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Deconcentrating Public Housing in Minneapolis: *Hollman v. Cisneros*

by Edward G. Goetz

In July 1992, attorneys for the Minnesota Legal Aid Society and the Minneapolis branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) filed a lawsuit in federal district court on behalf of a group of plaintiffs living in public housing in Minneapolis. The complaint in *Hollman v. Cisneros*, which was named for lead plaintiff Lucy Hollman, alleged that the operation and placement of public housing in Minneapolis perpetuated racial and low-income segregation. The co-defendants in the *Hollman* suit—the Minneapolis Public Housing Authority (MPHA), the City of Minneapolis, the Minneapolis Community Development Agency, the Metropolitan Council of the Twin Cities, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)—offered to enter into settlement discussions with the plaintiffs, and after three years of negotiations, an agreement was reached.

The *Hollman* consent decree, signed in 1995, committed the co-defendants in the lawsuit to a series of policy changes to deconcentrate family public housing in the city of Minneapolis and to disperse subsidized households throughout the Twin Cities metropolitan area. Specifically, the consent decree required the following steps: (1) redevelopment of a 73-acre site on Minneapolis' north side that held more than 700 units of family public housing, (2) relocation of all families living in the public housing demolished as a result of the redevelopment, (3) development of replacement housing throughout the metropolitan

area for all of the public housing units lost in the north side redevelopment, (4) provision of special mobility subsidies to allow eligible low-income families to move to neighborhoods of

low-poverty or low-minority concentration, (5) changes to elements of the Minneapolis Section 8 housing program to enhance the geographic choices available to program participants, and



Photo by Edward G. Goetz

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(6) creation of a centralized information clearinghouse for low-cost housing opportunities throughout the metro region.

In 1999, the Family Housing Fund, a nonprofit agency dedicated to providing affordable housing, and the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency contracted with CURA to conduct an evaluation of the implementation of the *Hollman* consent decree. The MPHA provided open access to data and information, allowing a complete analysis of the impacts of the consent decree. The findings of the three-year evaluation were released by CURA earlier this year in an eight-volume report (see sidebar).

This article summarizes the outcomes of the *Hollman* Special Mobility Program and the relocation and replacement housing efforts. Part one describes where families have moved and where replacement housing has been built, and compares these neighborhoods to conditions that characterized the north side public housing site. Part two summarizes the findings from more than six hundred in-person interviews conducted with families who participated in the various elements of the *Hollman* settlement and two comparison groups.

The National Public Housing Context

The *Hollman* consent decree was signed at a time when national policy and local efforts in Minneapolis were aimed at dispersing low-income households as a means of reducing the social pathologies resulting from a high degree of spatially concentrated poverty. The secretary of HUD during President Clinton's first administration named concentrated poverty the most challenging domestic policy question facing the nation. Several studies had demonstrated HUD's own role in contributing to concentrated poverty by spatially concentrating low-income public housing, a fact that HUD increasingly acknowledged. As a result, the two largest federal initiatives in housing at the time were the HOPE VI program, an initiative to redevelop and deconcentrate public housing, and the Moving to Opportunity (MTO) mobility program, aimed at providing the means for subsidized households to move to low-poverty areas. In Minneapolis, rising crime and growing awareness of pockets of poverty and the disparity between

Cover photo: The redevelopment plan for the north side site created as a result of the *Hollman* consent decree called for the demolition of all 770 units of public housing on the site.

city and suburban areas led to a policy environment in which officials were receptive to efforts to break up poor communities and facilitate the movement of low-income families into more middle-class neighborhoods.

The concept of deconcentrating public housing families was central to the *Hollman* consent decree. The decree defined *poverty-concentrated neighborhoods* as census tracts in the central cities in which more than 33.5% of the population is below the poverty level, or census tracts in the suburbs in which 12.2% or more of the population is below the poverty level. *Minority-concentrated neighborhoods* were defined as any census tract in the region in which 28.7% or more of the population is non-White.

Shortly after the consent decree was signed, focus groups were formed to determine the nature of the redevelopment of the north side public housing site. Public housing residents, neighbors, local social service agents, and other stakeholders were involved in the focus group process. After nine months, the focus groups made their recommendations to MPHA, which then created a redevelopment plan. The Minneapolis City Council signed off on the plan in 1997. The plan called for the demolition of all 770 units of family public housing on the site. In their place would be a mix of housing ranging from market-rate single-family homes to subsidized public housing. The site would also have a mix of uses that would include parkland.

Methods

Families who were relocated from the demolished public housing or voluntarily participated in the special mobility program were provided with mobility counseling by agencies under contract with MPHA. Information on the moving preferences and relocation outcomes of these families was obtained from the files kept by the counseling agencies. The analysis of the replacement housing was based on interviews with public officials involved in the development of the units. Addresses for all replacement units, as well as addresses for the old and new homes of families relocated or part of the special mobility program, were geocoded. Neighborhood characteristics for original and replacement neighborhoods were taken from 1990 U.S. Census data.

Demolition and Relocation

Relocation of families from the north side public housing site began in 1996.

The *Hollman* Reports Now Available from CURA

The complete findings of CURA's three-year evaluation of the *Hollman v. Cisneros* settlement are now available in a series of eight reports written by Edward G. Goetz. The reports conclude that the consent decree has produced mixed results in the construction of replacement housing units, the reduction of race and poverty concentration in the Twin Cities, and the use of special mobility certificates.

All eight *Hollman* reports are available in a single bound volume or as individual reports. The reports can be found online as PDF files (requires Adobe Acrobat Reader 4.0 or later to download or print) at <http://www.cura.umn.edu/publications/Hollman.html>. Hardcopies of the reports can be ordered from CURA by calling 612-625-1551 or sending e-mail to cura@tc.umn.edu. Please limit requests to **one copy** of each report.

Deconcentrating Poverty in Minneapolis: Hollman v. Cisneros. Reports 1-8.
By Edward G. Goetz. Minneapolis: CURA, 2002. CURA 02-3. 326 pp. Free. (compilation of *Reports 1-8* below)

Report No. 1: Policy Context and Previous Research on Housing Dispersal. CURA 01-5. 92 pp. Free.

Report No. 2: Planning for North Side Redevelopment. CURA 01-6. 46 pp. Free.

Report No. 3: Baseline Data Analysis for North Side Redevelopment. CURA 01-7. 33 pp. Free.

Report No. 4: Changes to the Public Housing Stock in Minneapolis. CURA 01-8. 17 pp. Free.

Report No. 5: Relocation of Residents from North Side Public Housing. CURA 01-9. 33 pp. Free.

Report No. 6: The Experiences of Dispersed Families. CURA 01-10. 35 pp. Free.

