

THE
Seamless
WEB
Minnesota's New Education System

The Author

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Preface to the Second Edition

The first edition of this book was published in 1999. It was written to inform the public about a radical new education system being imposed upon Minnesota K-12 public schools, an education system known as the “Profile of Learning.”

Largely because of the information contained in this book, the Profile of Learning became a huge political issue for the elections of 2002. Minnesota’s current governor, Tim Pawlenty, and a number of legislators campaigned on, and were elected on, platforms calling for the Profile’s repeal. As a consequence, the Legislature did, in fact, repeal the Profile of Learning, and the repeal was signed by the governor in 2003.

Many of the Profile’s most damaging features, however, continue to be practiced—not just in Minnesota but in all 50 states. The reader is encouraged to consult the author’s other, and more recent, books on education for additional information on problems that exist and changes that need to be made in America’s schools. These books—*Fed Ed: The New Federal Curriculum and How It’s Enforced* (2002) and *America’s Schools: The Battleground for Freedom* (2005)—are available from Amazon.com or EdWatch.org.

Preface

The following letter was written and signed by 80 Apple Valley High School teachers. It is not to be treated as an official document of the Apple Valley High School. This letter was made available informally for AVHS teachers to sign, and in one and a half days, without publicity, 80 signatures were gathered.

In order to avoid confusion, one wording change was made. The original letter used the plural “Profiles” which was changed to the singular “Profile.” The Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning made this change from the plural to the singular several years ago. As a consequence, both the singular form and the plural form are commonly used at this time. The wording of the letter was changed to conform to current usage by the Department.

162 Chaparral Drive
Apple Valley, MN 55124

November 25, 1998

Governor-elect Jesse Ventura
B 5 State Capitol
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Governor Ventura:

We are concerned educators at Apple Valley Senior High School. We are career teachers with many years of experience in the classroom. We are dedicated to our profession. Most of us have children in the public school system. We are writing to you collectively to express our sincere concern about the recent implementation of the Profile of Learning by the Department of Children, Families and Learning.

At first glance, the Profile of Learning appears to reinforce the idea of standards, performance and accountability; but in actuality, the Profile will have a major negative impact on the educational opportunities of the children of Minnesota. We have tried to list objectively what we believe to be the major fallacies of the Profile of Learning below. We believe strongly that if the Profile of Learning is not exposed for what it really is—a politically motivated attempt to mandate an ambiguous, values-oriented curriculum—the learning environment in the state of Minnesota will degenerate and our children will become hopelessly bogged down in an educational quagmire.

WHY THE PROFILE OF LEARNING IS UNNECESSARY:

Minnesota ranks among the very top states in virtually all currently accepted measures of performance (ACT and PSAT scores, national math and science tests, and very low dropout rates). These substantiate that the current system is working well.

Higher standards are readily available to students through existing programs already funded (Advanced-Placement courses, International Baccalaureate, mentorships, post-secondary options and other advanced-level courses).

Cross comparison of standardized testing already hold schools accountable. Basic skills are measured by the Basic Standards tests in math, reading, and writing.

Application of learning (or “performance assessment”) is provided on a regular basis and is already an integral part of school curricula.

The state has already spent over \$250 million, not to mention the monies expended locally and there is no consensus at all as to exactly what the Profile of Learning is or what it is meant to accomplish. On the other hand, the state has already identified at-risk schools and at-risk students. Educators should concentrate finite resources on those at-risk.

The new graduation standards in many cases duplicate standards created by state and national organizations that are already reflected in locally developed curricula.

The best teaching includes a diversity of methodology to meet a diversity of needs, not mandated methodology and a prepackaged curriculum established in part by people far from the classroom.

THE PROFILE WILL NOT MEET EXPECTATIONS BECAUSE:

The Profile is too vague to be implemented in any consistent way.

Individual schools and teachers are free to interpret the current standards as they see fit; hence the standards will have little value.

The standards are not truly “high.” The state will accept a “1” as described by the scoring rubrics, which the state acknowledges to be a very minimal level of performance.

Students provided special services and students in accelerated courses are often exempt or waived from the standards, hence subverting the very purpose of the standard (the potential for myriad lawsuits here is obvious).

The standards themselves are limited in scope and content in many areas. The coverage of important content materials is often scant.

