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# THE SCHOOL ROOM AND THE STATE :

-- A Program Designed to Equalize  
Educational Opportunities in Minnesota. --

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A Special Message to Members of the  
Sixty-Fourth Legislative Session

Thursday, March 25, 1965.

## To Members of the Minnesota Legislature:

The other day I talked to the children in the Park Point Elementary School of Duluth. The gymnasium was packed. The youngsters were tense with excitement. A few were members of special classes for the handicapped. The rest were average, healthy, curious, receptive.

I was drawn up short, recalling again our immense responsibilities as adults in this State of Minnesota to provide these children with every possible opportunity to learn, to measure up, to understand themselves and their world.

It is that subject -- the education of our young people -- about which I wish to speak in this message.

Building a viable system of education is a job that goes on day by day, school district by school district, across the entire state. The pace quickens during the critical 120 days when the legislature convenes to chart the course of the state. Traditionally, our legislature gives top priority to the ever present needs of the students of our state -- and the results have built us a great name, in advanced scientific industry, in humanitarian health and welfare programs, in wise use of our rich natural resources, in family and community stability, and, most important, in developing and sharpening our capacities to cope with this changing mid-twentieth century America.

That capacity fortifies us today as we proceed with the job which must be done.

### **I. Strengthen the Department of Education**

I have talked a good deal in earlier messages about the need to strengthen the leadership role of our State Department of Education. Specifically, there are three steps which I urge.

1. You have before you a bill which would give the Civil Service Board the authority to establish broader ranges in the pay plan, thereby making it possible for the department to recruit and retain professional and technical personnel in competition with the school districts of the state.

2. A second bill would provide for five additional ranges on top of the present pay plan.

Both of these proposals will go a long way to provide the imaginative leadership which we must have if education is to keep ahead and accomplish its mission.

3. Also pending is a recommendation to provide for a \$25,000 survey of the operations of the Department of Education.

The growing needs of education give us reason to examine the function, goals and present organization of the State Department, and to provide new and improved ways of fulfilling those functions. I urge your support for this survey.

### **II. School District Organization**

It is in the local districts where the real confrontations occur -- where you must look directly into the eyes of the wise, curious and exciting faces of youth.

Minnesota has moved cautiously and deliberately in strengthening the effectiveness of its school district organization. The legislature has guarded the cherished traditions, and has recognized the importance of community understanding and acceptance of proposed changes. It was a milestone when the 1963 legislature passed the bill that ended the outmoded closed school district system, and it was well to provide for a two-year lapse before the bill was fully operative.

1. I urge you to take the same forthright action with regard to the pending proposal to put all areas of the state into districts which provide education from kindergarten through high school. There are some thousand common ungraded school districts still in operation in Minnesota -- serving approximately 8 per cent of our school children. These one-room school houses can offer effective education, if they are fortunate enough to have a singularly accomplished teacher in charge. But I am convinced, as is Dr. James Conant and many others who have examined this question in greater depth than I, that a youngster does not have full and equal opportunity at the best education possible when he lives in a district which provides him only with a sixth grade education.

If he goes on to high school, in another district, on a tuition basis, his parents are certainly not sharing in the governing of that high school district nor in the long-range planning and support of its education responsibilities.

This has long been a goal in our state -- a high school home for every young person. I hope that the 1965 legislature will make it a reality.

2. Though no legislation is pending on the subject of high school district enlargement, a commentary on the needs of elementary and secondary education in Minnesota would not be complete without referring to this subject.

It is estimated that of the 450 school districts with grade one through twelve in Minnesota, fully one-half have a tax base that is inadequate to meet their needs.

The quality of education will not improve, the curriculum offerings will not expand, the vocational facilities and training will not be available when a school district is impoverished, marginal, unequal to its challenge. I know that Minnesotans want the best education possible for their young people. I am confident that a way will be found to strengthen the organization of our high school districts.