Report No. 7: Mobility Certificates. CURA 01-11. 29 pp. Free.

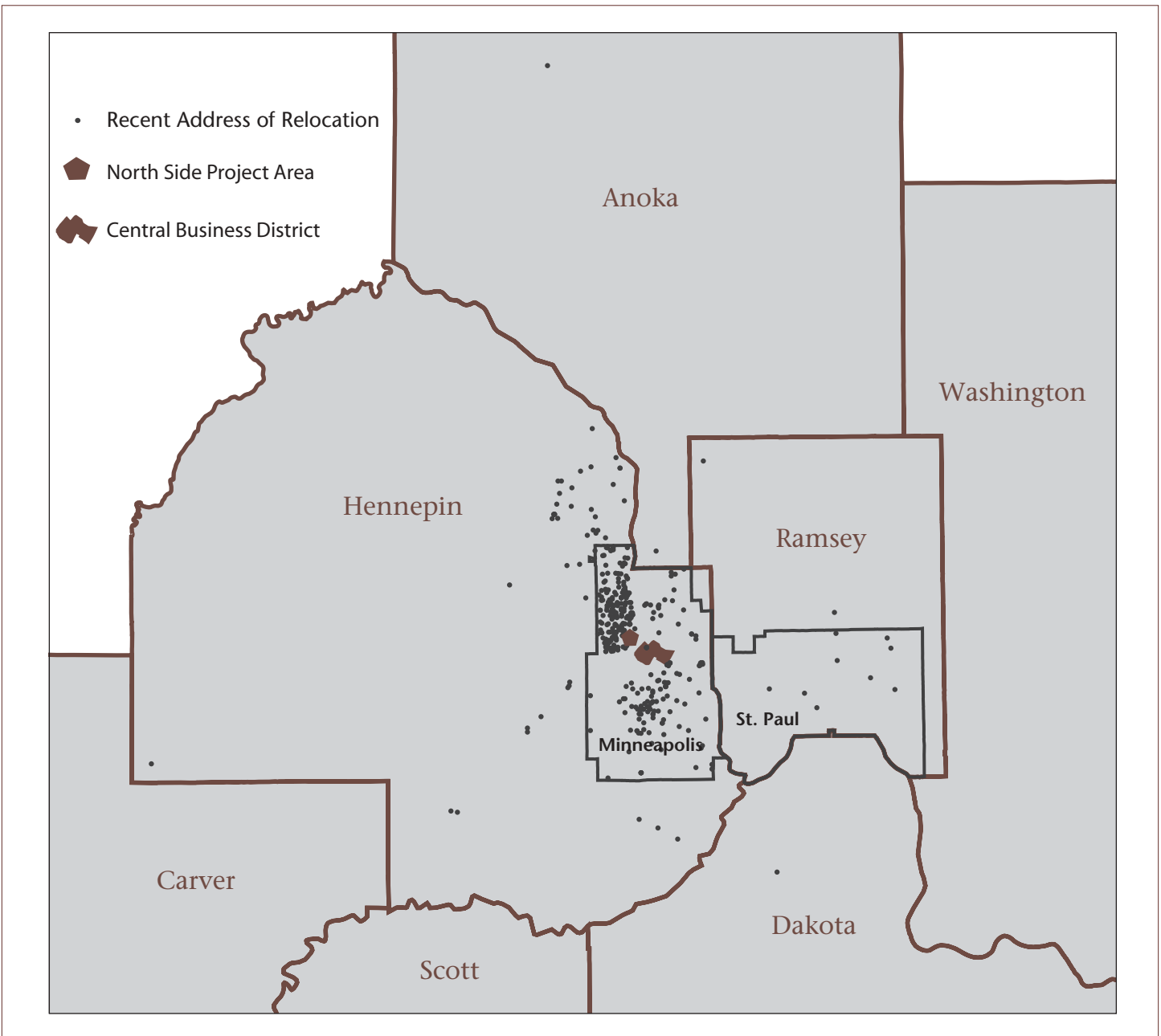
Report No. 8: Replacement Housing. CURA 01-12. 41 pp. Free.

Demolition of the Sumner Field and Olson Townhomes projects began in that year as well. In 1998, relocation from the Glenwood and Lyndale projects began, with demolition of the projects following in 1999 and 2000. In all, 440 households were relocated. This number is significantly less than the 770 units torn down because some families moved out prior to the beginning of relocation assistance, and other families were ineligible for relocation assistance for various reasons. More than half of the relocated families (57%) were Southeast Asian and 39% were African American. One-third of the families were large, having five or more people.

Most of the relocated families (70%) indicated that they wanted to remain in one of the central cities (overwhelmingly Minneapolis). One-third preferred to stay in public housing of some type, whereas 39% preferred to receive a Section 8 housing subsidy that they could use in a privately owned apartment unit. During the first wave of relocation (1996 to 1997) most families were relocated using Section 8 subsidies. After the housing market in the region tightened in 1997 and remained so through 2001, Section 8 vouchers became more difficult to use and most of the relocated families were moved into other public housing. In the end, 41% of the families were moved into

public housing, 36% were moved into Section 8 housing, and 16% became homeowners. Most of the families (87%), regardless of the type of housing they inhabited, remained in the central cities. Southeast Asian families were most likely to remain in the city and to remain somewhere on the north side of Minneapolis. A total of 10% of the north side families moved to inner-ring suburbs in the region (typically the northern-ring suburbs of Minneapolis), whereas a handful of families moved beyond the inner ring or out of the region altogether. Figure 1 shows the clustering of relocated families in the northern and southern neighborhoods of Minneapolis.

Figure 1. Recent Address of Relocation within the Twin Cities Metropolitan Region of Families Affected by the *Hollman* Consent Decree



The families who were relocated upgraded their neighborhoods considerably according to census characteristics. Their new neighborhoods had higher median incomes, higher percentages of residents employed, fewer neighbors below the poverty level, and higher housing values. Residents also moved into neighborhoods with fewer non-White households.

Although these results seem to suggest that the desegregation objectives of the lawsuit were achieved, there are several caveats that must be considered. First, just more than half of the relocated residents moved into other neighborhoods that met the consent decree's definition of poverty or race concentration. In addition, the neighborhoods to which families relocated were becoming more poverty- and race-concentrated than the rest of the city or metropolitan region. Finally, for families who made subsequent moves (after their initial relocation), these moves tended to be into neighborhoods with higher levels of poverty and more non-White residents. For all of these reasons, there is an expectation that the degree of deconcentration and neighborhood improvement achieved through relocation is likely to diminish over time.

