

Education expert

Outsider comes inside to bring about change

By RUTH DUNN

Rep. Sandra Peterson (DFL-New Hope) is no newcomer to the limelight. During her tenure as president of the Minnesota Federation of Teachers, the state's second largest teachers' union, her face and name appeared in newspapers and on TV across the state. Four years ago, she was instrumental in the federation's merger with the Minnesota Education Association, to create Education Minnesota. She served as co-president of the new union for three years and then as vice president.

Peterson is familiar with the legislative process from the outside. She's testified and lobbied on behalf of bills, and was appointed by several governors to numerous legislative task

forces and committees. But seeing the process from the inside is a different story. "I'm learning like everyone else," she said. Peterson serves on the House Education Policy and Reform and Transportation committees.

Peterson, a former teacher in the Robbinsdale School District, is not surprised that there are more educators than any other occupation represented in the House. "Every day in their classrooms, teachers see how the Legislature affects their lives." Teachers also possess skills for campaigning, like being able to communicate with voters, she said.

Legislative gridlock was the big factor in her election from a swing district, said Peterson. "Voters are upset with both political parties. People told me if they went to work and didn't get the job done, they would not be paid. People want us to get things done and to make decisions that will benefit the state in the long run. We have to focus on results, or we will

DISTRICT 45A

2002 Population: 36,983

Largest city: New Hope

County: Hennepin

Top Concerns: Education, transportation, economy

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not see a second term."

A widow since 1990, Peterson has two grown sons and a 2-year-old granddaughter who might grow up to be a teacher someday, if Peterson has any influence.

She enjoys city life and is an avid movie buff. She has also been known to hunt game birds in Manitoba, Canada, and to return to the homestead near Benson that has been owned by her family since the 1800s. She loves to read non-fiction books, especially biographies, because she learns so much from them.