

GOVERNOR'S POLICY ISSUES 1984-85

Dissemination of Innovation Issue Team

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Dissemination of Innovation Issue Team

**Subcabinet:** Educational and Cultural Affairs

**Team leader:** Laura Zahn, Minnesota Department of Education

**Summary of issue:** The team worked at ways to disseminate innovation in teaching, management, evaluation, and curriculum. The intent was to limit review to dissemination systems which included one or more of the four commonly accepted levels of dissemination: spread (send out information, such as newsletters and brochures); exchange (communicate about specific needs and options); choice (assist in decision making by providing specific information); and implementation (provide technical help and information to make use of choice).

The team's mission was to recommend what the state's role in dissemination of innovation should be.

Two general questions were attempted by the team:

Should or could the state meet needs for dissemination of innovation in one or more major approaches, which may require significant fiscal impact, such as establishing a new agency or program, or expanding an existing program?

If not, should the state attempt to meet needs for dissemination of innovation, and if so, how?

**Major findings and conclusions:** A number of education innovations exist, according to findings of team members who examined dissemination systems in their own agencies or national or private systems.

There is not a need at this time to duplicate efforts or create a new bureaucracy, such as a centralized agency, to disseminate innovation.

A number of what appeared to be excellent dissemination systems for innovative ideas presently exist. Many are relatively small programs, which are limited in scope and potential because of fiscal constraints. (The state may be able to contribute funds to already existing dissemination systems, and increase accessibility in adoption and adaptation of innovative programs by Minnesota school districts.)

Because education innovation and systems to disseminate it do exist, the team is making two recommendations for further consideration in the 1985 session:

- Discretionary levy authority to allow districts to levy up to \$5,000 to adopt and adapt an innovation;
- A statewide, computerized information network, which would allow education information to be transmitted and received via microcomputer. A two-year pilot could cost \$116,500 in 1985 and \$124,060 in 1986, after which use, information demands, and other factors could be analyzed.

If there is a further need, it appears to be for more information on existing systems of dissemination.

Team members wish to emphasize the need for dissemination. Obviously, all innovations, no matter how wonderful, are limited if no one knows about them.

The Governor may want to adopt a policy that any program dealing with school improvement include a component to disseminate, at the agency level or through future legislation.

Dissemination should be considered an integral part of each improvement project or effort. It can be addressed as a budget line item by agencies requesting funding for an innovation or within agency budgets, as long as dissemination is recognized as an important state function and responsibility, and the state is willing to support it.

### **BACKGROUND**

Several national reports point out major flaws and federal, state, and local studies suggest ways to improve and restructure public education.

In this newly fueled quest for educational excellence, new ways of teaching and management are sought. The innovative programs can rejuvenate teachers, meet special needs of individual students, and improve the instructional environment significantly. Emphasizing creative new ideas has been a popular strategy to meet the high expectations and growing pressure of accountability of our schools.

Therefore, some of Minnesota's 434 independent school districts have embraced new management, teaching, and learning concepts, and are restructuring public education at the local level. At the state level, a number of programs have been established and funded. For example, the Technology and Educational Improvement Act and the Council on Quality Education provide incentives for development of education innovation. The Governor's Task Force on the Minnesota School for the Arts is examining creation of a unique performing arts school. The State University System requires faculty development grant recipients to include a dissemination of research component in the project. The Minnesota Department of Education, the Minnesota Department of Energy and Economic Development, the State Vocational Board, and other agencies often organize conferences and workshops to assure details of successful innovations can be replicated elsewhere. The Minnesota Department of Education is working on, for instance, school-business-community partnerships, which link innovative ideas in private enterprise and public school personnel.

However, there is no one state agency for education innovation. On the contrary, each major educational system in the state has its own structures for innovation, and, quite likely, a number of ways to disseminate it.

On the surface, this may seem like little is being done, that small programs here and there operate independently of each other, and/or without much attention. There is no single place to go to obtain complete information on all education innovation in the State of Minnesota.

The charge for this issue team, then, was to study ways the state can help disseminate new ideas in education, including curricula, teaching methods, management techniques, and evaluation methods.

The issue team operated under the assumptions that team members are not creating new ideas, but focusing on how those new ideas are distributed. The team members also assumed innovation already exists, and the mission is not to develop or define projects or programs as innovative, but how to simply pass on information about them. The team also opened the definition of education to lifelong learning.

Team members included: Jackie Lind, Department of Energy and Economic Development; Dr. George Bates, State University Systems; Cyndy Christ, Governor's Office on Science and Technology; Peggy Spencer, State Vocational Board; Jerry Setter, Higher Education Coordinating Board; Sue Sattel, Council on Quality Education; Pat Tupper, Minnesota Department of Education; Len Nachman, Minnesota Department of Education; Dr. Ann Geisser, Minnesota Community Colleges; Dr. Nancy Roberts, University of Minnesota School of Management.