Special Mobility Program

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development provided 900 Section 8 certificates and vouchers to facilitate the deconcentration of public housing families through the *Hollman* decree. A portion of these Section 8 subsidies was used by families relocated from the north side site. The rest were used to create a special mobility program in which participants volunteered to use these subsidies to move to homes in nonconcentrated neighborhoods. The program was open to some of the named plaintiffs, residents of Minneapolis public housing in concentrated neighborhoods, and persons on the public housing waiting list.

During a six-year period from 1996 to 2002, only 285 families participated in the special mobility program, or just more than 6% of all eligible families. Of the 285 families that participated, only 80 (29%) had successfully leased a housing unit as of March 2002. Most of the lease-ups occurred after December 2000. In fact, during all of 1998 and 1999, only three families successfully used the program. These figures represent an extremely low level of participation and success for the special mobility program.

Each year, hundreds of Section 8 subsidies made available by HUD for the program are returned to Washington unused.

The low level of participation in the program is likely due to three factors. First, from 1997 to 2001, the Twin Cities experienced an extremely tight rental housing market, with vacancies consistently below 2% during most of that period. This made the Section 8 subsidies very difficult to use as landlords had their pick of applicants and many may have preferred to avoid the regulatory restrictions of the Section 8 program. Second, the MPHA used a 1996 waiting list to identify potential program participants. As the months and years went by, this waiting list became more and more out of date and fewer of the mailings actually reached eligible families. When MPHA updated its list in 2001, participation rates increased. Finally, there simply may be a lack of interest among eligible families for such a mobility program in the Twin Cities. Potential participants may be satisfied with their current housing, or satisfied enough that they do not want to trade their current situation for the difficulties of moving and the uncertainty of life in neighborhoods unfamiliar to them.

Most of the special mobility program participants (73%) were African American and most participating households were single-parent households (81%). Although they represented fewer of the program participants, Southeast Asian families were more likely to successfully

lease a unit under the program than were members of other racial or ethnic groups.

Most special mobility program families who successfully leased a unit under the program stayed in the central cities (53% stayed in Minneapolis and 5% moved to St. Paul). As with the relocated families, there was a tendency for program families to move to the northern inner-ring suburbs (14% did so). Another 10% moved to inner-ring suburbs to the south and west, and 13% moved into developing suburbs. Figure 2 shows the spatial distribution of mobility program participants.

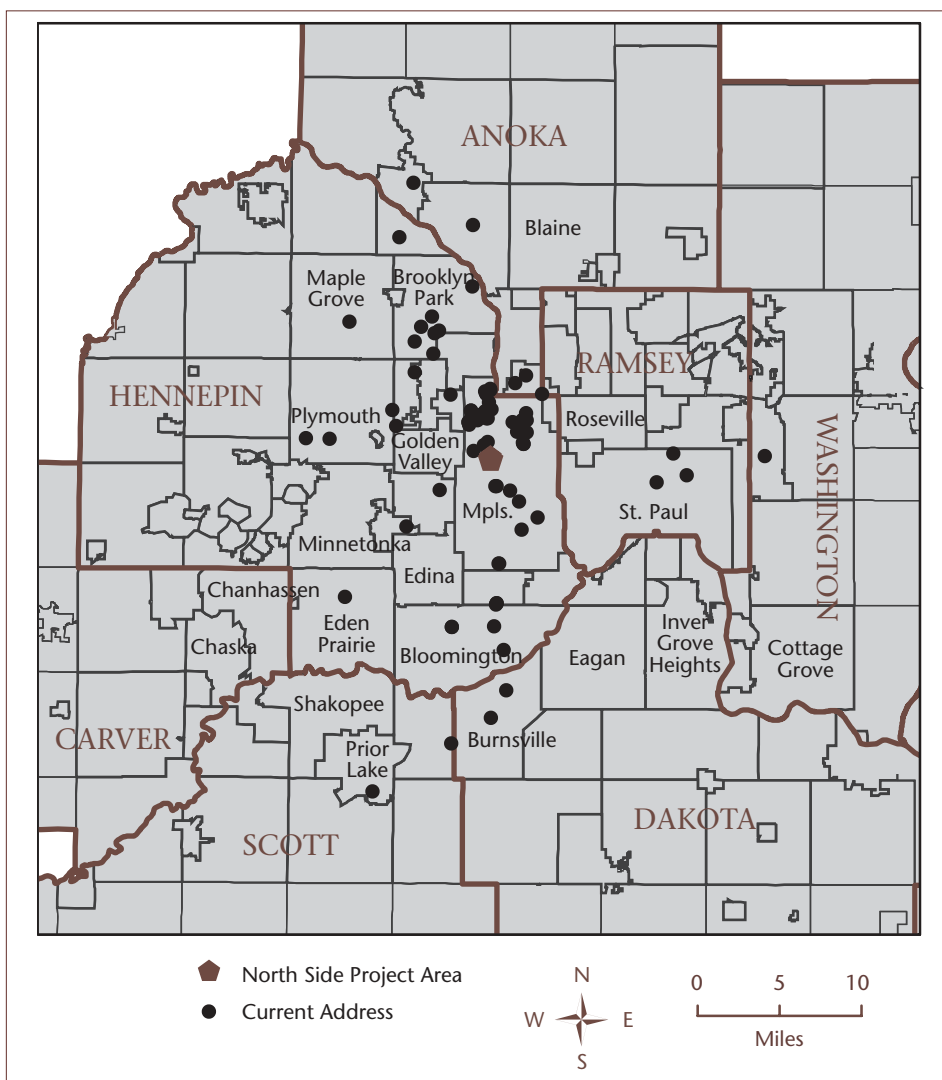
Those who were able to successfully move under the mobility program did end up moving to neighborhoods that looked significantly different than the ones they previously occupied. This is not a surprise because the program required that families move into "deconcentrated" neighborhoods. The median income of the new neighborhoods was almost double that of the old neighborhoods and the neighborhoods had half as many very low income families, one-third the number of poor families, and twice as many homeowners. The neighborhoods also had, on average, much smaller non-White populations than the old neighborhoods. Thus, as with the relocation phase of *Hollman*, the special mobility program seems to have achieved the objective of deconcentrating assisted families into more middle-class and White neighborhoods. As with the relocation findings, however, there is an



Photo by Edward G. Goetz

In all, 440 households were relocated from the Sumner Field, Olson, Glenwood, and Lyndale projects on the north side of Minneapolis. The vast majority of families who were forced to move were Southeast Asian or African American, and most of the families expressed a desire to remain in Minneapolis.

Figure 2. Post-Move Addresses of Hollman Special Mobility Program Participants



important caveat. Although the mobility program worked when families were successfully able to move, there was very little demand for the program in the first place (6% of eligible families) and there was a low rate of success among those who did participate (29%).

