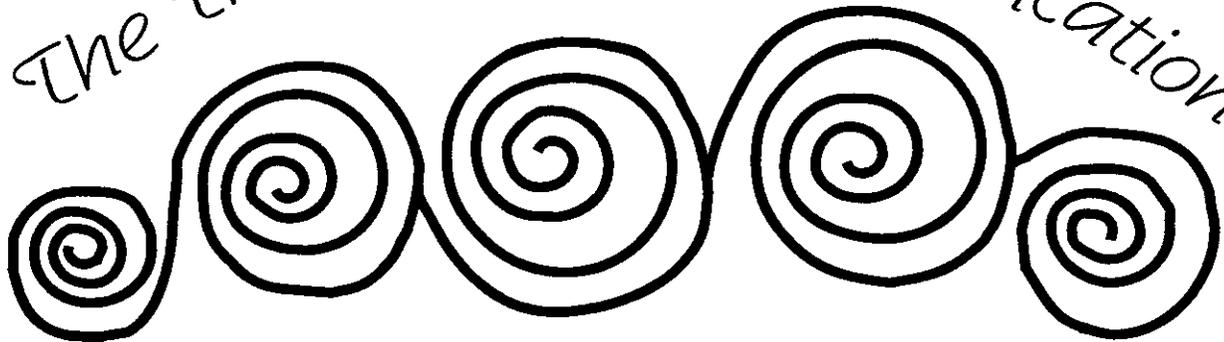


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The Transformation of Education



Meeting the Needs of Every Individual Learner

Submitted to:

Wayne Erickson, Director of Special Education
MN Department of Children, Families and Learning

by

Creating Futures, LLP

Barbara S. Burke, Ed.D.
Cynthia R. Stevens, M.A.

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Creating the Future of Education

Executive Summary

October 1997

The project was initiated as a joint effort between the Department of Children, Families and Learning (DCFL) and the Minnesota Administrators of Special Education (MASE) to create the future of special education. A three phase process using the Creating Futures Planning Model[®] was designed by Barbara Burke and Cynthia Stevens.

Phase 1/Input: Data was collected from three sources:

- 22 regional focus groups, consisting of directors of special education, special and regular education teachers and support staff, school administrators and parents
- 11 professional and parent association focus groups, including MASA, MESPA, MASSP, ICC, SEAC, ARC MN, LDM, PACER and DCFL*
- The focus group questions were designed to foster deep dialogue about special education. This process enabled people from diverse backgrounds and perspectives to come together around core values and beliefs.
- 220 written survey responses to *The Future of Special Education: An Issues Paper* by Wayne Erickson

Phase 2/Development: Focus group data was coded and analyzed:

- 11 key themes emerged: one unified education system, identification and individual needs, parent involvement, training, least restrictive environment, funding, leadership, collaboration, program, accountability, due process
- A mission, vision and guiding principles for re-envisioning special education as part of a unified education system emerged.
- Regional work groups developed the 11 theme areas and identified: benefits to ALL students in achieving the mission and vision of one unified education system, ways in which regular and special education will have to change to accomplish the mission and vision, barriers to forming one unified education system, and strategies for implementing the 10 components of a unified education system.

* MASA: Minnesota Association of School Administrators, MESPA: Minnesota Elementary School Principals Association, MASSP: Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals, ICC: Governor's Interagency Coordinating Council on Early Intervention, SEAC: Special Education Advisory Committee, ARC MN: Association of Retarded Citizens of Minnesota, LDM: Learning Disabilities of Minnesota, PACER: Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights, DCFL: Department of Children, Families and Learning

Phase 3/Recommendations: Work group data was synthesized:

- Participants at the Fall Director's Conference October 8, 9, 10, 1997 reviewed the regional work group data and identified bold, radical and empowering strategies for forming one unified education system and submitted draft recommendations in the areas of leadership, program, funding and legislation.

