/MinnesotaSystemRedesign> – pointed to the need for the state to help school districts adapt to the options-based system of public education the Legislature has created here.

This second paper contains a rough draft of an ‘Optional Plans of District Organization’ statute aimed at enabling districts more easily to introduce the changes needed to persuade families to enroll. It also explains why organization, structure, matters for a district’s capacity to adapt.

The Legislature’s policy of developing the state’s school options within the framework of public education does set Minnesota somewhat apart . . . but might be of interest elsewhere. To send this paper to others the link is <http://bit.ly/FourOptionalPlans>.

As always, we invite your responses and suggestions.

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1. The step remaining for the Legislature in shaping its options-based redesign of Minnesota public education is to help school districts into an organizational form better able to pick up the innovations appearing in the schools that students are now choosing in the non-district sector.

An earlier paper (<http://bit.ly/MinnesotaSystemRedesign>) from the Center for Policy Design describes the opening of Minnesota's public education in the mid-1980s. It explains how the Legislature has been creating a de-centralized system, with a variety of public and publicly-authorized entities offering public school. In this new open public system significant innovation is beginning to appear, offering students the opportunity to find what fits them best.

The challenge now is to get the district sector to pick up the new models and new approaches appearing. Action will likely come gradually, school-by-school and district-by-district, since not everyone is at the start ready for the significantly-different.

The traditional organization of school districts makes change difficult. A different form of district organization probably will be needed; either one with stronger central leadership or one with decisions decentralized to the schools and teachers.

Unfortunately . . . **'Are we organized right?' is a question boards never ask, says a superintendent who has served several, and seen many.**

The state needs to get that question asked and answered—and can, by putting into law a set of optional forms of organization that districts—the citizens, voters—can adopt if they wish . . . the Legislature using an approach successful earlier with municipal government.

This second paper lays out four alternate plans of school district organization, together with a process for their consideration and adoption.

Three of the plans are 'statutory'. The idea is to put them into legislation so that only a 'yes' from the voters is needed for adoption. The fourth would let a community design a plan specific to its own needs.

The four are summarized below. After the summaries come the specifics; a rough-draft bill showing what an 'optional forms' statute would look like.

Plan A maintains the current arrangement in which the board owns and runs the schools, but provides a new element of policy and political leadership for the district by having the chair of the board, or president, directly elected. Currently the chair is chosen by the other members of the board. The directly-elected chair would resemble the mayor in suburban city government.

Plan B carries essentially the concept in Minnesota's 2009 legislation for 'self-governed schools'. The schools would operate under agreement with the board, and be overseen by the board, but would not be 'run' by the board. The board would function much as the 'authorizer' does in the charter sector. A school could be 'teacher powered' should its teachers wish.

Plan C brings the schools into the framework of general local government, county government specifically. The school board would concentrate on learning; the county handling the non-instructional functions and making available to students its health and social services.

Plan D offers a procedure by which a district could draft a new plan of organization specifically for itself. It is essentially the 'home rule' process available to cities that want to design their own form of governance. It offers the opportunity to use elements of any or all of the statutory plans. Other ideas could be worked in: mayoral control, for example. It is a more complicated process, but it offers an opportunity for a community to be creative.

Before you read the rough-draft bill it is good to emphasize that:

- **This is not a state mandate. It is enabling legislation. No district would have to do anything.** The state is simply giving the people of the district the opportunity to act if they find a redesign useful in realizing the mission they have set for themselves.
- **Each of the plans is in a different way intended to increase the capacity of the district to adapt, diversify and shape options attractive to its resident students.** As change and innovation spread, Minnesota will develop a self-improving system of public education.

2. Here is the rough draft of a bill for an Optional Forms of District Organization statute. Readers will ask an obvious question about the ‘why’ of organizational change—which a section following will answer.

Section 1. Optional Plans.

Subdivision 1. Purpose. The Act is intended to facilitate and improve student outcomes by offering voter approved district governance options that are designed to encourage innovation and accountability within the district.

Subdivision 2. Optional Plan A—Elected Leadership District. A district may provide for the direct election of the board chair by the voters, with the chair to be one of the publicly elected board members and having the leadership responsibilities described in Section 5, subdivision 2.