Replacement Housing

The consent decree called for the replacement of all public housing units lost to demolition or conversion during the redevelopment of the north side site, which was 770 units. The replacement units were to be developed only in nonconcentrated neighborhoods in the Twin Cities metropolitan region. Two hundred of the public housing replacement units will eventually go back on the north side site. The consent decree mandates that at least 80 more be placed in nonconcentrated neighborhoods in Minneapolis and that at least 380 be located in suburban areas in the region.

Similar to the special mobility program, the effort to build replacement housing got off to a slow start. The reasons for this were both technical and political. Technically, the MPHA had no direct authority to develop public housing outside the city of Minneapolis. It was constrained from the beginning by the need to identify partnership agencies that would work together to make the suburban public housing units happen. In addition, some of the more arcane rules and regulations related to building public housing presented obstacles, as did the lack of an interested public agency in many suburbs. Finally, there was not enough money set aside in the consent decree to build all of the 770 units called for. Higher acquisition costs in the suburbs meant that more money was necessary to build the units. In the end, all of these difficulties were overcome; three suburban housing agencies (the Housing and Redevelopment Authorities of Carver, Scott, and Wash-

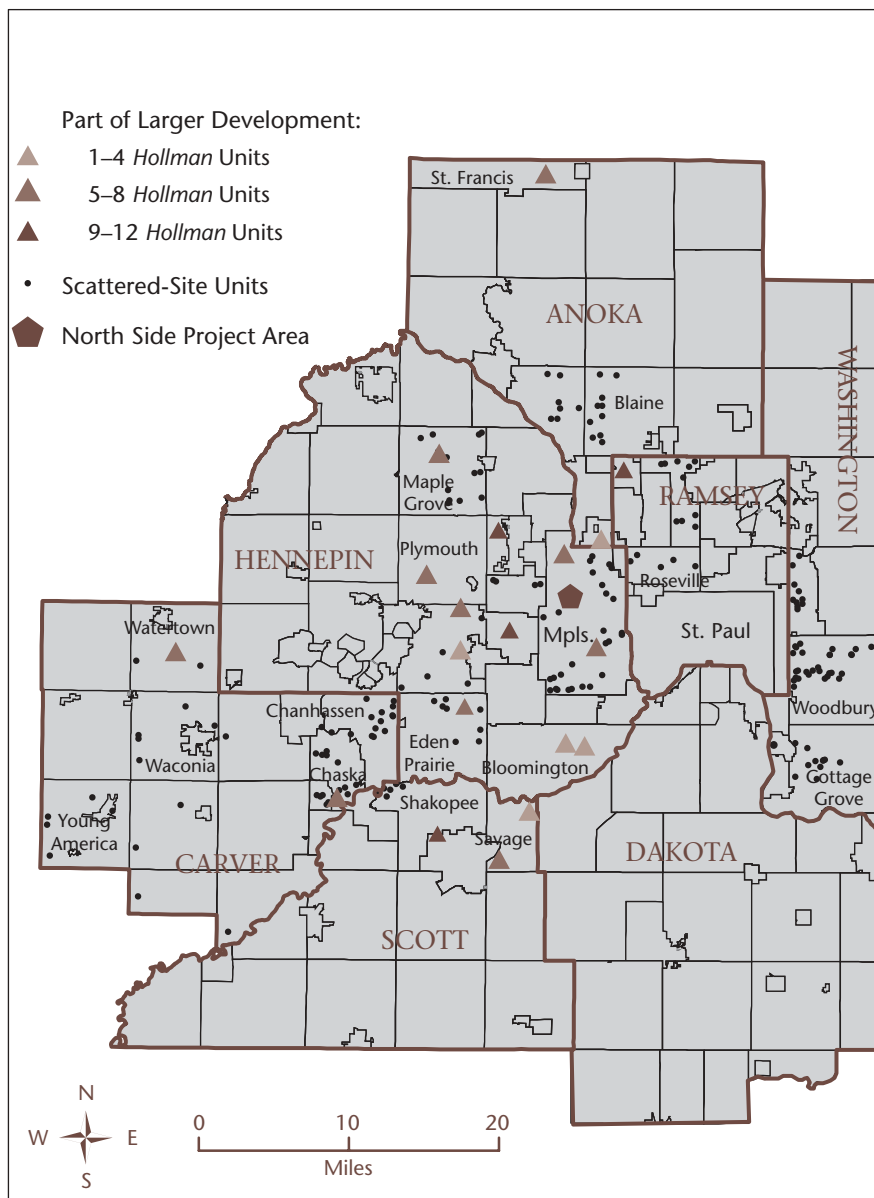
ington Counties) agreed to develop Hollman units, the Metropolitan Council came forward after some time to develop units in suburban areas not covered by other agencies, and HUD agreed to allow a portion of the unused special mobility program budget authority to be shifted into the replacement housing effort. In addition, MPHA entered into agreements with private and nonprofit developers to include some *Hollman* units in other projects being developed.

Political obstacles to building public housing in suburban areas (and in nonconcentrated parts of the city) are not new and they were not significantly different in the *Hollman* case than they have been for decades in communities across the United States. Neighbors worried about crime, property values, the influx of lower income families, and various disruptions of community life. However, even these objections were overcome in enough places so that by the end of 2001, MPHA had commitments in place for all of the 770 units of replacement housing. The units are a mix of newly developed apartments and townhomes, and scattered-site units purchased by public agencies and rented out as public housing (typically single-family, duplex, and townhome units).

Figure 3 shows the location of units completed or under construction as of February 2002. A total of 332 units were ready for occupancy in early 2002, 80 in Minneapolis and 252 in the suburbs. The suburban communities of Woodbury and Shakopee lead the way with 34 and 27 *Hollman* replacement units, respectively. Figure 3 shows a broad scattering of units throughout the region, with significant numbers in the southwestern portion of the region. There are no units in Dakota County because Dakota County Board of Commissioners refused to participate in the program.

The neighborhoods in which the replacement housing is located are predominantly White (94%), with a median household income of more than \$40,000, very small populations of people in poverty and low-income residents, and high percentages of homeowners and employed residents. On all of these dimensions, the replacement neighborhoods differ from the old north side site. Yet again, there is evidence that the objectives of the consent decree have been at least partially met. At the same time, however, only 57% of the replacement units in the suburbs are occupied by families who have moved out of

Figure 3. Geographic Distribution of Hollman Units Completed or Under Construction, February 2002



Minneapolis. The consent decree allows suburban housing agencies to reserve up to 30% of the replacement units for families from the suburban waiting lists, but in practice, a larger percentage of these units are going to suburbanites. This is occurring for two reasons. First, some agencies have reported difficulties reaching Minneapolis families because of the outdated waiting lists provided to them by MPHA. This is a problem that was addressed when MPHA updated its list in 2001. Second, many of these units simply are not attractive to Minneapolis families who are unfamiliar with the far reaches of Carver, Scott, and Washington Counties; may not have access to an automobile; or may not want to live in those communities.

