

# ***The Seamless Web: Minnesota's New Education System***

## **11 The SCANS Report**

Minnesota's STW system is largely based on the SCANS report. CFL's publication "Making Connections: School-to-Work Resource Guide, for example, said: "The SCANS report provided the foundation for the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994."<sup>75</sup>

Along the same lines, Minnesota's School-to-Work grant application referred to the Profile of Learning as follows: "...the Profile of Learning...[which] is evolving from the high standards movement as well as from SCANS and STW...."<sup>76</sup> That is, Minnesota's STW grant application clarified that the Profile of Learning is largely a product of the federal government's SCANS Report and the federal government's STW program. STW, in turn, is based on SCANS. *This means that Minnesota's Profile of Learning is largely based on the SCANS report.*

What is SCANS? This acronym refers to a 1992 U. S. Department of Labor report called, *Learning A Living: A Blueprint for High Performance, A SCANS Report for America 2000*. The report was commissioned by President George Bush and was a direct result of the recommendations of the National Center for Education and the Economy (NCEE) and the National Governors' Conference in 1989.

This report called for radical change in our American system of education. It said, "[SCANS] will have to reinvent education, reorganize work and work-based learning, and restructure educational assessment." (Emphasis added.)<sup>77</sup> The report also stated: "Experts universally agree that this job requires reinventing elementary and secondary education." (Emphasis added.)<sup>78</sup> (To say that "experts universally agree" on this "reinventing" of education is absurd, of course, but the proponents of the revolution in education are not bound by standards of truthfulness or accuracy.)

The report proceeded to describe the SCANS classroom as follows: "...abstracted knowledge and facts are being replaced with sophisticated and more realistic concepts of instruction and learning (the teacher may not know all the answers, students learn best in groups, and knowledge is related to real problems.)"<sup>79</sup>

SCANS recommended radical change in all of education—assessments become the norm instead of tests; teachers become "facilitators," not "instructors"; group learning is emphasized as opposed to individual learning; applied projects are required as opposed to classroom and textbook study; education policy is decided by the national government, not the state and local governments; children are viewed as "human resources," not "human beings"; and all education becomes one-track vocational in purpose as opposed to giving students a two-track alternative.

The report also called for the 1 to 4 rubric scoring system instead of grades, portfolios instead of transcripts, enrolling all students and all businesses into the program as opposed to fostering choices, basic skills assessments as opposed to high school level academic achievement testing, dividing outcomes into content standards and performance standards instead of having a singular cognitive learning standard, a unified data-base of student records as opposed to concerns for data privacy and Certificates of Mastery instead of high school diplomas. In other words, the basic precepts of SCANS and Minnesota's new system of education are one and the same.

The SCANS report, for example, specifically recommended:

When a student reaches the performance standard for SCANS competency, that certification will be noted on the resume. When the student has accomplished enough to meet an overall standard, the resume will show that he or she has been awarded a Certificate of Initial Mastery (CIM).<sup>80</sup>

The report then said:

Employers can be expected to demand from students the highest level of certification that the job demands (...including—but not limited to—those required for the CIM).<sup>81</sup>

In other words, SCANS explained that it intends to convince or coerce all employers to require a Certificate of Mastery for job applicants. The CIM certifies completion of the federal SCANS-STW-Goals 2000 program. It is much different than a high school diploma. The Minnesota Business Partnership reported that most large employers have already agreed to require Certificates of Mastery for their job applicants.<sup>82</sup>

What else does SCANS consist of? It's not only a redefinition of our system of education, it's also a redefinition of what it means to be a worker. It's a major change in our economic system, and it's a central planning attempt to compile "job competencies" for most employment areas in our nation. In the past, our education system has provided students with core academic skills and with some vocational skills. We have never before attempted to provide specific job-related skills for most occupations. Providing specialized job-related skills was seen as primarily being the responsibility of the job applicant and of the employer.

Is it, for example, the role of K-12 education to provide specific job skills for waitressing? Or for truck driving? Or for being a sales clerk? We have never before viewed education as having that purpose. On the contrary, the objective of American education has been more in the area of teaching students to read well, to write well, to do math well, and the like. We have always understood that if students possess the core academic skills, they would then be able to quickly learn the specific skills they need for any job for which they had the necessary innate ability.