Overarching Theme: One Unified Education System

- The overarching theme of one unified education system was identified, unsolicited by over 46% of focus group respondents. Clearly special education cannot be changed outside the broader context of the entire education system.
- The original project focus of creating the future of special education was adjusted to encompass the greater vision of one unified education system which meets the individual needs of every learner.

Recommendations:

- The future of one unified education system must be created in partnership with the greater community.
- In order to create its future, the education system must "get outside of the box" and create new images to maximize the potential of all students.
- The education system must increase communication with all key stakeholders.
- Education must focus on children and their families.
- Educational systems of the future must be built upon dynamic forms, relationships and interconnections.

Next Steps:

- Create opportunities for continued broad based input from all stakeholders regarding creating the future of a unified education system which meets the needs of every learner.
 - ⇒ Make concerted efforts to engage the voices of youth, parents, minorities, classroom teachers and school administrators.
- Facilitate deep dialogue at the community level around implementing the mission, vision and guiding principles of one unified education system.
- Facilitate dialogue with key leaders in professional and parent associations.
- Establish a representative group of all stakeholders to guide the process and promote the mission, vision and guiding principles of one unified education system.
- Establish an action plan with intermediate steps and measurable benchmarks which can be celebrated as they are met.

Project Summary

“Creating the Future of Education”



A new vision for education emerged as almost 150 special education administrators and other interested persons met at the annual Director's Conference in Brainerd in October 1997. In a call for the transformation of Education, these special educators envisioned a new unified education system designed to meet the individual needs of EVERY learner. The vision emphasizes the need for the entire school system to effect a high level of student performance and accountability for every learner.

Vision

ALL children and youth are provided an education designed to maximize their potential and optimize their abilities as citizens of a diverse world.

The conference was the culmination of a four month statewide project to "Create the Future of Special Education." Barbara Burke and Cindy Stevens, project and conference facilitators, witnessed a transformation of mission when special educators opened their vision to address the individual needs of EVERY learner within the education system. Burke noted, "It became clear that the problems within special education could not be addressed outside the larger context of the unmet needs of many learners within the entire education system."

The new vision of a unified education system to meet the needs of every learner is based upon 11 guiding principles:

- All children and youth are valued and can learn.
- All children and youth receive individually designed instruction based upon their learning style.
- Parents are involved in designing, providing and participating in their child's education.
- Education is provided by caring teachers, staff and parents, highly trained in multiple, research based instructional strategies with measurable outcomes.
- Education is provided in multiple, diverse instructional settings within the school and community.
- Adequate funding maximizes opportunities for all children, provides stability of programming and flexibility of services and utilization of staff.
- Leadership promotes meeting the individual needs of all children, within inclusive educational and community settings.
- Educators work collaboratively with each other, with parents, other agencies and the community.
- Educational programs are engaging, meaningful, inclusive, functional, school and community based for all learners preparing them for their future.
- Schools and communities are accountable for student learning.
- Safeguards are in place to ensure that all means all.

The emerging vision is a call to break down the barriers between separate programs within education. Included in the vision are lower class size and training for all teachers in multiple instructional and behavioral strategies to meet the unique needs and interests of all learners in a diverse world.

For parents at the conference, the most significant feature of the emerging vision may be the shift in accountability within special education from a paperwork trail that documents the process of education to an accountability system for all of education, including special education, that documents student progress.

Pat Fernandez, Director of Special Education at Saint Paul Public Schools, gave the conference results a "thumbs up."

The conference agenda was specially designed by Stevens and Burke of Creating Futures, LLP, to promote the creativity and well-being of all participants. Sue Dosen, Assistant Director of Special Education for Saint Paul Public Schools said the work on a new vision is greatly needed. She indicated she enjoyed the creative process and was very pleased with the results.

Kate Traevik, Assistant Commissioner of Education at the Department of Children, Families and Learning and Wayne Erickson, Director of Special Education at CFL, closed the conference with a commitment to move this process forward and to take the results to the broader education community.

Burke and Stevens noted that there were three transformative moments during the four month process.

