



Talking Points

*For use by school leaders in presentations
about important issues related to public education*

Continuous Change

Minnesota Schools are constantly changing to meet the needs of today's learners as they prepare for an unknown future. The Minnesota Association of School Administrators, the Association of Secondary School Principals and the Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association assist schools and school leaders as they identify and make changes.

Have public schools really changed, or are they run just like they were 50 years ago as charged by some critics? There is some element of truth in both perspectives.

First, schools have changed in significant ways. Kids learn more during their educational careers than they have at any time in the past, from kindergarten through grade 12 and beyond. If you visit a classroom, it is unlikely to resemble a classroom of the 1950s and 1960s when there were four straight rows and students were quietly receiving instructions about what they would later learn by rote memory. The teacher was in the front of the class and the pencil sharpener in the back. There were no stations or learning groups. There was no collaboration or communication among students. Smart boards didn't exist and research was limited to the ten-year-old set of encyclopedias in the library. There were few instructional specialists, and most of us didn't know about the influence that art or music or science had on the way our brains form or the ways we were able to apply the knowledge we acquired. Staff development was unheard of, and current events were a mystery. In most classes, students didn't have special needs or speak in different languages. Kids may not have known what the environment was and had not learned the consequences of their actions on it. But our world is different now and dynamic, and our schools must be, too.

Things have changed. Since 1980, nearly 50 new mandates, programs, and expectations have been added to the public school charge. All of these take time and other precious resources. Most of these provide *some* benefit to *someone*. A *few* of these help students to learn more and achieve more. Quality early childhood education, for example, reduces the achievement gap among learners, produces greater school outcomes, and improves success in the workplace. Our schools at all levels are employing new strategies at all levels to promote student learning and achievement and to strengthen students' life and learning skills.

Schools are teaching new technologies every day; providing updated curriculum, differentiated learning schedules, gifted and remedial instruction, and timely assessment. Online learning is being more widely used to supplement classroom teaching. There are even online diploma programs and postsecondary options. The increasing possibilities of technology have not even been imagined yet. (Go to youtube.com and see *shift happens, did you know 2.0* for information on the pace at which our world is changing.)

On the other hand... structurally, most schools operate as they did a long time ago. That structure has worked and has helped Minnesota become among the best in the country and the world. That structure *might* continue to work if it was affordable. It *might* continue to work if this dynamic world didn't demand that our schools become more fluid, flexible, innovative and globally focused. That structure *might* still be the best one if we didn't see different and new untapped resources and opportunities on the horizon. It *might* still work if we didn't know that the structure that empowered us in the past might block our competitiveness in the future.

Schools are challenged to continue to achieve world class standards, but to do it at lower costs and higher efficiency. It is incumbent on our school leaders to light the untraveled path to a new and better way. It is incumbent upon policy makers and parents and taxpayers to recognize that what was good enough for the past is not good enough for the future.