Subdivision 3. Optional Plan B—De-centralized District. A district may establish a structure by which it delegates specific authorities to schools pursuant to the terms of an agreement approved by the board, under which the school assumes the responsibility for managing the instructional and certain non-instructional aspects of the school.

Subdivision 4. Optional Plan C—County-Partner District. A district may contract with a county or third party to provide some or all of the non-instructional functions of the district in order to gain greater economic efficiency and permit the district to focus on its educational mission.

Subdivision 5. Optional Plan D—Home-Rule District. A district may establish itself as a home-rule district to be governed by a home-rule charter, to be developed by a board appointed task force and approved by the board. A home-rule district must comply with the requirements of a charter school under chapter 124E, but need not comply with other requirements for districts.

Subdivision 6. Adoption or abandonment. Any one of the foregoing plans may be adopted or abandoned in a district by following the procedures set forth in Section 2. Until the adoption of such a plan, the district shall continue to operate pursuant to the provisions of this chapter.

Section 2. Election to Adopt an Optional Plan.

Subdivision 1. One plan per election. The board may, and upon petition therefor signed by voters equal in number to at least 15 percent of the voters voting at the last previous board election, shall, submit to the voters at a regular or special election the question of adoption by the district of Optional Plan A, B, C or D. Except as provided in Section 8, subdivision 3, only one plan shall be so submitted at any one election. No plan shall be submitted in any district in which another optional plan is already in effect until the latter plan has been in effect for at least three years.

Subdivision 2. Form of ballot. The proposals for the adoption of optional plans shall be stated on the ballot substantially as follows:

“Shall Optional Plan A, modifying the standard plan of district government by providing for the direct election of the board chair, be adopted for the district?”

“Shall Optional Plan B, providing for the district to establish delegate responsibility to its schools, be adopted for the district?”

“Shall Optional Plan C, permitting the district to contract with the County of _____ and/or other third parties to provide certain services to the district, be adopted for the district?”

“Shall the district be governed pursuant to the terms of the home rule plan approved by the board on _____, 20____, as provided in Optional Plan D?”

Subdivision 3. Adoption. If a majority of the votes cast on the question of adoption of Optional Plan A, B, C or D is in the affirmative, the plan so voted upon shall be adopted in the district and, once placed in effect as subsequently provided in this section, shall remain in effect until abandoned by a similar majority at subsequent election at which the question of abandonment or adoption of another optional plan is submitted.

Subdivision 4. Three-year minimum; abandonment. At any time more than three years after the adoption of an optional plan in a district, the question of abandonment of such plan may be submitted to the voters, in the same manner provided in the foregoing sections for the submission of the question of adoption. If a majority of the votes cast on the question is in favor of abandonment, the plan shall be abandoned; and the standard plan of government shall be resumed in the district and all the provisions of law applicable to districts in which an optional plan is not in operation shall thereafter apply to the district.

Subdivision 5. Filing election certificate. Whenever the question of adoption or abandonment of an optional plan is submitted in any district and results in a majority vote in favor of the question submitted, the district shall promptly file with the county

auditor, the commissioner, and with the secretary of state a certificate stating the date of election, the question submitted, and the vote on the question.

Section 3. Applicable Law; Same Rights, Liabilities, Proceedings.

Subdivision 1. Consistent laws apply. Except in the case of Optional Plan C, all laws of the state applicable to a district before the adoption of an optional plan and not inconsistent with the provisions relating to such plan shall apply to and govern the district after the adoption of any optional plan.

Subdivision 2. Resolutions. Any resolution or policy in effect at the time of adoption of such plan shall continue in effect until duly amended or repealed, notwithstanding the adoption of such optional plan.

Subdivision 3. Same rights, liabilities, proceedings; exception. No valid and legally subsisting right or liability and no judicial proceeding shall be affected by any such change of government, unless otherwise provided.

Section 4. Transition Rule.

In the event Optional Plan A is adopted in a district, the board shall continue to elect its chair consistent with past practice until the next board election is held, at which time a board chair shall be elected by voters as contemplated by Optional Plan A. The board chair will be elected in lieu of one of the other board member positions that would have otherwise been elected at such time, such that the size of the board remains the same as it was prior to the adoption of Optional Plan A.

Section 5. Optional Plan A—Elected Board Chair.