Transformative Moments

1. The Mission Shifts

After about 6 or 7 focus groups, the project facilitators first gave voice to their perception that a very strong theme was emerging from the focus group data. People were saying *"We can't change special education without changing regular education. The two systems are inextricably bound and yet have become entirely two separate systems. Special education is being asked to meet all the needs of students which cannot be met within the general education system."* Many people, when they identified their own core beliefs and values about special education declared that we must move towards one unified education system. This awareness was confirmed by participants in every focus group across the state - across all participants categories. Over 46% of the focus group data dealt with the need for a unified system of education, even though the question was never asked. The overwhelming magnitude of this message, which occurred in discussions about all issues and in every question, caused a shift in the Mission of the project. The initial Mission "Creating The Future of Special Education: was changed to "Re-envisioning the Future of Special Education Within A Unified Education System."

2. A Vision Emerges

The message was clear, both general education and special education had to change TOGETHER. Parents and professionals alike agree that general education has been saying "All children can learn." But all has never meant all. There has always been an expectation that 10% or so of the learners remaining in school cannot, for one reason or another, have their needs met in general education as it currently exists. Many general and special educators attributed this phenomenon to the focus in general education on teaching to the group. Therefore, there came a call for meeting the needs of EVERY learner in education. This requires a transformation in both regular and special education. General education must shift its focus from the group to the individual learner, looking at interests, ability, strengths, learning styles and needs. General education must move beyond a college track focus which meets the needs of only about 25% of the student population and create new experimental learning options to prepare every student for productive citizenship in a diverse world. Special education must dramatically change, too. No longer can special education identify students as disabled because of system failure. No longer can special education have the comfort and protection of separate programs, funding and leadership. Special educators must join regular education in meeting the needs of EVERY learner within one unified education system.

3. A Call for Action

By 3:00 PM on Thursday afternoon at the Directors Conference, participants who had been fully engaged for nearly 2 hours in creating new images of a unified education system, began to feel empowered. A grass roots CALL FOR ACTION occurred and a special meeting was requested with CFL, MASE and parent group representatives. There was an overwhelming desire on the part of many participants that the work begun within this 3 phase process continue to move forward. There was a call for Department leadership, the broadening of participation at the local level, the need for an on-going process to keep professional and parent groups involved and the need for individual participants to have strategies and opportunities to move this project forward and to realize the Mission and Vision.

**The following recommendations reflect outcomes
of the entire three phase project.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

PROGRAM

One Unified Education System

- All student have an ILP (short form, modified IEP).
- Lower class size.
- All teachers are trained and are competent to use multiple instructional and behavioral strategies to meet the individual needs of diverse learners.
- Parents participate in the design and selection of learning options for their child.
- New educational options are available for all learners within the system, especially at the junior high and high school level.
- Multiple curriculum and instructional options are available for all learners K-12.
- Education is provided within the school and in the community.
- The school and community are accountable for student learning.
 - * Basic academics
 - * Life skills
 - * Student Performance
 - * Student/parent satisfaction
- Assessment is tied to a student's response to instruction.
- Special services are available for every learner who needs assistance based upon a prevention and early intervention model.
- Education is student and family centered.
- Special expertise (reading, disability, technology, health, etc.) is available to all staff and students on an as needed basis to meet the unique needs of diverse learners.
- All students are included.
- Students and staff establish relationships which continue over time.
- Education is based upon the student's, interests, abilities, needs, and learning styles.
- Education is experientially based, K-12.
- Students do not have to be labeled to get special help.
- Protections and accountability exist to assure that all means all.
- There is adequate planning time for staff, parents, schools, and interagency/business collaboration.
- Year round school.
- School to work programs prepare students to live and work productively as a citizen in a diverse world.

- Students with mild/moderate disabilities are served appropriately in regular classrooms and programs within the school and community.
- Community education programs are available to provide opportunities for life long learning.