The Experiences of Hollman Families

The CURA research team conducted in-person interviews with 618 families to examine how *Hollman* families are doing in their new communities. The survey included five categories of families: (1) families displaced from the north side site (a total of 195 respondents), (2) families that used the *Hollman* Special Mobility Program to move to nonconcentrated neighborhoods (a total of 18 respondents), (3) families living in the replacement housing built throughout the region (32 respondents), (4) a comparison group of Minneapolis Section 8 program participants (200 respondents), and (5) a comparison group of Minneapolis public housing residents living in

concentrated neighborhoods (173 respondents).

The sample of special mobility program and replacement housing families is small because at the time the interviews were conducted (1999), there were very few families in these categories. In conducting the analysis, the mobility program and replacement housing respondents were combined into a single group called “voluntary” *Hollman* participants. This distinguishes them from the group of families involuntarily displaced from the north side site who did not have a choice to participate because their units were torn down and they were forced to move. The voluntary and displaced groups are contrasted with the Section 8 and public housing comparison groups, which include families with similar demographic characteristics but who did not participate in the *Hollman* decree in any way.

Survey participants were asked a series of questions about the degree to which they interact with their neighbors, their satisfaction with various neighborhood and housing conditions, levels of crime and public disorder in their neighborhoods, employment, and their children’s experiences. *Hollman* families were asked to answer these questions about their new neighborhoods as well as their old neighborhoods. The program is considered to have had a positive effect if *Hollman* families reported better conditions at their current address than the comparison groups or better conditions in their current housing than at their previous address.

Children’s Experiences. Respondents were asked about their children’s experiences in school and in their new neighborhoods. There were no program effects related to children’s school experiences. *Hollman* families (both voluntary and displaced) were no more likely to say that their children like school, do well in school, or receive enough attention from teachers than were the comparison group respondents.

Voluntary participants in the *Hollman* programs were more likely than others to report that their children had friends in the neighborhood and played with others in the neighborhood. Displaced families reported significantly lower rates of social interaction among their children. In fact, among the displaced families, there was a significant decline in the social interaction of their children in their new neighborhoods compared to the old one. Southeast Asian families also



Despite political and technical obstacles to building public housing in suburban areas of the Twin Cities, by the end of 2001, MPHA had commitments for all 770 units of replacement housing required by the consent decree. The replacement units are a mix of newly developed apartments and townhomes, and scattered-site units purchased by public agencies and rented out as public housing.

tended to report lower levels of social interaction among their children in their new neighborhoods.

“Neighboring” Behaviors. Respondents were asked about the frequency of their interactions with neighbors. On all items tested—including how often they say hello to neighbors, how often they talk with neighbors, or how frequently they borrow things—there were no signs of a program effect. That is, *Hollman* families did not do these things any more or less frequently than the comparison group members, nor did they do them any more or less frequently than they used to before they moved. As with the previous finding, there was a tendency among Southeast Asian respondents to report fewer neighboring behaviors than did members of other groups.

Whether a lack of change in neighboring behaviors is a positive or a negative result can be debated. Some defend *Hollman*-like deconcentration by suggesting that lower income public housing families can benefit from the greater levels of social capital that exist in middle-income neighborhoods. This is unlikely to be the case, however, if they are not interacting with those neighbors. On the other hand, some argue that the greatest benefits of deconcentration are in getting poor families out of the most dysfunctional and dangerous neighborhoods in the

city. In this case, the benefits of the program do not hinge on the families interacting with their new neighbors.

Neighborhood Satisfaction. Respondents were asked about the degree to which they were satisfied with eight separate neighborhood characteristics: bus service, schools, proximity to place of worship, proximity to friends, proximity to healthcare, childcare in the neighborhood, grocery stores, and parks and playgrounds. When controlling for demographic differences across the groups, the *Hollman* families reported higher satisfaction than the comparison groups only for grocery stores and parks. The voluntary group actually reported less satisfaction than the comparison groups with bus service in the neighborhood. The voluntary group also registered less satisfaction with bus service and with proximity to place of worship than did the displaced respondents. Taken together, these findings indicate that neighborhood satisfaction is not a monolithic concept. Program participants saw an improvement in some aspects of their neighborhoods, but expressed less satisfaction with other elements. For the majority of neighborhood characteristics, however, there was simply no program effect at all.

Neighborhood Problems. Respondents were asked about the existence of neighborhood problems such as graffiti, public drinking, drug use, and aban-

doned buildings. Both displaced and voluntary *Hollman* families reported fewer of these problems in their communities than did the comparison groups, and both the displaced and voluntary groups reported a significant decline in the prevalence of these problems from their old neighborhoods to their new neighborhoods. For example, 13% of the displaced respondents and 18% of the voluntary respondents reported drug use in their current neighborhoods was a moderate or major problem. This is compared with 47% of the Section 8 respondents and 33% of the public housing respondents. In addition, the percentage of displaced and voluntary respondents who felt that drug use was a problem in their old neighborhood was 44% and 51%, respectively. Thus, both groups reported that their new neighborhoods have significantly fewer problems with drug use than their old neighborhoods.

Crime and Safety. As with neighborhood problems, crime and safety are issues for which program effects are evident. Both the displaced and the voluntary group reported feeling safer in their new communities than did the comparison groups. They also reported that their children felt safer in the neighborhood and in their schools than did the comparison group respondents. The improvement in safety is somewhat less pronounced among the displaced families, however. The displaced families reported feeling safer in their neighborhoods, but reported no change pre- to postmove for their children, either in school or in the neighborhood.

Employment. Moving to new neighborhoods did not impact the employment of *Hollman* families in any of the ways we examined. Rates of employment were no different after the move than they were before the move and those who were employed reported no differences in wage rates, opportunities for advancement, or the number of hours worked.

Conclusion

In terms of the implementation, the *Hollman* consent decree must be called a success. The co-defendants in the lawsuit have done what they promised, even in the face of technical and political obstacles. Families have been relocated, north side redevelopment has begun, the special mobility program is up and running, and most impressively, all of the required replacement housing has been developed or approved.