The grading criteria are nebulous at best and dangerous at worst.

Local control and autonomy are superior to a central bureaucracy when it comes to designing curriculum.

THE STANDARDS ARE NOT PRACTICAL BECAUSE:

The record-keeping and paperwork nightmare which is inherent in this system will require the expenditure of exorbitant amounts of money, will tax available resources including support personnel, and will divert teacher time and energy away from students.

This system is designed to work with a student to teacher ratio of 1:15, not 1:30 (the ratio for many current elementary teachers) or 1:150 (the ratio for many secondary school teachers). The projected time required to discuss each performance package task with each individual student (as suggested by the performance package checklists) and assess each student’s finished product will eliminate weeks of classroom instruction.

The Department of Children, Families and Learning cannot clearly define these stan-

dards.

Colleges have no way (nor do they have the inclination) to process the additional information which will be attached to a student's transcript as a result of the Profile of Learning. Many say they are willing to accept these "value-added" transcripts, but only so long as the transcripts continue to contain the information traditionally provided.

The Profile of Learning does not conform to NCAA standards.

The standards, performance packages and scoring rubrics will create a standards-based grading nightmare which may be at odds with and at times will confuse the matter of traditional grading.

Performance assessment is time-intensive, and will usurp valuable instructional time. Three geometry teachers in our school estimate that they have lost and will continue to lose three weeks of instructional time per trimester in order to complete performance tasks required by a geometry performance package.

The standards will double (at least) the difficult task of equating classes, grades and credits in the case of transfer students. (The quality of decisions made by counselors in these cases may degenerate simply to expedite the process.)

The current packages won't necessarily be applied to post-secondary enrollment option (PSEO) students, which potentially could create inequities in student and teacher responsibilities as well as learning experiences between high rigor high school classes and those open to high school students in tertiary institutions.

MOST IMPORTANTLY, THE PROFILE IS DETRIMENTAL TO STUDENTS BECAUSE:

They limit students' options. Students will not have time to both meet the standards and expand their educational opportunities in elective areas such as art, foreign language, music and technology. In many cases the standards will result in the diversion of critical instructional time for the facilitation and evaluation of large scale projects of questionable value. For example, one state-developed model package (an Arts Analysis package called "What's the Story!") was designed to take eighteen weeks of class time. Since quarter classes typically take nine weeks to complete, and trimester courses twelve, the problem is self-evident.

The additional time necessary to accomplish what will amount to volumes of paperwork will, of necessity, limit the amount of time teachers will be able to spend with students.

Students will become enmeshed in an endless cycle of preparing mandated projects at the expense of knowledge and comprehension and, in many cases, with lessened regard for individual learning styles.

In holding all students to the same standard, this system encourages mediocrity. It is a fallacy to assume that all students can achieve a high standard (the failure of OBE offers sufficient proof). Such an attempt will undermine and compromise opportunities for more able students. And students who lack basic skills will be overwhelmed.

These standards narrow students' learning and constrict their horizons rather than expanding them.

The standards establish a de facto list of educational priorities and many have the effect of preventing students from selecting courses best suited to their interests, career goals, or personal needs. For example, the required economics standard may compel high school seniors to forego such traditional social sciences as anthropology, psychology, criminology and sociology. The economics standard will also assure that every Minnesota high school graduate understands Keynesian economic theory or the like even if he/she doesn't know how to balance a checkbook or use credit cards responsibly.

The idea of "post-holing" or using performance packages to provide a deep understanding of one limited subject rather than an introduction to many will, at best, make our graduates micro-smart but macro-ignorant. For example, in the area of literature, students may learn how to read and interpret very well, but will leave high school without an effective introduction to the great literary works which comprise our heritage and the broad historical background against which to read them. An art history student may learn how to analyze a single work well while missing an introduction to many others.

State or district-designed packages may supplant better activities already utilized by individual teachers.

The cumbersome process and daunting prospect of package development will limit the exercise of individual teacher creativity.

Finally, ACT, PSAT and other college-entrance exam scores will likely go down. These exams are knowledge and comprehension-based, whereas the Profile is performance-based. The massive amounts of time required by projects and performances (K-12) will significantly limit the amount of time spent on knowledge and comprehension.