Subdivision 1. Board. Under Optional Plan A, the size of the board shall continue to be determined pursuant to section 123B.09 provided that one of the board members shall be directly elected by the voters as board chair. The board shall retain all authorized duties prescribed by this chapter, including section 123B.09.

Subdivision 2. Duties of Board Chair. The elected board chair shall have the following duties:

- (a) Provide general policy leadership for the district and the board.
- (b) Provide for the development of an annual and long-range plan for the district.
- (c) Work in conjunction with the superintendent to develop an annual budget to be presented to the board for consideration and approval.

- (d) Act as the official spokesperson for the district.
- (e) Appoint all board committees and designate board members to serve in other appropriate capacities, including representatives to other organizations and associations in which the board participates.
- (f) Provide an annual report to the public concerning the state of the district.
- (g) Preside at all meetings of the board.
- (h) Collaborates with the superintendent to set meeting agendas.
- (i) Perform other functions as determined by the board.
- (j) Provide for oversight and evaluation of the superintendent.

Subdivision 3. Superintendent. The board shall employ a superintendent who shall be responsible for the administration of the district and shall have the authority and duties set forth in section 123B.143. The superintendent shall attend all meetings of the board, may participate in discussion at the meetings, but shall not be an ex officio member of the board. The board may have an executive session during any board meeting, during which the superintendent may be excused from the meeting. The superintendent of a district shall perform the following:

- (a) Visit and supervise the schools in the district, report and make recommendations about their condition when advisable or on request by the board;
- (b) Recommend to the board employment and dismissal of teachers;
- (c) Annually evaluate each school principal assigned responsibility for supervising a school building within the district, consistent with section 123B.147, subdivision 3, paragraph (b);
- (d) Oversee school grading practices and examinations for promotions;
- (e) Make reports required by the commissioner;
- (f) Work with the board chair to prepare an annual budget for the district to be presented to the board for approval; and
- (g) Perform other duties prescribed by the board.

Subdivision 4. Limit on Board powers. Neither the board nor any of its members shall dictate the appointment of any person to office or employment by the superintendent, or in any manner interfere with the superintendent or prevent the superintendent from exercising judgment in the appointment of officers and employees. Except for the purpose of inquiry, the board and its members shall oversee the administrative ser-

vices of the district solely through the superintendent, and neither the board nor any of its members shall give orders to any subordinate of the superintendent, either publicly or privately.

Section 6. Optional Plan B—Self-Governed Schools.

Subdivision 1. Authority. A board of a district operating under Optional Plan B may approve an unlimited number of schools to operate within the district. The board shall request proposals for the types of schools and/or innovations the board seeks. A school-based group may also submit a proposal to the board for consideration. Such a proposal may be based on a model requested by the board or may be based on a model developed by the school based group.

Subdivision 2. Roles and responsibilities of self-governed schools.

- (a) Schools approved by the board under this section have the following autonomy and responsibilities:
 - (1) Create the governing arrangements for the school.
 - (2) Determine the leadership model for the school, which may include a principal model, a teacher professional practice model with school leadership functions performed by one or more teachers or administrators at the school, or any other model;
 - (3) Determine the budget for the school and the allocation and expenditure of the revenue based on provisions of subdivision 4;
 - (4) Determine the learning model and organization of the school;
 - (5) Select and develop its curriculum and determine formative and summative assessment practices;
 - (6) Set policies for the school including student promotion, attendance, discipline, graduation requirements, which may exceed the board standards, and other such rules as approved by the board consistent with the mission, goals, and learning program of the school;
 - (7) Determine the length of the school day and year and employee work rules covered by the terms and conditions of the employment contract;
 - (8) Select teachers and other staff consistent with current law and collective bargaining agreements and any applicable memoranda of understanding. The district shall be the legal employer of all staff at the school and all teachers and other staff members of the applicable bargaining units. Teachers and other employees may be required to sign an individual work agreement with the governing council committing themselves to

the mission and learning program of the school and the requirements of the governing council; and

- (9) Fulfill other provisions as agreed to by the district.
- (b) If a school created under this section is supervised by a principal, that principal must be licensed, consistent with section 123B.147, subdivision 2.

Subdivision 3. Contract. The district and any school shall enter into a written school contract providing the terms and conditions by which the school will be governed, operated and evaluated. The contract must address at least those responsibilities set forth in subdivision 2, and may address any other agreements between the school and the district. Any powers or duties not delegated shall remain with the board.