### III. Interim Study of the State Aid Formula

Minnesota made a giant stride when it adopted the present foundation formula but it is no secret that the foundation formula is still but a framework...the beginnings of a real foundation. We have yet to build the structure.

What are the minimum requirements of a quality program of education?

How much does it cost?

Where are valid measurements of a school district's ability to pay for it?

It is imperative that we find the answers to these questions if we are to make the state aid dollar pay off in providing high quality educational opportunity to every child -- rural and urban.

We might pursue this study through the traditional Legislative Interim Committee procedure or we might achieve greater flexibility, and enhance the likelihood of obtaining funds from private research foundations, if the study were to be conducted by a citizen-legislator committee, appointed by the Governor, in consultation with legislative leaders.

Whichever device is ultimately selected, I regard this as one of our most urgent responsibilities.

#### IV. Curriculum Improvement

The National Defense Education Act has given new life to the nation's education programs, particularly in science and mathematics. It is encouraging that the Congress has now expanded the NDEA to include history and civics, geography, English, and guidance and counseling at the lower school level.

Because the federal financing of these programs had not yet been settled at the time of budget preparation, I was not able to include in my original budget recommendation the matching state monies for five new NDEA positions. I urge you to support the supplemental request which has been presented to you to meet this new challenge.

#### V. Vocational Education

It is in the field of skills training that we face one of our most critical challenges. The massive expansion of scientific technology, the diminished need for unskilled labor, the sky-rocketing numbers of young Americans, young Minnesotans, in search of a place in the sun -- all these have combined to create an urgent pressure for vocational education and training.

The Minnesota Area Vocational Technical School Law passed 20 years ago has served admirably to meet this need. The 17 area schools, and the seven to be in service by 1966, will put vocational education within commuting distance of 95 per cent of the population.

1. Because of growing national concern, vast federal sums are becoming available for expanded vocational programs. I urge you to act favorably on the supplemental request which is before you, for approval of eleven positions in the Vocational Education Division of the Department of Education. These key personnel will help us take full advantage of the federal grants for equipment and facilities, and will make vocational education more readily available to Minnesota's youth. All but three of the new positions are 100 per cent federally financed.

Two of the new employees would be specifically directed to speed up the development of the "work-study" programs. These represent a new direction in our high schools. The young potential dropout is encouraged to stay on in school by giving him the chance to combine classroom work with part-time gainful employment.

2. While we are still somewhat hampered by the fact that the vocational schools have been developed on a district basis, I am encouraged by the increasing sharing of vocational facilities. In this regard, I comment to you the pending proposal to provide tuition-free vocational education to the qualified young person, whether or not he is a resident of the area vocational school district. Federal funds will be available to cover the costs incurred by the receiving school district, but state legislation is imperative in order to permit this new approach.

3. I further ask that you consider with care the request for approximately a million dollars in matching funds to make use of the money available through the federal Manpower Development Training Act. Minnesota should be fully prepared with matching money if that becomes necessary to qualify for continuance of the MDTA grants.

4. Education does not end with high school. Many adults in Minnesota are seeking to make up for what they missed out on during their teen years, and many others are acquiring new skills through adult education. Ample provision should be made for expansion and encouragement of our adult education programs.

5. I am particularly encouraged by the new national interest that has been taken in the young man who is rejected by the draft for medical reasons. In the past, he has been too often discarded on the slag heap.

The 1964 Selective Service Rejectee Referral Program is evidence of the nation's determination to end this wasting of youthful manpower. I have designated the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation of the Department of Education to shoulder this referral responsibility, to see to it that if a youth is rejected, he is told why and he is helped to the rehabilitation resource which can give him new skills, new hope.

## VI. Education of the Handicapped

### 1. Sheltered Workshops

How do you learn to work if you are a handicapped person? If you are retarded, where do you turn to find out how to be useful?

One answer that has been developed is the sheltered workshop setting where a handicapped person who has learned all he can from the school room situation can, in effect, "graduate" into a work-training program.