We are dedicated teaching professionals who care deeply about the future of our children. We believe that an overwhelming majority of Minnesota's teachers, our colleagues, feel as we do about the fallacy of the Profile of Learning. The monumental investment of time, money, and energy required by their implementation is wasteful as well as educationally and academically harmful to our children. We urge you to re-evaluate this misguided mandate quickly, because as each day passes under this system our students will fall farther behind those in other states and countries who have bypassed this foolishness and continued to prepare their children for a successful life in the 21st century by giving them a firm foundation in a core curriculum of knowledge and its comprehension.

Most Sincerely,

We, the Undersigned Concerned Educators

The signatures of 80 teachers followed.

Foreword

“What is essential is that we create a seamless web of [education]...that literally extends from cradle to grave and is the same system for everyone....”

—Marc Tucker’s letter to Hillary Clinton, November 11, 1992

This manual describes the profound changes now taking place in Minnesota’s system of education. These changes are not occurring in a vacuum. They are being developed in conformity with initiatives coming from the federal government. One such initiative is the Goals 2000: Educate America Act passed in 1994. Other federal laws which are now driving Minnesota’s education system include the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 and the Workforce Investment Act just passed in 1998. Presidents George Bush and Bill Clinton were both deeply involved in these federal laws.

A book like this has never been written before. It focuses, one at a time, on the major features of Minnesota’s new system of education and carefully explains each one. It describes how this new system of education is like a gigantic puzzle. The manual describes each of the major pieces of this puzzle and shows how they all fit together.

Many local education officials, unfortunately, are unaware of the real nature of education change in Minnesota. They may make comments like this: “All that may be true, but we aren’t doing it here.” People who make such comments are simply unaware of the big picture. They only know what the non-elected officials at the Department of Children, Families and Learning have told them.

We, the citizens who make up Maple River Education Coalition, believe that these local officials, as well as all other Minnesota citizens, have a right to know the whole story about what is happening in Minnesota education. That is our reason for publishing this manual. You will discover that every major point is carefully stated and extensively documented. The sources used are primarily government documents which are quoted at length. The Appendix includes a listing of the most important documents. It also describes how you, the reader, can obtain these documents and read them for yourself.

This manual is dedicated, first and foremost, to telling the truth. It is dedicated to the principle that in a free society, it is the citizen who must determine what is true, not government. It is dedicated, ultimately, to the proposition that knowing the truth enables our state and our nation to be free. To that end, this manual is dedicated to illuminating Minnesota’s revolutionary new system of education, accurately described as the “seamless web,” designed to literally envelop every child and adult in our state from “cradle to grave.”

Renee T. Doyle,
President, Maple River Education Coalition

Glossary

Assessments

Methods of measuring student progress. “Assessments” is a broader and more ambiguous word than tests. It includes tests but also includes highly subjective evaluations such as rating scales, observation and student opinion. The root meaning of “assess” is to attach a value to something. Tests, in contrast, are designed to measure knowledge. The change in language from “tests” to “assessments” is symptomatic of the shift in education from focusing on knowledge to focusing on values, attitudes and behavior.

Central Planning

Making important, detailed decisions at a centralized location by a government agency that has the power to enforce the decisions. Central planning is a key ingredient of socialist economic systems, the reason being that high-level government officials make the important decisions as opposed to those decisions being made at a local and/or private level.

Certificate of Mastery

Certifies completion of the vocational and ideological components of the new system of education and is intended to eventually replace high school diplomas. Certificates of Mastery differ from diplomas in that diplomas emphasize academic achievement, while Certificates emphasize behavioral and job-related achievement. They are divided into Certificates of Initial Mastery (CIMs) which roughly designate 10th grade level achievement and Certificates of Advanced Mastery (CAMs) for 12th grade level achievement.

Culture

Normally defined as “the ideas, customs, skills, arts, etc. of a people or group that are transferred, communicated or passed along to succeeding generations” (*Webster’s Dictionary*). Minnesota’s Department of Children, Families and Learning, however, says: “...feelings and behavior related to sexuality are part of a larger system of culture.” (*Minnesota School Health Guide*, Published by Minnesota Departments of Health and CFL, Ch. 12, p. 20.) “Behavior related to sexuality” includes sexual orientation and homosexual activity.