In terms of impact, however, the story is more complicated. Families have moved to new neighborhoods that show significantly fewer signs of distress and poverty than their previous neighborhoods. But, for relocatees, half moved directly to other neighborhoods that met the decree's threshold for poverty or race concentration and most have moved to neighborhoods that are becoming more concentrated over time. Even the subsequent moves of these families, when they have occurred, have been to neighborhoods with higher distress indicators. For these reasons, the reasonable expectation is that these families will eventually become more concentrated in distressed neighborhoods. The special mobility program succeeded in moving families to neighborhoods that appear significantly better than the families' previous communities with respect to the measures we examined. Yet, the scope of the mobility program was greatly limited by a lack of demand for the mobility certificates and by the difficulty in using Section 8 subsidies in the tight housing market that gripped the Twin Cities between 1997 and 2000. Even the greatest achievement of the *Hollman* effort—the development of public housing in suburban areas—has not led

to the desired level of desegregation because many of the units are not occupied by Minneapolis families.

The impact of the housing moves made by *Hollman* families has been less than what has been experienced in other cities. Studies of the Gautreaux program in Chicago and the national Moving to Opportunity demonstration program have shown dramatic improvements in the conditions of participants. The *Hollman* families do not report as many dramatic changes. *Hollman* families do report significant benefits from reductions in visible neighborhood problems and feelings of greater safety. However, on most items their experiences do not differ significantly from other Section 8 families or families living in other public housing in concentrated neighborhoods.

There are two likely explanations for the modest level of benefits reported by *Hollman* families. First, unlike the *Gautreaux* case or similar cases in other cities across the country, a large portion of the *Hollman* families are recent immigrants from Southeast Asia. These respondents reported greater reluctance to participate in the program and fewer benefits than did other respondents. These families likely valued the spatial concentration they experienced on the

north side because it allowed them to maintain family and social ties important to immigrants. Second, it is the case that even the worst public housing in Minneapolis is not as bad as what exists in Chicago and other cities that implemented the Moving to Opportunity program. Moving from the worst public housing in Minneapolis to another neighborhood does not constitute the same degree of change that moving from the worst public housing in Chicago entails. More modest benefits, in this scenario, are simply reflective of more modest changes in the objective conditions experienced by families participating in the program.

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HACER Receives Community Collaborator of the Year Award

Hispanic Advocacy and Community Empowerment through Research (HACER) was recognized as a catalyst for community change when it was named the 2002 Community Collaborator of the Year by Chicanos Latinos Unidos En Servicio (CLUES) at a September 20 dinner at Metropolitan State University in St. Paul.

A nonprofit community-based research and advocacy organization, HACER is dedicated to providing the Latino/Latina community of Minnesota the ability to create and control information about itself in order to affect institutional decisions and public policy. The organization receives administrative support from and has its offices at CURA.

Executive director Claudia Fuentes said HACER's staff and board members were honored to receive the award.

"In the past year we released five reports, all of which were collaborative efforts with organizations statewide," she noted. "The support we receive from CURA enables HACER to work in partnership with Latinos in Minnesota while simultaneously involving University of Minnesota professors and students in our research efforts."

Maureen Acosta, director of fund development at CLUES, said her organization was "delighted to present the award to HACER, given their tremendous work in researching and producing reports on [the

Latino/Latina] community. These reports are helping to shape policy and the direction that the community is going."

The Community Collaborator of the Year award was created in 2001 to recognize organizations that work with other agencies and the broader Minnesota community for the betterment of Latinos/Latinas in the state. Last year's recipients included the Latino Complete Count Committee and co-recipients West Side Community Health Services and La Oportunidad.

Minnesota's Unreformed Sales Tax

by Robert T. Kudrle



Photo ©2002 by Star Tribune/Minneapolis-St. Paul

As part of his Big Plan of 2001, Governor Jesse Ventura proposed to lower the state sales tax rate and extend the tax to a broader range of services.

Most Minnesotans have strong feelings about the taxes they pay. Governor Jesse Ventura is no exception. His 1998 campaign made clear that he prefers the sales tax to the income tax and, as part of his Big Plan of 2001, he proposed to change the role of the sales tax in Minnesota, most notably by extending it to a broader range of services while lowering the rate from 6.5 to 6%. The following months saw the governor's sales tax reforms die in the state legislature, and his attempt to revive part of the package in 2002 was not even considered by the legislature.

In 2000 and 2001, CURA funded a research project that allowed me to look at Minnesota's sales tax in the context of what other states have done since the tax was first introduced in 1930. Drawing on that research, this article attempts to put Minnesota's use of the sales tax into national perspective to see if the experience of other states helps explain why the Ventura proposals were rejected. I will also evaluate both the

current Minnesota sales tax and the governor's proposals using generally accepted public finance criteria for evaluating such proposals. Finally, I will consider what kind of sales tax changes, if any, we can expect in the future.

The Sales Tax in Minnesota

The major impetus for the sales tax has always been its formidable revenue-raising capacity. Mississippi introduced the sales tax as an innovative way of funding desperately needed public expenditures during the early years of the Great Depression. Prior to that time, both state and local governments had relied overwhelmingly on the property tax. Twenty-four states had adopted the sales tax by the beginning of World War II, and 21 more had added the tax by 1969, the last year any state adopted the sales tax. The share of sales tax revenues for all states combined climbed from 22% to just more than one-third during the postwar period, whereas the share of individual income tax revenues climbed

from less than 7% to more than 35%. The corporate income tax share has remained less than 10%.

Minnesota is a relatively high-tax state, so some might be surprised that we did not latch onto this major source of state funding until 1967 when it had already become the largest single source of state revenue nationwide. The major reason for Minnesota's reticence lay in the reputation of the sales tax as one that takes more from the poor than the rich, which has kept a few states from adopting the tax altogether. On the other hand, the sales tax has some real advantages, including greater stability of revenue over the business cycle than the income tax.

States like to keep a balance among sources of revenue and Minnesota is no exception. Table 1 compares Minnesota's revenue sources for both state and local governments with sources for the United States as a whole. Based on these figures, Minnesota scarcely stands out. The state's high overall tax level means that

the absolute use of the sales tax is higher than the comparative percentage figures suggest. Moreover, two critical dimensions of the state tax are hidden in the aggregate figures: the tax rate and the tax base. Relative to other states, as Governor Ventura never tires of pointing out, the rate of tax is relatively high at 6.5% (against the national average rate of 5.2%) and it is applied to quite a narrow base of state economic activity.

The Experiences of Other States

Governor Ventura proposed to expand the base of the sales tax, reduce its rate, and make it more difficult for individuals and businesses to avoid the tax by purchasing from out of state. Does the experience of other states suggest anything about the odds his proposals faced? My research found four factors that appear relevant.