Subdivision 4. Revenue to self-governed school.

- (a) The revenue that shall be allocated by the school includes all education revenue generated by the students at the school from state, federal, local, and private sources, including referendum revenue.
- (b) The district may retain a reasonable administrative fee for managing the federal programs, private revenues, and general administrative functions including board, superintendent, district legal counsel, finance, accountability and school contract oversight, facilities maintenance, districtwide special education programs, and other such services as agreed to by the school and the board. The administrative fee shall be set forth in the contract.
- (c) The district may provide specific services for the school and may specify the amount to be paid for each service and retain the revenues for that amount, all as set forth in the contract between the school and the district. The formula or procedures for determining the amount of revenue to be allocated to the school each year shall be consistent with this subdivision and incorporated in the school budget annually following a timeline and process that is included in the contract between the school and the district.
- (d) All unspent revenue at the school shall be carried over to following years for the sole use of the school.

Subdivision 5. Exemption from statutes and rules. Except as outlined in this section, schools established under this section are exempt from and subject to the same laws and rules as are chartered schools under chapter 124E.

Subdivision 6. Performance standards.

- (a) The contract between the school and the district shall include performance standards and expectations that shall include at least the follows:

- (1) Student achievement targets on multiple indicators including either a growth model or value-added growth model; and such alternative measures of student achievement as may be mutually agreed upon;
- (2) The criteria and process to be followed if it is determined that the school fails to comply with district oversight and accountability requirements as outlined in the agreement; and
- (3) Other performance provisions as agreed to.

Subdivision 7. Board termination of self-governed school authority.

- (a) The board may terminate the contract between the school and the district for one or more of the following reasons:
 - (1) Failure of the school to comply with the terms of the contract;
 - (2) Violations of law; or
 - (3) Other good cause shown

Section 7 Optional Plan C - County-Partnership District.

Subdivision 1. Authority. A district organized under Optional Plan C may contract with (i) the county in which the district or any portion thereof, is located, (ii) with another third party that is a non-for-profit entity; or (iii) with another “governmental unit” under the Minn. Stat. 471.59., to provide any non-instructional support functions or services necessary to operate the district. The functions that may be contracted include, but are not limited to, transportation, buildings and grounds, food service, social and health services for students, child care; purchasing, or any other non-instructional functions of the district. Except as otherwise specifically provided in law, the district may not contract for or otherwise delegate the responsibility for the development of the educational curriculum and the delivery of instructional services to students.

Subdivision 2. Contract. The district shall enter into a written contract defining the scope of services to be provided to the district, the method by which county, third party, or governmental unit, will be reimbursed for such services, the length of the contract, the manner in which legal liability will be allocated among the parties, who will procure liability insurance related to the services, and any other terms and conditions typical for a contract for services. The contract must be approved by the board of the district.

Subdivision 3. Combined Options. A district may combine Optional Plan C with any of the other Optional Plans authorized under this chapter, and any such combined options shall be submitted to the voters under section 2, with the form of ballot to be appropriately revised to reflect the combined options.

Section 8. Optional Plan D — Home-Rule Districts.

Subdivision 1. Home-Rule Task Force. The board may establish a home-rule task force to advise the board on the merits of establishing home-rule governance of the district. The composition and number of task force members shall be determined by the board, and must include representatives of the board, teachers, administrative staff, parents and community members. The task force will report to the board concerning the merits of establishing the district as a home-rule district and if requested by the board, shall prepare a proposed home-rule charter for consideration by the board. The proposed home-rule charter shall be subject to revision and approval by the board, and if approved, shall be submitted for voter approval as provided in this chapter.

Subdivision 2. Home-Rule Charter. A home-rule charter may provide for any governance structure for the district not inconsistent with the constitution, including the method by which the board will be elected and the manner in which the district and its schools will be administered. The home-rule charter may include any provisions consistent with, and must at a minimum comply with, the requirements of a charter school under chapter 124E.

Subdivision 3. Approval. A proposed home-rule charter must first be approved by the board. A board approved home-rule charter shall be submitted to the voters for approval as provided in Section 2. If approved by the voters, the district shall thereafter be governed by the home-rule charter until such home-rule charter is abandoned as provided in Section 2, subdivision 4. A copy of the approved home-rule charter shall be included in the filing made under Section 2, subdivision 5.

