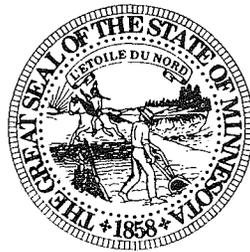


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# Legislative Commission on Public Education

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Report to the Legislature  
February, 1985



Executive Summary

# LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION ON PUBLIC EDUCATION

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Betsy Rice	Counsel, Senate Counsel and Research
Joan Sundquist	Research Consultant, House DFL Caucus Research
Joel Sutter	Legislative Analyst, Senate Counsel and Research

# Introduction

The Legislative Commission on Public Education was established by the 1983 Legislature (Minnesota Statutes 1984, Chapter 3.865). It is composed of twelve legislators, six from the Senate and six from the House of Representatives, including the chairs of the Senate and House Education Committees, the Senate Education Aids Subcommittee, and the House Education Finance Division. The statutory charge to the Commission is to study elementary and secondary education and report its findings and recommendations yearly to the education committees of the legislature.

The Commission began its work by deciding to formulate a clear mission statement for public education in Minnesota. With the help and expertise of parents, students, teachers, principals, school district administrators, school board members, State Department of Education staff, higher education faculty, and other interested groups, the Commission adopted the following mission statement:

"The purpose of public education in Minnesota is to help individuals acquire knowledge, skills, and positive attitudes toward self and others that will enable them to solve problems, think creatively, continue learning, and develop maximum potential for leading productive fulfilling lives in a complex and changing society."

A series of seventeen public hearings was conducted throughout the state in October and November, 1983, to obtain reactions to the proposed mission statement and to solicit recommendations for the improvement of education in Minnesota. Approximately 1,000 people -- parents, students, educators, business people, legislators, and community members -- participated in these hearings.

The range of issues discussed and the diversity of recommendations emanating from the public hearings convinced Commission members that it needed to determine specific areas or topics on which it would focus.

The Commission decided to examine four areas in depth during the 1984 study period. These areas of focus were:

- Individualized Learning Issues
- Organization for Learning
- Curriculum
- The Teaching Profession

The conclusions and recommendations of these in-depth studies are included in the next section of this report.

# Conclusions and Recommendations

The diverse activities of the Commission have resulted in broad recommendations that establish general direction for the formulation of education policy in Minnesota.

The Commission recognizes that resources are limited; therefore, it has instead suggested areas of concentration that will produce significant impact within the constraints of available resources. While acknowledging that change takes time, it is our intent to establish a clear sense of direction toward achieving education excellence in Minnesota.

## INDIVIDUALIZED LEARNING

Although several different types of individualized learning programs exist, there is limited information available about the effects of such programs. It does, however, seem appropriate to attempt to relate material, pace, instructional method, and other factors to the needs of the individual.

### RECOMMENDATION:

Obtain more information and develop methods for individualizing education, research and development relating to individualized learning should be encouraged.

#### Rationale:

- ° Develop information about the results of individualizing learning, especially longitudinal data;
- ° Facilitate cost analysis of individualized learning programs;
- ° Develop programs for individualized learning;
- ° Establish pilot programs in schools;
- ° Develop teacher and principal expertise in implementing individualized learning.

## **ORGANIZATION FOR LEARNING**

Group size has an impact on both teaching and learning. The size of a group may be directly related to the instructional methods that are used, as well as contributing to the satisfaction and success of the teaching and learning that occurs.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Educational improvement efforts should concentrate on encouraging student groupings appropriate for the learning activity.
2. The Commission should examine State Board of Education rules about student groupings.

#### Rationale:

- Facilitate the use of instructional methods appropriate for the learner and the material being taught;
- Improve learning;
- Improve satisfaction for both learner and teacher.