First, major revisions of state fiscal systems are quite rare. In general, minor changes to the sales tax system—focused around a slow trend away from taxing business capital equipment and toward a greater taxation of services—tend to prevail. Although tax rates and even tax bases are sometime increased or expanded to meet momentary fiscal needs, these changes have most often been temporary expedients that are reversed in better times. The fact that policy inertia reigns during good times boded ill for the Ventura proposals given that the Minnesota economy was sizzling when the reforms were being considered.

Second, many decision makers and voters believe that higher sales taxes are more consistent with a good economic development climate than higher income taxes (perhaps because the high-income professionals who must be recruited or retained by a state are more heavily hit by high income tax rates). National surveys going back a number of years also show a preference for expanding the sales tax on fairness grounds. In addition, because the sales tax in nearly all states is heavily geared to goods and covers services much less comprehensively, voters and decision makers perceive that there is “room” to expand the sales tax. Finally, a huge part of most states’ sale tax revenue is hidden from view: When a business pays sales tax on an input, that increase in business cost is never seen as a separate charge by the final purchaser. Such “stealth” taxation provides about 46% of all national sales tax revenue. As I argue later, this is bad economics but great politics. The experience of other states

Table 1. Revenue Sources for Minnesota State and Local Government and the United States, 1991

Revenue sources	Minnesota	United States
Federal aid	15.8%	17.1%
Property tax	17.1%	18.6%
General sales tax	10.7%	13.9%
Individual income tax	16.0%	12.1%
User charges	14.7%	13.9%
Other	25.7%	24.4%
Total	100%	100%

Source: Advisory Committee on Intergovernmental Relations. *Significant Features of Fiscal Federalism*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1993.

with respect to the perception of sales tax reforms would seem to have offered promise for the Ventura proposals. Most Minnesotans thought the sales tax was fair, and our narrow base offered a number of avenues for expansion that could be sold to the public by showing the apparent silliness of the classification criteria in the tax code.

A third major lesson is that states learn from the experiences of other states. Popular tax policies such as California’s proposition 13 controls on property taxes in the late 1970s were widely imitated. On the other hand, the disastrous economic and political reaction to Florida’s short-lived expansion of the sales tax to services in 1988 made lawmakers in most states very careful about trying anything similar. The Florida experience should have (and perhaps did) provide a warning to the governor that broad increases in the sales taxes paid by businesses could create a political firestorm.

A fourth national trend pointed the governor’s way. Fighting to remove an artificial tax advantage for out-of-state sellers as Internet commerce expands has proved to be a political winner for Republicans and Democrats alike in most states. Ventura’s opposition to untaxed imports into the state was widely shared. However, this last issue was easily detached from his tax base and tax rate proposals, and there was little that Minnesota alone could do about this problem anyway.

The Fate of Sales Tax Reform in the Big Plan

Let’s begin by looking at the successful part of Ventura’s Big Plan: positioning

Minnesota to cooperate with other states to fight untaxed “imports” into the state. From the very beginning, states adopting the sales tax faced a significant collection problem that became increasingly serious over time, namely that individuals and businesses could avoid the sales tax by bringing untaxed goods into the state or having them delivered there. In 1935, California and Washington made the purchaser liable for a “use tax” in such circumstances. Unfortunately for the importing state, the solution was almost entirely formal, at least with regard to individual consumers. Even today, several decades after the last sales-tax-imposing state introduced the use tax, most citizens in most states disregard it completely (albeit out of ignorance rather than a conscious attempt to break the law). States’ attempts to force substantial out-of-state sellers to collect their sales tax for them have been stymied. Two U.S. Supreme Court decisions have established that, without additional legislation by Congress, states can mandate such responsibility only if the firms involved maintain considerable direct activity in the levying state.

Governor Ventura pushed successfully for Minnesota’s membership in the Streamlined Sales Tax Project, a scheme spawned by the National Governors’ Conference in 1999 that aimed to simplify states’ sales tax laws and to make their tax classifications more consistent so Congress would approve mandatory tax collection by out-of-state sellers. But Governor Ventura’s position did not sharply distinguish him from many other governors, nor was the issue controversial in Minnesota. Most DFLers

and Republicans supported membership in the project and the model legislation that was developed in its first phase; indeed, it was included as part of Minnesota House File 1 (H.F. 1) and passed at the end of June 2001.

Allowing the states to collect taxes on remote commerce enjoys strong political support, but despite local business claims to the contrary, the Internet threat to state retailers has remained very modest so far. In a December 2000 article in the *National Tax Journal*, economists Donald Bruce and William F. Fox suggest that the average state might lose only 1.52% of total state taxes to e-commerce by 2003. Of this, an estimated 70.1% will be from business-to-business commerce. What some talk about as a future threat—business sales to final users—would still account for less than 0.5% of total revenue. This is a very small number, but as the sales corresponding to those losses increase, local growls will likely become a roar. One way or another, and probably sooner rather than later, Congress will likely mandate cooperation by out-of-state firms for those states that meet a certain set of simplifying restrictions.

Most of the rest of the sales tax portion of Ventura's Big Plan went nowhere. Three factors were likely responsible. First, the state legislature found no need to change the sales tax substantially, and so the turmoil that inevitably comes with any major tax change was easy to avoid. Second, interest asymmetry prevailed between those business sectors that would face the choice between lower profit margins and a 6% price hike, and those with the prospect of a relatively paltry 0.5% tax cut. Finally, many businesses facing the price hike could make a plausible case that the Ventura innovation would spell disaster for the state economy. Not without justification, they pointed to the economic chaos that followed the extension of the sales tax to business services in Florida—an experience that led to the repeal of the legislation after only six months.

Was the Ventura Proposal Good Public Policy?

In retrospect, Governor Ventura's failure in the face of the political forces arrayed against him is not surprising. However, from an economic policy perspective, the political appeal of the proposal is less important than the likely real effects of the proposed policy. In this section, I evaluate Ventura's proposal based on four widely accepted public finance

criteria: equity, efficiency, competitiveness, and revenue. In evaluating the Ventura proposal, it becomes clear that a feature aimed at one of these objectives almost invariably conflicted with at least one of the others.

Equity. Although fairness is a subjective idea, a common standard in economics is vertical equity: Does a tax take a larger or smaller percentage of income as that income rises? In other words, is the tax progressive or regressive? Looking at a single recent year, the Minnesota Department of Revenue found that the sales tax took 4.6% of the income of people earning \$6,817 or less a year but only 1.2% from those earning more than \$78,618. If, as some economists have advocated, a more appropriate measure of impact is the relative percentage of tax payments during a lifetime, regressivity is considerably reduced. At least one well-known study even found that, when the typical tax exemptions are included, the sales tax becomes slightly *progressive*. But lifetime studies must assume a "typical" income stream that changes over time, and this provides little comfort for persons who spend their entire lives with low earnings.