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Quite likely many reading the draft bill and considering the four plans will be asking themselves . . . *Why* re-form the organization of the school district?

Simply . . . because money, mandates, regulations, exhortation, pilot projects have all been tried; because the strategy of moving to a different form of organization has not been tried, and needs to be tried. Structure does matter.

Hopefully what follows will explain.

3. For an organization needing to change and adapt, the form of organization matters. The organizational arrangement contains the incentives — the reasons to change and opportunities to change—that shape performance.

It is important to see clearly the essential in the effort to ‘fix’ public education. **There is a new and different job to do, now. We have been trying to make the old organization do today’s new job.** The vacuous exhortation heard today, that “We must . . .” do better, expresses the determination to raise system performance. But no matter how often or how insistently repeated, the “We must . . .” does not, can not, get us there. To do the new job a new kind of school district will be needed.

Start with the reality. The ‘existing organization’, in Minnesota as most everywhere, is an independent special district. Education is the responsibility of a set of elected officials with no other responsibility. State law calls the boards of these special districts *school* boards; the associations of district superintendents call their members *school* administrators.

That organizational arrangement has consequences. The boards’ conviction that their job is “to run the schools” is central to the behavior of the district sector today.

Meeting every two weeks, the boards drift into micromanagement. In large cities the central offices grow large. In these centralized organizations there develops a powerful imperative for ‘sameness’ that makes it difficult for those in charge to adapt to the differences among neighborhoods and among students. Uniformity is often represented as ‘equity’, as ‘fairness’.

Schools are limited in their ability to be-different or to do-different, when ‘different’ might violate that political imperative or inconvenience the central office. “The cards are stacked against innovation”, Professor John Goodlad wrote in *A Place Called School* in 1985.

There is no elected leadership: Boards look to the superintendent for leadership. “Give us your vision’, they ask during the search. Yet in major cities boards turn over that leadership rapidly; superintendents often resigning or being dismissed in just a few years.

That ‘sameness’, the inability to adapt to the differing needs of students, is inconsistent with the districts’ stated mission: their promise that ‘each student’, ‘every student’, comes out a well-educated person.

Taken seriously, the affirmation about ‘every student’ would mean having a form of organization that made the school the unit of improvement so the school could personalize learning for the student.

“Any successful effort to improve student learning will begin by improving student motivation”, Jack Frymier said when at Phi Delta Kappa, the education professional organization. And motivation, he said, is individual; different students are motivated by different things. It is the teacher’s job to adapt the instruction to those individual differences. But that has to be done in the school: Only the teachers know the students as individuals.

The nations whose schools America are urged to emulate have education organized differently.

Finland is often held up as a model. Clearly there is much to admire about its schools and especially about their teachers. The idea seems plausible: Finland is almost exactly the size of Minnesota. But Finland had the opportunity to create its school system almost anew in the 1970s after it became independent of Russia and set out to build a modern economy. And the system it created, with its admirable features, is organizationally unlike ours in ways that, unfortunately, those recommending it to us as a model tend not to discuss.

That difference was evident to the American delegation that visited Finland in 2012.

- On top of a strong social commitment to parenting and early child care Finland has arranged a fairly conventional program of schooling: nine years of compulsory ‘basic school’ (ending at age 16) followed by two years of non-compulsory ‘upper secondary’; academic or technical as the student chooses. Only a few—about 10—university programs for teacher education were established. Teacher salaries are set nationally; employers and the teachers union bargaining in roughly the process we use here in the building trades.

Most important: Public education in Finland is the responsibility of general local government. Which, again, matters.

- Consider its largest city, Helsinki (significantly larger than Minneapolis). Finland's national government—'the state', as Europeans say—makes Helsinki a general grant of revenue. The city adds revenue from a local (income) tax. Then in a budgeting process *at the municipal level* the revenue is allocated among public safety, public works, public welfare, public parks, public education and the other city functions.
- Not surprisingly, the city department of education is fairly small. That accounts for most operating decisions being made in the schools, where teachers have a significant voice.

Some urge our districts — superintendents, principals and boards—to create a Finnish system here. But can they, given so different an organizational arrangement here? It would seem difficult-to-impossible for us to do as Finland does when we are not what Finland is.