## **CURRICULUM**

State efforts in establishing minimum curricular requirements are in a period of transition. On the one hand, school districts are being required to increase the number of course offerings. On the other hand, there is an increased emphasis on what the students should learn, rather than what courses should be taken (learner outcomes). However, only limited information is available about the courses students are choosing and the counseling that is available to assist with those choices.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. The process of curricular change should be encouraged, not hindered. Emphasis should be placed on:
  - Obtaining better information about available curriculum, including opportunities for high school students at post secondary institutions, and learning options for students with special needs such as gifted/ talented, eleventh and twelfth grades, and students in small schools;

- Exploring the concept that a complete array of courses need not be available at each school if alternatives are developed;
  - Obtaining better information about choices made by students about what courses and learning opportunities to pursue;
  - Examining the opportunities available to address the problems of adult literacy and job retraining for adults with special needs. The role of community education in addressing these problems should be examined.
2. When adequate information is available, a decision should be made about curriculum direction for the future. In this context, the Commission endorses the concept of learner outcomes and developing related assessment procedures.
  3. The Department of Education should be directed to develop a definition of and learner outcomes for higher order thinking skills as well as the means to assess these skills.
  4. Consideration should be given to the need for adequate counseling for students about course selections, specific learning needs, opportunities in and requirements for entrance at a variety of post secondary institutions, and related issues.

Rationale:

- Provide information needed to make decisions about curriculum;
- Encourage a thorough discussion of curriculum options for students before selecting a particular course of study.
- Facilitate various approaches to curriculum issues;
- Address the learning needs of persons with special needs.

## **THE TEACHING PROFESSION**

The overall quality and experience of Minnesota education professionals is very high. There is concern, however, about maintaining this level of quality among new teachers, as well as the ability of the profession to attract sufficient numbers of new teachers to meet the demands of the future.

Statistical trends indicate that Minnesota will need to employ 55,000 new or returning teachers during the next ten years. This will require increased enrollment in teacher education programs.

In recent years the teaching profession has become increasingly competitive with other occupations for talented people. Some determining factors which affect its poor attraction rate include:

- Low starting salaries;
- Low career earnings potential;
- Low prestige;
- Poor working conditions;
- Few career options within the profession.

Of the current teaching staff, 55% must renew their license every five years. Renewal units for relicensure are granted by local teacher committees within broad state guidelines. This process yields great diversity in what is expected of teachers for license renewal. Regular types of staff development activities and updating of course work in subject areas are not required for license renewal by the state.

Minnesota has a well-educated, competent, and experienced teaching staff in its public schools. Nevertheless, there are signs of burnout and dissatisfaction, possibly caused by factors that discourage our teachers from doing the highest quality work.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Increased emphasis should be placed on high quality, demanding teacher education programs that will improve the preparation and effectiveness of the profession. The present methods of teacher preparation should be reviewed. A program to test academic knowledge should be encouraged as part of the licensure processes.
2. Strategies should be developed for improving starting salaries and career earnings, professionalizing working conditions, updating teaching methodology, and developing career options within the teaching profession.
3. License renewal requirements should be evaluated and improved. Standard subject area and staff development requirements should be considered for license renewal.

4. Education improvement efforts that are related to teachers and other professional education staff should focus on factors that emphasize professional development for the staff.

Rationale:

- Improve the attractiveness of the teaching profession;
- Maintain the quality and abilities of those in the profession;
- Assure an adequate supply of high quality teachers for the future;
- Increase attention to creating an atmosphere that acknowledges teachers as professionals;
- Provide greater responsibility for superior teachers;
- Establish a climate where teachers and principals help each other solve educational problems;
- Increase respect for the professional ability of teachers;
- Increase cooperation among teachers, students, parents, community;
- Improve subject matter command of teachers;
- Improve teachers' ability to teach;
- Provide mentors for beginning teachers;
- Give teachers greater voice in curriculum design and instructional planning;
- Coordinate curriculum and instruction among teachers;
- Provide peer evaluation for teachers, either formally or informally.

# Summary

The Legislative Commission on Public Education has worked over the past 18 months to examine public education in Minnesota. A complete examination certainly could not be accomplished in that period of time. Therefore, the Commission chose to focus on several key areas in education, attempting to gain a thorough understanding of each issue, while providing some broad recommendations for the formulation of education policy in this state.

The task of examining education is on-going. This Commission has provided a focus for discussion on the future direction of education in Minnesota. Future Commissions on Public Education must continue to carry out the responsibilities of examining education and directing much-needed attention to the most important resource of our state, our students.