Education for Students with Disabilities (2% of population)

- All students with disabilities are included in the unified education system.
- All students with disabilities receive a FAPE.
- The services a student with disabilities and his/her family need are available B-22.
- Services are provided collaboratively by education, health, and human services.
- Students with moderate/severe disabilities and their families have available to them a full array of special services designed to meet the student's unique needs based upon an IFSP.
- No labels for students, staff or programs.
- Parents are provided training and are fully informed of their rights and options and are able to provide informed consent.
- Decision making is team based and parents are fully involved in decision making as full member of a team.
- Parents and staff establish meaningful communication and a relationship is built with one staff person who becomes the primary contact for the parent into the collaborative system.
- Assessments focus on determining programmatic needs, not eligibility.
- Students with disabilities have access to any/all programs and services which will meet their needs (no glass ceilings and no need to fail first or fail up the levels of service).
- All due process protection is available.
- Non adversarial conflict resolution processes provide a means to problem solve for parents, schools, agencies and the community.
- Schools and community are accountable for student progress on outcomes outlined on IFSP.
- Special Ed transition services prepare students to live and work as independently as possible after they leave the unified education system.
- Accountability, including monitoring and compliance, shifts from an emphasis on documenting process, to documenting student progress.

Recommendations

LEADERSHIP

One Unified Education System

Department of Children Families and Learning –

- DCFL work with the federal office and MN congressional representatives and senators to keep them informed of funding issues (i.e., non-supplanting and maintenance of effort) and create new visions regarding how to frame these issues and pave the path to waivers.
- Highlight options which can be implemented now.
- Identify new/emerging models from MN and elsewhere.
- Commissioner of CFL is an education leader with recent experience in the field.
- Commissioner of CFL is not a political appointee.
- Establish models for students data and accountability systems.
- Leadership speaks for the education of **all** children and youth, **every** child and youth.
- DCFL realizes its mission and provides leadership for collaboration of all service for children and families.
- DCFL models one unified education system in Mission, Vision, Structure, and Resources.
 - * their own initiatives
 - * working with professional and parent organizations to assure broader involvement/ownership/action.
 - * working with legislators.
- Colleges and universities revamp teacher training to ensure teacher competency of current and new teachers.
- All teachers receive the training, previously provided to SE teachers only, in designing multiple instructional strategies, behavioral strategies and programs, curriculum and instructional and accommodations.
- There is one teaching license.
- All administrators are trained and competent to speak and provide leadership for the education of **all** learners, including knowledge of federal requirements for students with disabilities and their families.

Parent

- Parents are fully and meaningfully involved in leadership initiatives, from the very beginning stages, at all levels of education -federal, state and local.
- All parents are provided training for how to fully participate in decision making regarding their child's education program.

Professional Associations

- Initiate process similar to what SE went through, with their particular constituency.
- Participate in a multi-association deep dialogue process to formulate one Mission & Vision and to develop a statewide implementation plan (one year process).
- Base legislative initiatives upon the shared Mission & Vision and implementation plan.
- Provide training to all constituents (members & non-members) on the new M & V and how/why to implement.
- Continue deep dialogue process through implementation to problem solve and resolve conflicts.

Local Districts

- Initiate process similar to what SE went through with their cabinet and then the whole organization and their community (and agencies).
- Train administrators and teachers NOW on strategies, available models, and current options.
- Lay ground work for year round school.
- Develop an implementation plan - DO IT! (In spite of boxes.)
- Use graduation standards and accountability for every learner as an impetus for change.

Special Education Administrators

- Work ourselves out of a job.
 - * Provide training to building administrators.
 - * Provide training to RE teachers (collaborative with RE) on multiple instructional strategies and behavior strategies.
 - * Open doors for staff collaboration and sharing students.

- Provide training to SE and RE and parents together about building relationships. Create new models for teams.
- Work with building administrators and unions to make collaboration planning time a priority.
- Focus on schools with building wide Title I programs to start opening doors and getting out of boxes.
- Work with Junior High and Senior High Schools curriculum leaders and administration to create new experiential programs that all kids can access.
- Work with RE administration to create new ways to collaborate on prevention and early intervention for all kids with special needs. Be creative!