Yet we might get to something like Finland's schools from where we are in Minnesota.

In the first meeting of Governor Perpich's discussion group in 1985 the executive of the Minnesota School Boards Association, Willard Baker, said: "We'll stipulate: We can do better". That affirmation was, and remains, important.

The key will be for school boards—and their association leadership—to accept that 'doing better' requires some redesign of the organization.

Organizational redesign is not usually the first thing considered when trying to get an organization to do-better. But the conventional remedies—increasing financing and changing leadership — disappoint. When they do, it is time to think about what can be done by getting districts into a more effective form of organization.

That is, simply, necessary now for the districts. Organizations live in a policy environment, as animals live in a natural environment. Success depends on how well they adapt to the environment in which they live. In Minnesota the Legislature has created a new and different 'policy environment', to which the district sector now needs to adapt.

4. Creating a dynamic district sector is very much in the interest of the state itself. Governor and Legislature will likely find the ‘optional forms’ approach adequate statewide, but might want to act more decisively for Minneapolis and Saint Paul.

The state itself is a party at interest in the discussion about organizational change. Legislators and governors carried out the redesign of Minnesota public education not only to enlarge educational opportunities for students but also to give themselves some real influence on performance in the system.

And for good reason. Minnesota needs to maintain in our cold, remote location an economy able to compete successfully. Legislators and governors will be mindful that public education accounts for about half of the state’s general fund. An administration moving to reduce incarceration in Minnesota’s prison system is bound to see reducing the failure in K-12 as essential to its success with that effort.

Predictably and legitimately the state will not want to lose the open, options-based system it created; will not want to revert to the public-utility model. Its new arrangement goes far to establish the state is meeting its obligation to provide an adequate education for students. Its charter sector is especially significant, structured as it is to innovate with forms of school and approaches to learning.

A reversion to the *status quo ante* would make the district again an organization able to take for granted not only “its customers” (as Albert Shanker said at the Minneapolis Foundation’s Itasca Seminar in 1988) but also the state itself. It would put the Legislature and the governor back in the old situation, hearing again from districts that the state’s role is to ‘give us the money and leave us alone’.

Across the nation today there is pressure to restore the old system. A reversion is visible certainly in California; perhaps also in cities like Denver. If Minnesota maintains its open public system, as others revert, Minnesota might move to the top of the list of the high-performing states.

(It would help in this important national policy debate—it needs to be said—if some of the prominent voices advocating for ‘charter schools’ nationally would clarify or modify their message. Their appeal endlessly for scaling-up the number of ‘charters’ is open to the interpretation that they see chartering as a strategy for replacing

rather than for stimulating the district sector. That impression is created mainly by things said at the national level, not in Minnesota. But the national advocacy is heard here.)

Legislative action should be politically possible here.

In districts needing to make their schools better able to attract enrollment, or wanting to personalize student learning, coalitions could probably be assembled to get a plan on the ballot and to produce a majority for adoption.

Superintendents will matter. Working as they do between the board and their administration, they are likely to be cautious about advocating organizational redesign. But Jay Haugen in Farmington, a district that has moved markedly to empower its schools and teachers, currently Minnesota's superintendent of the year, says: "Lots of superintendents want to do this".

So will teachers. Not all . . . but it will not require all. It is very much in the interest of teachers and their unions for teaching to become a truly professional job and career. There is a strategic decision to be made by leadership in the teachers unions as well. Can the union find a way to serve both teachers in the conventional boss/worker arrangement and teachers in the professional-partnership arrangement? Not easy; but not inconceivable. The transition would be gradual. Interest on the part of both teachers and union officials in the new professional role has been visible at the meetings of the Teacher-Powered Schools initiative. (See www.teacherpowered.org)

Parents and citizens interested in better learning will also matter. An optional plan could be placed on the ballot by citizen petition. And is of course to be adopted by public vote.

There are encouraging reports of closer relationships between the district and charter sectors. Interest seems to be growing generally in personalizing learning. Some district administrators, in retirement, are taking positions in the charter sector: The superintendent of the largest district in Minnesota (Anoka-Hennepin) afterward headed the largest chartered school (Minnesota Transitions).

It is possible the Legislature might want to act more decisively for Minneapolis and Saint Paul rather than leaving action to their local political process.

