



Summary of Meeting with Jim Bartholomew and Tim McDonald

Civic Caucus, 8301 Creekside Circle, Bloomington, MN 55437

Friday, December 19, 2008

Guest speaker: Jim Bartholomew, education policy director, Minnesota Business Partnership; additional input provided by Tim McDonald, associate, Education|Evolving

Present: (all by phone): Verne C. Johnson, chair; David Broden, Marianne Curry, Paul Gilje, Jim Hetland, Dan Loritz, Tim McDonald, and Wayne Popham

A. Context of the meeting —The Civic Caucus has been conducting several meetings this year on pre-K and K-12 education. Today's meeting concerns work by the Minnesota Business Partnership on best practices and student achievement.

B. Welcome and introductions - Verne and Paul welcomed and introduced Jim Bartholomew, education policy director for the Minnesota Business Partnership(MBP). Bartholomew has been with the MBP as education policy director since 1997, except for a one-year stint in 2003 as director of governmental relations for the Minnesota Department of Education. He is a member of the State Board of Teaching and a founding board member of the Hiawatha Leadership Academy, a charter school. He served on the State Board of Education from 1998-2000. Previously he served on the staff of the Minnesota Senate Republican Caucus. He is a 1982 graduate of the University of Minnesota.

C. Comments and discussion -During Bartholomew's comments and in discussion with the Civic Caucus the following points were raised:

1. Description of MBP -MBP is an organization of 100 chief executives of the larger companies in Minnesota. Since its founding in 1977 it has had education as a major emphasis. According to the MBP's website, its members "have a global perspective on the vital role education plays in the success of their companies and the state as a whole. While Minnesota's students rank among the best in the nation, they appear more average in global comparisons. Equally troubling, Minnesota has one of the worst achievement gaps in the nation between white and minority students."

2. Good results on fourth-grade math comparison with outstanding schools in other nations - Bartholomew said that. Minnesota's students have made considerable international progress in math during the past 12 years, and retained their spot near the top of the world in science, according to the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), a study released in December.

The study, published by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, shows that Minnesota's students are outperformed by only four of 36 countries in fourth-grade math, five of 49 countries in eighth-grade math, one of 36 countries in fourth-grade science and four of 49 countries in eighth-grade science.

The most encouraging results are the fourth-grade math scores, Bartholomew said. Minnesota's fourth-graders improved their performance at more than three times the rate of the entire United States.

Math gains are due to rigorous state math standards that are based on international standards of what kids should be taught, and increased time spent on math instruction, he said.

While the international test results are promising, other recent results have been cause for concern. State test results released in August showed that only about four of 10 Minnesota students can be labeled "proficient" in science. And educators statewide have been concerned about the state 11th-grade math test, where only one-third of students were deemed proficient last spring.

For more information on the study, go to: <http://www.mnbp.com/news.cfm?nid=43> .

During questions Bartholomew said that the study was based on a representative sampling of students throughout the state. One reason for improved math performance between 1995 and 2007 is that teachers are using the state's math standards which help focus and provide consistency in what is taught, he said.

3. High school graduation rates illustrate a serious problem in achievement -Statewide, Minnesota high school graduation rates for the class of 2007 were 73.1 percent. However, the racial-ethnic breakdown of that data illustrates a significant problem, with one grouping, American Indians, one-half the statewide rate, Bartholomew said.

2007 graduation rate

Statewide, all students 73.1 percent

White, non-Hispanic 79.5 percent

Asian 65.8 percent

Black 40.5 percent

Hispanic 39.8 percent

American Indian 36.8 percent

Source: http://www.tccompass.org/education/key_measures.php?km=HighSchoolGraduation

Bartholomew said the data indicate to him that we've not sufficiently customized our instructional practices to meet the needs of all kids. A Civic Caucus member wondered whether too much attention has been focused on giving students a college experience, instead of preparing all students for the job market. Is technical training being downplayed, the member asked?

4. Importance of empowering teachers -During discussion of graduation rates, Bartholomew and Tim McDonald, an associate with Education|Evolving, <http://www.educationevolving.org/bios.asp> , agreed that a key component of improving achievement and graduation rates is to empower teachers. Empowerment, they said, requires that teachers be given greater professional opportunities, with responsibility and accountability for what happens not only in the classroom, but in their school building and district. This means a substantial elevation of the role of teachers, relative to the role of school administrators, they said.

Smaller schools along with greater choice of school are part of the equation, they said. McDonald contended that in schools with 200 or fewer students, with teachers in charge, discipline and attendance problems evaporate, and parents become much more involved. Charter schools are helpful, but not essential, they said. "District schools", that is, schools operating totally within the framework of existing school districts, also can operate successful, smaller, teacher-managed schools, they said. McDonald added that charter schools are inherently self-governed, while with district schools permission must be given.

McDonald and Bartholomew said that giving choice to racial-ethnic minorities must be a higher goal than achieving racial-ethnic balance in schools. McDonald rejects the argument that minorities cannot learn unless surrounded by white peers as 'premised upon racial inferiority.' He draws a distinct difference between state-imposed segregation of the 1950's and the unintentional, 'de facto' segregation that happens when non-white families exercise choice over multiple public school options. 'Not the same thing.'