I have visited these sheltered workshops and have seen the great social gain accomplished when a handicapped person can find a job that is suited to his capabilities.

Industry, society, the handicapped individual and his family -- all are the gainers. I am told that we have 400 sheltered workshop settings available in Minnesota and that we need as many as 4,000. I urge you to enact the pending proposal to give state grants-in-aid to local groups which establish these workshops.

### 2. Daytime Activity Centers for the Retarded

During the past year I have visited several daytime activity centers for the mentally retarded and seen firsthand what can be accomplished in providing supervised training and recreation. There are currently 23 such centers supported jointly by state and local money; nine are supported entirely by local funds. All told, these centers provide for some 461 retarded children.

The results have been encouraging. A few of the youngsters have gone on to steady and paid employment. Some have made such improvements that they were able to enter special classes in public schools for the trainable retarded. Some have learned to walk for the first time, having spent years of their lives immobile, alone.

To establish new daytime centers for the retarded and to expand services in those centers already operating, I urge you to enact the full appropriation that has been requested -- \$522,900. It is a minimum program. There are already 150 persons on the waiting list of the existing centers. There are already communities standing in line for necessary state assistance to help them get activity centers into operation. And there are the parents who are counting on us for this kind of support as they try to cope with the heartrending responsibility of caring for a handicapped child.

### 3. Remedial Reading Project

During my observation tours of the various state educational and institutional programs, I had the opportunity to see some of the work that is being done with children who have severe reading disabilities.

It has been proposed that a pilot program be established to study the results of intensive remedial work with such children.

The demonstration would be conducted in selected local school districts collaborating with mental health centers or state colleges or the university.

It is hoped that the demonstration will prove that there is a remedy for reading disability and, with it, a way of preventing the emotional suffering and illness, the devastating unhappiness, destruction and delinquency which often accompany the feeling of being unable to learn.

The project will cost approximately \$30,000. I urge you to give it your support.

### 4. Increase in Special Education Aid

The goal of special education -- helping handicapped children attain their maximum level of independence and productivity -- will only be achieved when education services are of genuinely high quality.

Today some 7,200 retarded youngsters are in classes geared to their special needs.

But it is estimated that there are many thousands who are not. Thousands who are sitting idle at home, or in a foster home, or possibly even in a classroom of normal children, ignored, humiliated. For them, equal opportunity for education just does not exist!

To speed up provision of special classes to accommodate these youngsters, I urge your strong support for the pending proposal to increase state reimbursement for special education costs from \$3600 to \$4800 per teacher.

### 5. New Approaches to the Problems of Special Education

While much progress has been made, we are still painfully aware of the uneven development of education opportunities for the handicapped. Even with state aid, it is very difficult for some school districts to create suitable programs, especially when they have only one or two or a handful of handicapped youngsters to serve.

Increasingly across the nation, recognition is being given to the idea of some kind of "special service unit" or "intermediate district."

I urge you to give attention to the bill which would provide for an "educational service planning committee" charged with the responsibility of figuring out a way to provide special education services for smaller school districts on an inter-district, cooperative basis.

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An interesting pilot project in this area is the pending study by the Metropolitan Educational Research and Development Council. The Council, with a substantial federal grant, and with encouragement from the state, will offer a special education program for teenage retardates from several different school districts. Purpose of the project is to determine whether or not, with special teaching programs, these young retarded persons can learn employment skills and become self-supporting in their home communities.

The project will occupy the presently vacant Children's Building on the Glen Lake-Oak Terrace campus, but it will be necessary for the legislature to authorize the expenditures of \$40,000 to rehabilitate this building. I urge you to give this your full support.

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Still another course which must be pursued if we are to get classes where the classes are needed, is the strengthening of our teaching programs in the five state colleges and at the University campuses.