Team members were asked to use a common report form to obtain information about dissemination systems already in use. The forms were intended to explain the system, its affiliation with the state, which of the four levels of dissemination it uses, what needs the system meets, and provide some information on strengths and weaknesses of the system. Team members were free to choose the systems in their or other agencies, which they thought operated dissemination systems from which the team could learn. At no time has the information gathering method been portrayed as scientific. But team members believe a good variety of major education dissemination systems were represented in the more than a dozen dissemination systems examined.

Interview forms were reviewed by team members, after which conclusions were drawn and recommendations made.

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As stated earlier, Issue Team members do not recommend creating a new state agency or program to disseminate innovation in education.

There appear to be a number of dissemination systems, which deal with education innovation, already in place. If the Governor chooses to make education innovation a high priority, the Issue Team recommends the following be considered:

**Discretionary Levy Possibility**--The Governor may wish to consider allowing school districts to have discretionary levy authority which would enable them to levy approximately \$5,000 per year per district to adopt an innovation. Similar legislation was passed in 1984 to allow districts with community education programs to levy for early childhood and family education funding.

Districts with an interest and commitment to innovation could levy and choose from a list of innovation published by the Council on Quality Education. The list could include a number of quality innovations, including but not limited to CQE projects. At the same time, the Council on Quality Education could drop a dissemination mini-grant program. This permissibility would allow all districts with an interest in innovation to secure funding without applying for a grant. No state match would be required, but might be considered as an incentive. The relatively small amount of money would prevent opportunists from capitalizing on a new funding source, but would be sufficient to provide for "new blood" each year. Area Vocational Technical Institutes could be included.

Approximately \$10,000 would be needed for CQE to produce and disseminate a list of innovations to all Minnesota school districts and to other interested agencies and individuals. The money (\$15,000) in CQE's mini-grant program could return to the CQE fund to allow more innovations to be funded. Some provision might be made so large districts could levy for more than one innovation/year, and some fiscal considerations of power equalization should be made.

**Computerized Dissemination System**--Eight states, not including Minnesota, presently "buy" a portion of data base space from the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA), through The Source data base, which is partially owned by Control Data. The state network, run either by the State Education Agencies or the State School Board Associations, provide a variety of information to local school districts who subscribe to the NSPRA computer network. Cost-effective innovation, public relations and school promotion information, statistics, curriculum information, information about state requirements and rules, legislative updates, and a variety of other information is available through this computer network to local districts.

A number of members of the Minnesota chapter of the School Public Relations Association, including representatives from the southwest Educational Cooperative Service Unit, the Minnesota Association of School Administrators, and the Cambridge, Rosemount, Robbinsdale, Bloomington, Roseville, Edina, and Rochester districts, have indicated a strong interest in subscribing to a state network, through NSPRA, to receive and communicate information with the Minnesota Department of Education, and each other. Some small and out-state districts are particularly interested in the network, which could allow them to receive legislative information without coming to St. Paul. Other interests of these districts include a news line, statistics, regulatory information, and the ability to communicate with other states and other districts within the state. Innovation could be a feature.

The cost to subscribe to the NSPRA network would cost approximately \$175 per district per year, plus on-line charges of approximately \$17 per hour. Estimates are of about two hours a week for at least one person in the district using the service. Other costs the state could bear would be personnel to work with districts in a pilot and evaluate use, and to work in the Minnesota Department of Education in getting useful information onto the computer, and evaluating information needs and uses. Eventually, other state organizations, such as the Minnesota Curriculum Services Center, the public libraries, the teacher unions, the Minnesota School Administrators Association, principals associations, and school boards associations could also be buying into the national network to communicate instantly with Minnesota districts.

The Interagency Resource and Information Center (IRIC), located in the Minnesota Department of Education, already subscribes to the NSPRA network, and to a number of other data bases. The possibility exists to link the IRIC with school districts to search for information.

The public library system, headquartered at the Minnesota Department of Education in the Office of Library Development Services, has expressed interest in electronic mail, via a computer and modem, for Minnesota's 330 public libraries.

The Minnesota Curriculum Services Center has long-range plans for connecting its computer with vocational institutes and teacher training institutes. Information about each item available in the instructional materials media resource library would be available weekly over the microcomputer, as would listings and bibliographies.

The Council on Quality Education is piloting a state network called EDU-Link, which is not connected to the national network. Instead, districts with a microcomputer and a modem can call a 1-800 number and connect with the CQE computer. CQE reports good use in the first year, and expects use to increase as more districts become aware of this service.

A two-year pilot, which would allow 25 districts to hook-up and use the NSPRA network, employ two information officers for two years and a clerk-typist for the second year, and be run from the MDE IRIC or public information office, would cost about \$116,500 the first year and \$124,060 the second.

Frankly, we need a pilot because not enough is known about what information would be used and in what quantities and frequency, as well as overall costs. While this type of communication and dissemination is surely in the picture for Minnesota schools districts, state agencies and other institutions, it should be approached with planning and flexibility, depending on costs and other factors. A pilot is advisable.