Education for Students with Disabilities

Special Education Administration

- Provide training and full disclosure of options to parents.
- Establish student accountability system, tied to students response to instruction in SE and based upon graduation standards for mild/moderate handicapped students and relevant performance standards for moderate/severely handicapped students.
- Work with community agencies to move towards IFSP for severely handicapped students and their families, B-22.
- Hold tight on eligibility criteria during 1st waves of graduation standards to keep pressure on system to change.

Parents

- Parents are provided specially designed training to fully inform them of the due process rights and the educational options which are or can be made available to their child.
- Parents participate in comprehensive training available to staff, parents and community.
- Provide an advocate/mentor to every parent of a child/youth with a disability.

Teacher Training and Licensure

- Have one teaching license
- Have certifications available for any teacher with special expertise in working in highly specialized areas such as sensory impairments, autism, severely/profoundly handicapped.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FUNDING

One Unified Education System

- More than adequate resources are available for education so that **all** can mean **all** and the educational needs of every learner can be met.
- Education is valued by the community and policymakers.
- One funding system tied to accountability for student performance on specified standards.
- Funding supports open access to all programs/service for students who need and/or could benefit from the service. (No more boxes, labels, eligibility requirements or funding requirements which limit access to programs.)
- Business and the community provide financial support for School To Work and community-based educational programs/services.
- *Provide incentives to accomplish Mission, Vision, Guiding Principles
 - * Pilot projects at local district level.
 - * To colleges and universities to change teacher training.
 - * For transformative leadership at CFL.
 - * Lower class size.
 - * Develop new experiential program options at Junior High and Senior High School level in schools, business and community.
 - * Develop accountability systems.
 - * Year round school.

* = Duplicates legislative recommendation in the next section

Education for Students with Disabilities

- Collaborative funding supports wrap around services for students with moderate/severe disabilities and their families.
- Funding is available for mental health services for children and youth with Serious Emotional Disturbance and their family.
- Fold EDRS/MARSS into UFARS - make it 1 system.
- *Reinstate reimbursement for SE administration.
- *Remove base year funding formula.
- *Retain SE funding for specialized expertise in low incidence and severely/profoundly handicapped students and technology/assistive devices.
- *Shift dollars and staff serving mild/moderately handicapped learners to RE, tied to accountability for student learning (hold SE positions harmless for up to 10 years).

RECOMMENDATIONS

LEGISLATION

One Unified Education System

Now

- Provide pilot project status for some districts/buildings to develop new models of service based upon Mission & Vision (probably means lifting of restriction on use of state funded SE staff).
- Reinstate reimbursement for SE administration, including clerks to reduce paperwork burden on teachers.
- Remove base year funding formula.
- Provide incentives for colleges and universities to change teacher training.
- Change selection/appointment process for CFL Commissioner.
- Provide CFL with \$ to provide leadership to make this Mission & Vision a reality.
- Provide funds to lower regular education class size K-12.
- Provide incentives for development of experiential, non-college track options for Junior High and Senior High Schools and community-based programs.
- Provide \$ to develop accountability systems for student performance, tied to response to instruction.
- Provide incentives for year round school.
- Provide incentives for districts where all students have an ILP with accountability.
- Funding for parent training and education involvement.

Eventually

- Repeal PELRA.
- Have one funding system to maximize opportunities for all children, provide stability of programming and flexibility of services and utilization of staff.
- Shift dollars and staff serving mild/moderately disabled learners to RE with accountability for student learning.
- Hold current SE positions harmless as these are moved to support all students with special needs in regular classrooms, including students with mild/moderate disabilities.

- Remove funding and programmatic barriers in all state funded programs which potentially restrict students from accessing programs they need and/or could benefit from.

Education for Student with Disabilities.

Now

- Retain SE funding for specialized expertise for sensory impairments, other low incidence categories, and severely/profoundly handicapped students and technology and assistive devices.
- Develop collaborative funding system to support wrap around services for severely handicapped learners and their families, B-22 (including mental health services).

Eventually

- IFSPs for all low incidence and severely/profoundly handicapped children and youth and their families, B-22, with interagency collaborative funding.