My visits to all of these campuses gave me a chance to see the stepped-up programs of education of future teachers geared to careers in the field of education of the retarded, of the blind, of the hearing impaired. Some very exciting work is being done. I was particularly impressed by what I saw at St. Cloud and at the University at Duluth. I urge you to allow the full appropriations which have been requested to finance these teaching programs.

#### 7. Residency Bill

Unhappily, there is an increasing number of emotionally disturbed young people entering the state mental hospitals. It is important that their schooling not be interrupted during the months when they are getting psychiatric help. You have before you a bill that would clarify the home school district's responsibilities to these young people. Its passage would enhance their chances to continue schoolwork even while hospitalized.

8. I should like to include in this message a reference to the outstanding work which has been accomplished by the various advisory committees, particularly the Governor's Advisory Council on Children and Youth, of which Robert W. Johnson is Chairman, and the Advisory Board on Handicapped, Gifted and Exceptional Children, which is headed by Dr. Harriet Blodgett of Minneapolis.

The Governor's Advisory Committee on Services to the Blind, headed until recently by Ray Lappegaard, studies and interprets the needs of the visually handicapped.

Recently, I appointed an Advisory Committee on Services to the Hearing Impaired, which is headed by Ray Saunders, Principal of Golden Valley High School.

The Governor's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped, with Lawrence Binger as Chairman, has done an excellent job of developing public support for its work and I hope you will enact the pending proposal to give it statutory recognition, and modest funds for operating costs.

I am also aware of the yeoman service performed by the persons who serve on the many advisory committees to the State Board of Education.

I am grateful to the members of all these committees and boards and I depend heavily on their continuing evaluations and recommendations.

#### VII. The Teacher

The key to all our schoolroom efforts is of course the teacher.

Let us recognize this fact and grant him the status he deserves!

Let us strengthen the teacher training programs by giving broad financial support to our state colleges and university.

Let us liberalize the teacher retirement system in Minnesota to make it more in keeping with the important contribution which the teacher makes throughout his working life.

Let us provide the teacher with the community climate, and the tools, that will permit him to achieve an improved economic status.

Many proposals are now before you which would have far-reaching effects on the working conditions and opportunities for advancement of teachers. I urge you to act forthrightly to strengthen the profession of teaching in every way possible.

#### VIII. State Aid Formula

There are some basic considerations which must be borne in mind as we approach a discussion of the amount of state aid to school districts.

First, our goal of fifty-percent state sharing of the local operating costs of elementary and secondary education.

Second, the principle that state aid to schools is one of the most effective ways to relieve the local property tax burden. It has fulfilled this function admirably in the past and we will continue to depend on it as a major weapon in our war on rising local property taxes.

Third, state aid to local education costs is the best way to equalize education opportunity.

Finally, it has proved to be a great bulwark for undergirding the quality, the ever-continuing effort to achieve excellence.

In my budget message I recommended a total of 401 million dollars for school aids for the coming biennium, which sum embodied 42.5 million dollars to meet the additional costs arising from the increasing numbers of pupils, and 18.2 million dollars to liberalize the factors in the foundation aid formula.

No one knows better than I that the school districts across the state are experiencing rising costs. There are more school children; teachers' salaries must be improved; equipment must be renewed; libraries must be replenished; special needs of handicapped youngsters must be met.

In such an age, 18.2 million dollars, an increase of 7.02 percent which will bring the state's participation in local school districts adjusted maintenance cost to 45.7%, is but a minimal proposal. It is based on current estimates of income tax revenues.

If later estimates during this session of the legislature indicate that additional funds are available, I urge you to increase the formula accordingly.

As for the specific figures in the foundation aid formula, I ask you to hold to two basic guidelines: the principle of equalization and ability to pay, and the principle of relief of local property taxes.

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I have outlined an action program aimed at making the school rooms in our state effective centers of education and learning. No question that the decisions will be difficult.

But I have a deep respect for this process in which we are involved, and I am confident that in the year 1965 the elected spokesmen for Minnesota will demonstrate their total commitment to democracy's responsibility: the education of a free people.