Bartholomew noted recent legislative testimony by Eric Mahmoud of Harvest Prep and Bill Wilson of Higher Ground Academy, both charter schools with high minority enrollments that are performing well.

5. Recommendations expected within 45 days from business group cooperative study -

Bartholomew said that the MBP, in cooperation with the Itasca project, a business-related group, will likely issue their new report on aligning Minnesota's K-12 system with international best practices within the next 45 days. Bartholomew outlined a few findings of the report to date:

a. It's not fundamentally about money -The main problem isn't how much money is being spent on education, Bartholomew said. The USA spends much more money than many other countries that are performing better on education. The problem lies in how the money is spent.

b. Changes needed in quality of teachers and leadership of schools -Schools need well-articulated goals and expectations, and well-qualified teachers in classrooms. Achievement is only limited by the qualified people who work with the kids, he said. It's not that kids, regardless of background, can't learn, he said

c. Need to link experience with the best schools -The problem isn't one of finding where education is working. We know where the best schools are. The missing link is how to create the changes that need to occur to emulate those schools.

d. Pre-K is very important -Bartholomew agreed with others who are contending that early childhood education is very important in preparing children to learn.

e. Customization is important -Schools have not adapted well to changing demographics. He said he's not sure specifically whether customization should follow a model recommended by Clayton Christensen in his book "Disrupting Class". Bartholomew acknowledged that online learning is exploding and will play a critical role in the near future. He cited what is happening in higher education, with Capella University as an example.

6. Four key ingredients identified— In developing education policies, Bartholomew said the MBP uses four key principles: (1) defining expectations (2) measuring progress (3) giving flexibility to design of curriculum, and (4) giving families choices.

Questioned further about characteristics of great schools, internationally, Bartholomew said the schools are primarily, but not uniformly, public schools. Pre-school education is important. In response to a question, he said he didn't know specifically how special education is handled those schools, relative to Minnesota.

7. Dealing with a budget gap —It was noted that the Minnesota Legislature faces an enormous budget gap in 2009 that will have substantial impact on all state services, including education. Bartholomew said the state must focus on the concept of public education, not simply maintaining current structures and practices. This will allow policy-makers to focus on the needs of students, while creating opportunities for providing services differently. Responding further to questions about the budget problem, Bartholomew said he supports relating teachers' salaries to performance, not only length of service and degrees earned. It's not only money that attracts teachers, he said, it's the nature of the job, and whether teachers are treated as professionals. New approaches to licensing teachers need to be explored, he said.

McDonald contends that the inputs-focused perspective when analyzing these budget gaps has become a red herring. We need to look more fundamental, to the actual design of schools. There are more economical ways of doing things, he said.

8. Is education the only area responsible for closing the achievement gap? —A Civic Caucus member asked whether other areas such as housing and health care aren't important in helping all students succeed. Many children are behind the starting line when they first come to school, and we expect education by itself to bring everyone up to speed, the member said. McDonald said that one can't expect the schools to become social service agencies. But what we do know is that with smaller schools, with teachers empowered, and with parental and community involvement, that students can learn, regardless of background.

The tendency has been to add on: counselors, social workers, breakfast, before and after school programming, extended day and calendar. We are making a system that is already heavy and inefficient even more so. He said that this approach is not financially viable, or efficient. These financial problems we face are a symptom of a problem with design. The root problem of perennial deficits has never been legislative appropriation. What is 'adequate' funding? Operating expenses of district K-12 have been rising at three times the CPI for at least a decade. The business model is no longer viable. We have been focusing efforts almost entirely on the symptom, not the disease.

9. Relevance of union contracts and seniority issues -McDonald said we have been caught in a perennial frontal-conflict between two groups: labor and management. This does not have to be. The

more workers are in charge of their own destiny, the need for labor protection diminishes. This could allow for professional associations to emerge, a 'healthier' type of union for schools, and one that would service kids, not adults. Bartholomew said he totally agrees. Responding to a question, Bartholomew said he believes the MBP would work together with the teachers union on teacher empowerment.

10. Important connection between education and strong labor market —Minnesota's ability to remain economically

competitive and build our quality of life will increasingly be determined by our success in dealing with demographic changes, and

ensuring all our K-12 students receive the best education possible, Bartholomew said. Minnesota is aging and becoming more

diverse. For example, growth in our labor force is projected to grow much more slowly than it has between 1970 and 2010.

As a result, our ability to replace and grow jobs is jeopardized. One solution is to make sure all our students are as well prepared

as possible. Today, less than half of our African-American and Hispanic students graduate from high school, yet between 2010 and

2020 their population grow rates are projected at 29% and 66%, respectively (the corresponding growth rate for white students is

3.6%). All our students need an education that allows them to be competitive in the global marketplace.

11. Need to be globally competitive —Summing up, Bartholomew said our students need to be globally competitive. You can have standards and still treat teachers as professionals and empower them at the school level.

12. Thanks— On behalf of the Civic Caucus, Verne thanked Bartholomew and McDonald for meeting with us today.