One of the big questions of SCANS, therefore, is whether schools should focus on academic skills with some vocational programs, or whether schools should concentrate on detailed job skills so employers can presumably avoid the cost of job training programs. Which is more important? SCANS makes a major shift in how we answer that question.

A second and related question is whether central planners sitting in Washington, D.C. are capable of determining which skills are genuinely required for large numbers of jobs? To evaluate that question, let us look at several of the "competencies" that the SCANS report has identified:

## **Job: Farmer**

### **Allocates Time (C01)**

Harvest crops on time. To perform the task, the farmer evaluates the maturity of a given crop and, if the crop is deemed ready for harvest, prepares equipment for use. Next the farmer evaluates the weather and harvests the crop as quickly as possible after accounting for other priorities. **Task ID # 8011151**<sup>83</sup>

One wonders how many farmers would stay in business if they did not "prepare equipment for use" before the crop was ready for harvest?

### **Participates as a Member of a Team (C09)**

Handle manure (e.g. cleaning the barn and spreading the manure on fields). To perform this task, one farmer sets the spreader in place (farm hand A). The other farmer, using a tractor with a

loader, fills the spreader (farm hand B). Then the first farmer spreads the manure on the field. Once manure is spread, both farmers use hand scrapers and shovels to clean areas missed by the tractor. **Task ID # 8091631**<sup>84</sup>

Why doesn't the same farmer who runs the loader also run the spreader? Obviously this SCANS (necessary skill) deems teamwork to be more important than efficiency and being able to make a profit. Are these really state-of-the-art "necessary skills"? Modern farmers in Minnesota are more likely to use a hot water pressure washer to clean their barns and to thoroughly clean and disinfect the premises—something that no handscraper will accomplish.

### **Responsibility (F 13)**

Take responsibility for accomplishing work assignments. To perform this task, the farmer ensures that work assignments are accomplished correctly and on time, such as ensuring that the cattle count is correct. **Task ID # 7131631**<sup>85</sup>

This task makes it sound like farmers spend a significant amount of their time counting their cattle. Ask a farmer how much time, if any, is spent on that task. In addition, how is the farmer going to "take responsibility" by "ensuring that the cattle count is correct"? One would suppose that he or she would have to count them again. Are such time-consuming and bureaucratic tasks really "necessary skills"? They are not.

### **Responsibility (F13)**

Milk cows. To perform this task, the farmer brings cows to a barn early in the morning and sets up milking equipment, and ensures proper operation. The farmer then brings the first cows into the milking parlor and feeds them by attaching milkers. The cows are treated medically, as necessary. **Task ID #7131631**<sup>86</sup>

Do the central planners know which end of the cow gets fed and which end gives milk? Maybe they should actually visit a dairy farm, do some of the work, and find out at least a little bit about farming before they dictate farming's "necessary skills."

These examples demonstrate why central planning has never worked. Should education goals be switched away from academic achievement over to specific training for particular jobs when the "necessary skills" for those jobs are defined by bureaucrats sitting in Washington, D.C.? Most employers are quite emphatic in saying that they want employees who can read well, write well and do mathematics well. Employers are more than happy to teach new employees the necessary job skills if those employees have a good basic education to build upon.

Should employers be requiring Certificates of Initial Mastery of their job applicants to determine that they have the "necessary skills" as illustrated above? This is what SCANS is all about. In addition, Minnesota's CFL says that the Profile of Learning is largely based on the philosophy and detail of the central planning fiasco known as SCANS.

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Notes:

75. Making Connections: School-To-Work Resource Guide p. 11.
76. Minnesota School-to-Work Initiative, p.6.
77. SCANS Report, p. XVI.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid., p. XVII.
80. Ibid., p. 62.
81. Ibid.
82. "Employers Educators: Communicating Requirements for K-12 Graduate Success," Publication of the Minnesota Business Partnership, May 1997.
83. Skills and Tasks for Jobs: A SCANS Report for America 2000, Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, Washington D.C., 1992, p. 3 - 197.
84. Ibid.
85. Ibid., p. 3 - 199.
86. Ibid.