Department of Children, Families and Learning (CFL)

The new state department in Minnesota created when the Department of Education was abolished. The new department includes functions that had been part of other departments, especially in the areas of health care and welfare. The combined department is a major step toward “one-stop shopping,” also called “full-service schools,” and is required by Goals 2000. One-stop shopping is an integral part of the new system of education.

Diversity

The philosophy which holds that values, beliefs and actions are equal, as opposed to

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“equality” which holds that all people are equal. Diversity divides people into competing classes and groups as opposed to encouraging reconciliation, harmony and assimilation of various groups. Diversity is the core curriculum of the new system of education. Synonyms include “culture,” “multiculturalism,” “tolerance” and “inclusive education.”

Graduation Standards

Formerly called “Graduation Rule,” they consist of the new state requirements which specify that to be eligible to graduate from a Minnesota public high school, students must (1) pass the 8th grade level Basic Standards test (the writing portion of the test is given in grade 10), and (2) complete 24 high school level Content Standards which must be done by means of completing performance packages.

Goals 2000

Refers to the Goals 2000: Educate America Act passed by Congress in 1994, the last year the Democratic Party controlled both Houses of Congress and the White House. Goals 2000 created a system of federal education guidelines and federal grants which states can apply for and receive if they agree to implement the federal guidelines. Minnesota’s Goals 2000 grant application states that the Graduation Standards are the “centerpiece” of Minnesota’s compliance with the federal Goals 2000 regulations.

Learning Areas

Replace academic disciplines as the preferred education categories under the new system. Learning areas are broader and less clearly defined than disciplines and give education central planners considerable latitude for including subjects which are oriented toward behavior, attitudes, beliefs and values. The Profile of Learning is currently divided into 10 learning areas.

Lifework Plan

The first “performance indicator” of a state’s progress in implementing the federal School-to-Work program. CFL defines it as follows: “A lifework plan is a personal information system that will benefit decision-making. It is a living document, frequently revised. The lifework plan should [include] ...individualized learning plans and/or career development plans. It should provide a format such as a portfolio for collecting relevant materials. Most educators foresee a computer record-keeping system that supplement paper files.”

Local Performance Package

Performance package not written by the state. According to current law, a local performance package must: (1) have a difficulty level which equals or exceeds the state package, (2) have essentially the same content as the state package, (3) use essentially the same methodologies as the state package, and (4) be approved by a method determined by the state CFL. The CFL also has the authority to audit and review local performance packages. CFL determines how all the packages must be evaluated.

Performance Package

Defined by the current law as, “a group of assignments and application activities

[exercises] that a student must perform to demonstrate completion of the specifications of a content standard.” CFL claims that the performance packages are assessments. This is not true. As the law says, they are assignments and exercises. They are also lesson plans. Teachers are required to score them by the rubric system. Most performance packages are written by the state.

Predetermined Consensus

The manipulation of various committees, task forces or other groups to give the appearance of group decision-making when the outcome of the group process has been previously established by those who are setting up the group and orchestrating its activities. Predetermined consensus is one of the common strategies of central planners and is used to give the appearance of local decision making when none exists. (See chapter 17.)

Portfolios

Data files of students’ accomplishments in the new system of education including numerous examples of work on performance packages and the students’ IEPs or lifework plans. Portfolios additionally include a variety of other student records. The information on the portfolios will be entered into a centralized computer system connected with CFL and other school districts. Numerous federal agencies, as well as potential employers, will have access to this data. The information will be listed by social security number or by a number assigned to the student by the school district.

Profile of Learning

The new state mandate that all public schools must teach 78 Content Standards from grades K-12. The Content Standards can only be met by completing performance packages. At the 9-12 grade levels, the Profile of Learning requires the completion of 24 content standards by means of performance packages. The Profile of Learning for grades 9 - 12 is the same as the Graduation Standards, part 2.

Rubrics

The scoring system which CFL dictates that teachers must use for the performance packages. Scores range from 1 to 4, with 4 being the highest and 1 being the lowest. CFL emphasizes that the 1 to 4 system is not the same as a letter grading system. Some teachers have reported that CFL expects them to give no more than 5 percent of packages a score of “4.” A “1” score signifies little more than participation. The 1 to 4 rubric system is part of the federal SCANS Report.

