



May 14, 2013

Rep. Paul Marquart, Chair, House K-12 Education Finance Committee

Dear Rep. Marquart,

MREA is not issuing an action alert regarding Minnesota's World Class Work Force and Regional Centers of Excellence contained HF 630. We agree with your intent and premise, have grave concerns about the ability of this section of HF 630 to be effective as drafted, and recommend an alternate course of action to achieve your intent and two amendments to your proposed revision of 120B.11.

MREA supports the intent and premise behind Minnesota's World Class Work Force and Regional Centers of Excellence for the following five reasons:

- The state has an over-riding interest in defining the outcomes of the state's education system as stated in this section. The State is paying most of the bill for education and the education of the future workforce is central to the success of Minnesota a state in the 21st century.
- The achievement gaps are large, American Indian Graduation gap is the largest in the nation, and they are not going away despite pockets of excellence in the state.
- School districts are not held accountable for academic achievement in a systematic manner regarding student achievement. NCLB held school buildings accountable, the GRAD rule held students accountable, but districts were not. These approaches have largely been unsuccessful.
- The significant student work force readiness envisioned by this section of HF 630 will require systemic changes in order to align curriculum, create a professional culture of learning at all levels, allocate resources both human and capital to achieve the goals of student achievement, and create the trust evident in high performing systems. School districts need to function at high levels of quality on these and other dimensions, and sadly not all have the capacity to do so without the addition of strong leadership or external coaching and consequences.
 - I can speak from experience on what it takes for systemic level change which is a necessary condition for improved student achievement.
 - As Superintendent, I was able to lead two school districts in this direction, Eden Valley-Watkins and Foley, and achieve in each district 90% reading proficiency in 3rd grade and had steadily improving achievement at all levels.
 - I was the External Provider for Ogilvie HS from 2010-2012, a Minnesota SIG, school and which was publicly described as one of "Minnesota's persistently lowest achieving schools" by MDE. Ogilvie HS in 2012 had an MMR rating of 70, which is in top third of Minnesota's schools. Ogilvie had the greatest growth of all Minnesota SIG schools. Its growth was the double the average of the other SIG schools in that two year period.
- Other states hold school districts accountable through an accreditation process with consequences for failing to be accredited. For example, Iowa has standards for accreditation of school districts (I refer you to Iowa Administrative Code Chapter 12 Rule: General Accreditation Standards for School Districts and Accredited Nonpublic Schools) which are public standards. The IDE examines each district once every five years and can take accreditation, funding and other steps should districts not meet accreditation standards. Other states, including Wyoming

and now North Dakota, use the AdvancED (formerly North Central Accreditation) for accreditation. Michigan uses AdvancEd for part of their accreditation process. Minnesota has nothing like this.

MREA has grave concerns that the Minnesota's World Class Work Force and Regional Centers of Excellence section of HF 630 as drafted and proposed to revise 120B.11 will be ineffective in achieving its intent. It will fail to truly raise the achievement and workforce readiness of Minnesota's graduates and just be "another program with a name and label" for the following reasons:

- There will be no buy-in at any level other than at MDE and by the employees of the Regional Centers of Excellence (RCE's). There was little public discussion. It was introduced with the delete all HF 630 which you introduced one month ago in committee. It will be perceived as more lashing of public education and could very well go the route of the Profiles of Learning.
- This is a major change for Minnesota, and establishes new relationships between MDE, the RCE's and school districts. To gain the trust needed to implement this effectively will require conversation and negotiations among stakeholders. Without this conversation, all decisions to withhold funds need to be done by public data metric that provides early warning and opportunity for districts to improve on their own before the commissioner intervenes.
- World Class Workforce and RCE does integrate now with the System Accountability Committee and Report, but does not integrate any of the following improvement systems which are already in place in the state:
 - Minnesota's NCLB waiver has "closing gap by half" as its metric and a system for identifying priority schools.
 - School districts are to set aside 2% of revenue for staff development with goals. This law is integrated only when districts are determined by the commission to "not be making sufficient progress." That is rather late in the game.
 - Required teacher evaluations and QComp.
 - Integration aid.
 - Literacy aid.
- MDE does not have the best track record when given unchecked authority. Ask any of the SIG schools, the schools seeking flexible year calendars, or even the Q comp schools. There needs to be public standards and clear processes before MDE can withhold funds or orders school districts to implement a turn-around model. It is essential that the commissioner's authority under the revision to 120B.11 as proposed to be public and determined by credible data.

MREA recommends two courses of action which in our opinion will have a much greater chance of achieving the aims of World Class Workforce and RCE's.

1. Our first and most effective strategy is to establish a task force, or working group, so the conversation among stakeholders can be held, and charged with making recommendations to:
 - a. re-align the roles and relationships among the state (MDE), the new Regional Centers of Excellence and school districts to bring about systemic change and a world class work force by 2027 with clear standards, supports and consequences for school districts, Centers and for MDE in this process,

- b. integrate the existing improvement laws into a coherent whole(see list above)—to the degree possible under federal statute, and
- c. identify by existing research, a menu of proven improvement strategies from which school districts may choose to create systemic change.

Bring those recommendations to the 2014 legislature for implementation in the 2014-15 school year. Hold the 2015 basic formula increases contingent upon passage of this new alignment. Otherwise it goes into the state reserves. The sooner this is done in the session the sooner funding is secure.

You have the resources for this in the first year's \$ for RCE's. Repurpose some for the task force and the rest so the RCE's can become staffed and functional by June 1 to do summer training on this new alignment and district responsibilities for the 2014-15 year.

If you have too many task forces, then make a list, have the conference committee rank them and eliminate the lower ranking task forces and working groups.

- 2. Amend the current "PER" law 120B.11 to more tightly focus the school district's planning, reporting and include accountability measures as you are proposing as of this afternoon. These PER committees and there reports will become far more important in school districts.

We recommend the following changes to your amendment regarding 120B.11:

- a. Subd 1 add (d)

(d) "Not making sufficient progress" means any one of the following:

- i. Failing to submit an annual System Accountability Report as specified herein,
- ii. Failing to hold the annual meeting as specified herein,
- iii. Scoring in the bottom 10% of Minnesota Districts in any consecutive three year period on a publicly available data metric determined by the commissioner using multiple data points from SLEDS measuring both current district status and growth in students' career and college readiness.

- b. Subd 2 (3) to eliminate "performance based" as an ill-defined term that will tie schools up in knots. Keep it simple.

2.5 (3) a ~~performance-based~~ system for periodically reviewing and evaluating the
2.6 effectiveness of all instruction and curriculum that includes, among other measures to
2.7 improve teaching and learning, a ~~performance-based~~ system for annually evaluating
2.8 school principals under section 123B.147, subdivision 3, and school teachers under

Speaking on behalf of the 160 school districts in MREA, we appreciate your concern and focus on improving the educational outcomes for all Minnesota youth. You have the courage to tackle this large and important task. We want you and our districts to be successful in serving children both for their future and ours.

Please accept these recommendations to improve the odds of success to develop a common vision of district accountability. As co-chair of the Assessment and Accountability Working Group, I had no idea that we would develop the recommendations we did. Our best advice is to trust the process of a task force with the strings attached to get it done. If that is not your preferred course of action, please make all criteria regarding funding public and based on credible data. That will lay a firm foundation for the rest of your vision, and give it the best chance to strive for the world's best workforce.

Respectfully yours,
Fred Nolan, MREA Executive Director

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