Both districts do need help.

- Minneapolis' 61 school buildings, sized for about 50,000 students, now have about 36,000. The district has been running down its reserves and appealing to voters for excess levies. Indications are that leadership sees the district continuing to decline—which at one recent meeting produced a discussion about consolidating its seven high schools into three of suburban size. That was in itself perhaps telling, given that it appears to be the smaller and more personalized schools for which its residents are leaving.
- In Saint Paul there are troubling signs. Twenty-one administrators had resigned by 2017 when the board finally brought in a new superintendent. The board knows the district needs to make its offerings more attractive but seems unable to make that happen. Recently the City Council has been approached about using its ordinance powers (as over zoning and building permits) to block the startup or expansion of schools in the increasingly popular charter sector.

For these two districts there could be special legislation to establish an organizational arrangement the Legislature believes more effective. Special legislation is of course subject to approval in a local referendum: Essentially the Legislature would be deciding the question to go on the ballot. That was done for Minneapolis with the legislation to create a partly-districted board.

5. Legislative action could begin in the 2020 session. It will take time to think through the optional-forms idea. So it is important to begin the discussion now.

The idea of changing the organizational form of the school district will be controversial. There will be resistance to change; arguments to stay with the existing arrangement. So as always in such situations it will be important for the debate to consider the consequences of doing nothing.

‘Standing pat’ is a decision not without consequences. It will be important to recognize that, out there beyond state policy, technological change in the information system is creating new ways of learning that have the potential to disrupt conventional school.

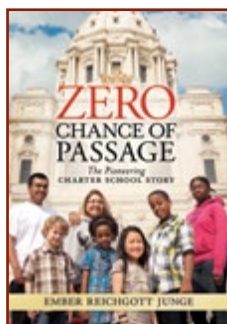
Only three things are needed for that bypass: ways for young people to learn; someone to assess and validate what is learned, and a willingness to accept those validations on the part of the organizations or institutions students want to enter. All three are developing; are arguably now present.

All those committed to public education should want to ensure that ‘learning technology’ comes in through the schools, rather than moving directly to a market of private families. The bypass truly would implement the ‘replacement’ scenario.

The sound course is clear. The goal really is what the districts affirm: an excellent education for every child. But ‘every student learning’ has to mean ‘every student motivated’. For that, teachers need the flexibility to personalize student work. For that, districts need to give the schools autonomy and ‘agency’. The state needs to help districts into that new role by making possible a new form of organization.

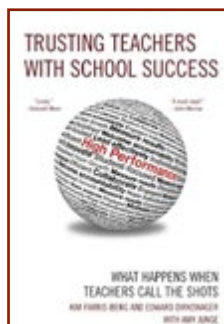
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BOOKS ABOUT INNOVATION AND TEACHERS



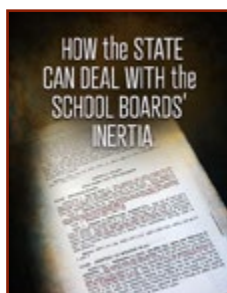
Ember Reichgott Junge on the origins of chartering

<https://www.amazon.com/Zero-Chance-Passage-Pioneering-Charter/dp/1592984762>



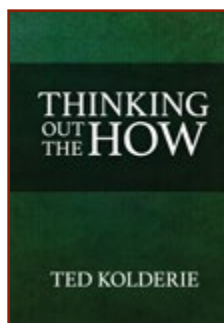
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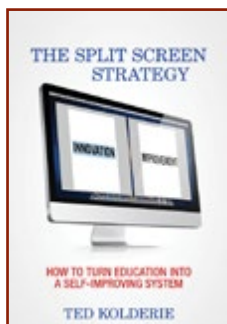
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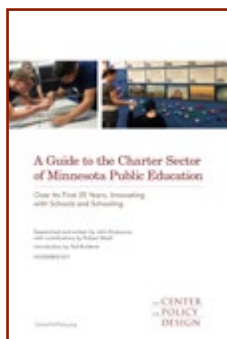
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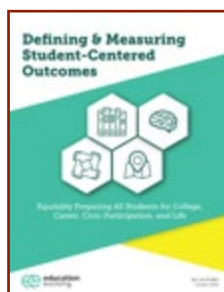
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