SCANS

Acronym for Secretary’s Commission for Achieving Necessary Skills. SCANS is the 1992 report of the U. S. Secretary of Labor which outlines most of the new system of education. It also describes the supposed “necessary skills” required for most lines of employment. Minnesota’s School-to-Work grant application states that the Profile of Learning and School-to-Work are largely based on SCANS.

School-to-Work (STW)

Refers to the federal School-to-Work Opportunities Act also passed in 1994. Like Goals

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2000, STW created a system of federal regulations and grants. States can receive these grants if they agree to follow the federal regulations. Minnesota's STW grant application states that the Graduation Standards are the "cornerstone" of Minnesota's compliance with the STW guidelines. STW dramatically changes the nature and purpose of education so that all education becomes vocational in orientation. STW also sets up a system of appointed boards which bypass legislators and local school boards in allocating money and in setting education policy.

State-approved Belief System

Governmental requirement that citizens subscribe to a particular world-view consisting of identifiable political, ideological and/or religious positions. Goals 2000, the Profile of Learning and Minnesota's new teacher certification rules contain a clear state-approved belief-system. The state-approved ideology includes, but is not limited to, big government, diversity, feminism, radical environmentalism, abortion rights, gay rights, and group identity.

Social Engineering

Controlling and shaping people's attitudes and behavior by techniques of behaviorist psychology as developed by its founder, B. F. Skinner. Skinner believed that freedom is an illusion and that all living organisms, including people, are totally controlled by their environment. Skinner said that the ideal society would be one that is under complete dictation by a small group of psychologists who would condition people into believing they were free when they were actually being controlled by elitist central planners.

World-Class Standards

Repeatedly-mentioned objective of Goals 2000, STW and the Profile of Learning. The term does not refer to competition between nations, such as in the Olympics. On the contrary, the concept means outcomes agreed upon by the industrialized nations of the world. Not all nations share the same commitment to freedom that is central to education and business in the United States.

Introduction

In the fall of 1997, in Southwestern Minnesota, two high school senior girls were doing their first “performance package.” This performance package was new to their school and was now required for their senior level art class. They worked on it diligently, not knowing that they had become part of the massive revolution in education that is now sweeping our nation.

What the seniors experienced, however, they quickly came to dislike. Their performance package required them to do a series of projects, most of them as members of groups. Since the two girls were good students, they found themselves doing most of the work. The other students pretty much tagged along behind. Such is the nature of group projects at the high school level.

Doing the bulk of the work was not what troubled them most, however. What concerned them most, they said, was this: Their class spent so much time on the newly required group projects that it was able to complete only half of the lesson plans for the course. The two girls finished the semester, they said, with the sense that they had been cheated out of half of their art class.

The experience of these two students is a microcosm of the major changes occurring in Minnesota’s new system of education. Essentially the same changes are taking place in most other states, although some states like Minnesota are farther along in the process than others.

These changes involve a “dumbing down” of the academic content of our schools. Students cannot do two things at the same time, and time spent on state-dictated group projects is time that cannot be spent on a systematic study of course content. Because of this dumbing down nature of the revolution in education, the task force created by the 1998 Minnesota legislature to “fine tune” the Profile of Learning recommended instead that it be “guttled.”¹ In addition, the Minnesota Rural Education Association is so afraid of a massive exodus of students from the public schools that its legislative committee recommended that the 1999 legislature force private schools and home schools to submit to the Graduation Standards just as the public schools must do.²

The lowering of cognitive expectations is not a concern to the architects of the new system of education, however. These theorists want to replace academic learning with other objectives which they believe are more important.

As parents, teachers and other citizens learn about the new system of education, opposition is rapidly growing. For example, a newspaper poll of local teachers in Mankato, Minnesota, determined that only 12 percent of teachers support the new Graduation Standards, and even that support was for a “trial period” only. Eighty-five percent of the teachers said the new system should either be eliminated or undergo major modifications.³

On October 11, 1998, grassroots citizens organized a rally at the state capitol to protest the Profile of Learning. The rally attracted an amazing 3,500 people.⁴ In addition, large numbers of teachers are now signing letters and petitions asking that the new education program be scrapped.

Introduction

Why are Minnesota citizens so vehemently opposed to the changes once they learn what those changes are? What is behind the troubling experience of the two high school seniors in Southwestern Minnesota? What is the revolution in education? To what degree is it happening in Minnesota? What impact will it have on our state and nation?

This manual will seek to answer these questions.