#### **FOR CONSIDERATION**

Listed below are short summaries of the dissemination systems team members found to provide one or more of the four levels of dissemination about education innovation.

Again, team members do not claim to have done extensive interviews or to be able to make recommendations based on the findings for increased state funding or commitment. The summaries are presented as part of providing a picture of what dissemination systems dealing with education innovation presently exist.

**National Diffusion Network (NDN)**--Briefly, NDN funds and recommends innovative programs, developed by educators, which are disseminated by in-servicing. Schools pay part of the cost of having a developer visit and pay to implement the projects district-wide. NDN pays for about 100 projects a year nationwide and for three Minnesota facilitators. Another 200 projects are recommended by NDN, but funded by districts who like the concept, want the training, and can pay for it.

NDN projects are evaluated for effectiveness, local education associations have a choice in picking the projects, change at the local level is emphasized, some financial and human commitment is required of the Local Education Agencies, and small, but effective, projects are also featured. Funding for this educational innovation project of the U.S. Department of Education is unstable.

**Council on Quality Education (CQE)**--The council disseminates information about successful innovations for adoption by other school districts throughout the state. Since 1971, 146 innovations have been funded. Currently about \$800,000 is appropriated enabling the council to select about 10 new projects annually from about 140 proposals. Dissemination falls heavily upon the local project directors. CQE spends approximately \$30,000 on dissemination and an additional \$20,000-30,000 for the EDU-Link pilot (a telecommunication system via micro-computers). The annual \$30,000 expenditure is divided among replication and dissemination support grants for other districts to adopt successful innovations, conferences, brochures, displays, and special dissemination activities and activities of operation of evaluation/dissemination committee.

**The Exchange**--This agency is a dissemination and technical assistance unit of the Teacher Center at the University of Minnesota. Private foundations sponsor some specific innovative projects, about \$15,000 of Federal Block Grant money fund some projects, and miscellaneous funds to coordinate other projects may be available each year.

In-service projects are funded through grants, which include the cost of staff, administration and travel, and through registration of materials. The Exchange provides training and resource materials to educators. It maintains a curriculum resource bank and in-service training usually focuses on effective innovation research and school effectiveness. The Exchange coordinates with Educational Cooperative Service Units (ECSUs), CQE, nonpublic schools, NDN, Title I, the Minnesota Department of Education, the Minnesota Department of Economic Security, Far West Laboratory, and to other grantors.

There appears to be no limit to the dimensions of the Exchange, because it can grow and provide as many projects as funds allow, since each project is funded individually. The Exchange works cooperatively with other agencies to avoid duplication, and it coordinates a number of dissemination projects.

In the past, state money was used in amounts of less than \$10,000 for program implementation and for teachers to act as certified trainers.

**Public Information Programs**--A number of Minnesota state education agencies have public information programs which disseminate information through newsletters, newspapers, brochures, press releases, and other promotional and informative materials. Resources could be increased to emphasize dissemination of innovation.

For example, the Minnesota Department of Education's Publications and Public Information Section distributes a newsletter to all school districts each month during the school year, called "Education Update." Some news about innovation is printed, but innovation is not necessarily a priority. Information and news is emphasized. Of the \$182,000 annual budget for activities and salaries in this section, the State of Minnesota contributes \$4,700. The rest of the money is Federal Block Grant, as is the \$63,200 in the section supervisor's budget.

**Minnesota Writing Project**--The Minnesota Writing Project, which has been supported by a Bush Foundation Faculty Development Grant since 1981, has writing task forces located on each of the seven Minnesota State University campuses. The project stresses the application of writing across the curriculum by bringing faculty from all disciplines together in week-long summer workshops. The workshops are led by task force members who are colleagues, and during the week workshop participants share their innovative approaches to using writing in classroom instruction. The workshop structure also emphasizes ways to integrate what has been learned into each faculty's teaching. System wide meetings of campus task force members are used in part to disseminate new approaches to teaching and writing between campuses.

**Dissemination Centers**--A number of dissemination centers exist. They include the Vocational-Technical Education Information Services Division, the State Board of Vocational-Technical Education's Vocational Equity Division, the Small Business Development Center (College of Business, St. Cloud State University), and the Congressional Research Service, (Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.).

**Varina High School**--Varina High School, in Richmond, Virginia, is the site of the Governor's Center for Educational Innovation and Technology. This state funded center, located in an existing school, emphasizes education innovation and technology through in-servicing. A team of developers works with school staff, then moves to another school. A dissemination team receives a portion of the budget each year to communicate about innovation and the Center's work.

While Issue Team members did not visit the Center, it appears it operates on much the same premise as recent school effectiveness and technology demonstration site legislation. In addition, the Virginia Legislature has some concerns about budgets of as high as \$1.3 million. At this time, it appears Minnesota has taken steps to disseminate innovation through Article 8 legislation.

The point of including it here is to emphasize the dissemination component, which might be emphasized in future Minnesota efforts.

LZ:sjhh1-5  
09/21/84