Governor Ventura clearly did not ignore the equity issue in his reform proposal because he referred to food, clothing, and heating fuel as "life essentials" and he did not propose to tax them. Unfortunately, the three categories together account for perhaps 12% of total personal income, with the overwhelming portion of tax savings from these exemptions going to the nonpoor. That might

not seem like a high percentage, but it is high relative to total consumer purchases covered by the Minnesota sales tax. A 1996 estimate of the sales tax base relative to Minnesota personal income was 46.6%, but of this, 44% of the base was business purchases, so the consumer expenditure tax base was only 26.1% to begin with. Moreover, Minnesota's exemption of clothing from the tax is shared by only a few other states, and for good reason. The clothing exemption rewards the well-off proportionately more than it does the poor. Exempting such a broad set of basic expenditures also detracts from the stability of sales tax revenue over the business cycle.

Important insights about a state sales tax such as Minnesota's can be gained by a comparison with a somewhat similar tax and perhaps the most successful tax innovation of the postwar world: the European Union's value added tax (VAT). Americans are sometimes puzzled to learn that so-called life essentials are usually included in each European country's VAT, that they are often taxed at the same rate as everything else, and that the VAT plays a larger role in total government revenues relative to the income tax than is the case in the United States. On its face, this appears hard to reconcile with the greater equality of after-tax incomes in Europe and the generous welfare state that exists in most European countries. But the explanation is straightforward. The impact of public finance on income distribution depends both on who pays taxes and who gets the goods and services that the tax money buys. It is quite



Photo by Steve Schneider

possible for a regressive tax to redistribute income from the rich to the poor, just so long as the rich pay more to the state than they get back.

High rates of VAT are possible in Europe without much tax loss from evasion because a firm can avoid taxes on the total value of its sales only by proving that it paid taxes due on its purchases from other firms. Then it pays tax only on its “value added.” The sales tax lacks this safeguard, however, so cheating is far easier. But the American states are stuck with the sales tax. The business records necessary for a state-level VAT make such a reform unfeasible. If there is a VAT in the United States’ future, it will come from Washington.

Efficiency. In his frequent speeches attacking the narrowness of the Minnesota sales tax base, Governor Ventura often used as an example a taxed good or service paired with a similar untaxed good or service. Unfortunately, he was seldom very clear about just what it was an example of. When he pointed out that easily substituted goods fell into different tax categories, the most obvious lesson was that those who bought the taxed product were treated unfairly by comparison with those who bought an untaxed alternative. This is a valid claim, but differential taxation causes efficiency as well as equity problems.

Different sales tax rates for similar goods may cause the same person to use his or her limited purchasing power less effectively to satisfy personal demands. Take the example of Minnesota taxed “honey-covered nuts” and untaxed “honey-roasted nuts.” If the resource cost of production and distribution of both goods is the same, a well-functioning price system should signal that to the consumer. Let’s say a certain amount of each costs a dollar at retail without tax and, as a reflection of individual taste, a person is willing to pay up to 4% more for honey-covered nuts. The sales tax makes the actual price for this good \$1.06, so the consumer chooses the less-preferred good, honey-roasted nuts, instead. However, if the tax rate had been at the same (lower) level for both goods, say 3%, the consumer could have made a more satisfying choice without paying more. (Is the government out three cents in this example because of the more efficient tax? No, because the consumer eventually pays that tax on goods and services purchased with the money left over.)

Perhaps Governor Ventura didn’t make this kind of argument about his

proposed broadening of the tax base because he knew that it wouldn’t stand up. The efficiency case for a broad sales tax base works only when *all* consumer purchases are taxed *once and only once*. But, for example, the governor’s proposed broad exemptions meant that everybody would continue to face distorted price signals about whether, for example, to prepare food at home or go to a restaurant. His extension of the tax to many additional services made no distinction between business and personal use. Taxing items that are sold to businesses and then resold results in multiple taxation or “pyramiding.” The Big Plan thus promised to increase some distortions while proposing to remove others.

Ever since the sales tax was introduced, business interests have pushed to remove taxes on business inputs, but the lawyers responsible for drafting sales tax legislation have almost never taken a sufficiently broad approach to the problem. Their instincts—and their desire for revenue—have led them to resist tax exemptions the farther away a good or service is from the production process. On the other hand, the drafters of sales tax legislation in every state, including Minnesota, knew that if they did not exempt some inputs from taxation (in addition to labor services), the sales tax would be nothing more than the highly unsatisfactory turnover tax (*Umsatzsteuer*) that the European VAT was explicitly designed to replace. Unfortunately for the efficiency (and competitiveness) of the tax, such exemptions are rarely complete.

Although state practice varies, business sales tax exemptions are typically confined to (1) tangible products bought for resale, (2) products incorporated into goods for resale, or (3) inputs consumed or transformed by the production process (e.g., raw materials and fuel). Most states, including Minnesota, also allow complete or partial exemptions for production capital equipment. In sharp contrast, however, almost none exempt general firm expenses, either current or capital. For example, the office supplies and equipment of all firms, regardless of the tax status of the firm’s product line, are almost always subject to the retail sales tax. A desk used by a paint manufacturer is just as much an input of the firm’s activity as the chemicals it buys. Yet because the desk will be purchased at retail and because it doesn’t enter directly into paint production, the tax will not be forgiven. This strange way of

distinguishing among categories of business costs means not only tax pyramiding, but also sales tax payments where they are not intended under law: grocery firms use desks too.

The distinction between business and personal goods and services is not a minor detail. Governor Ventura has declared that his emphasis on sales tax reform for Minnesota is a microcosm of what he would like to see at the national level. But without exception, the major proposals for a U.S. national retail tax-exempt business inputs from taxation. The major plans aim at approximately the same tax base as the European value-added tax, whereas the Ventura proposal embraced the distorting multiple taxation that Europe got rid of with the VAT. One effect of such tax pyramiding is to encourage vertical integration: bringing activities in-house that would be more efficiently produced by independent firms. Among other problems, this puts smaller firms at a competitive disadvantage.

The net effect of the Ventura proposal to extend the sales tax to many more services and provide some minor reductions in the overall level of taxation on capital used in production would have been to increase the role of business input taxation in the state’s sales tax base. Although such an extension moves the tax slightly closer to income proportionality in its collection from final purchasers, the cost is high. The price system is distorted for everybody, the tax burden on otherwise similar individuals depends on their relative preferences for products most heavily subject to multiple taxation, and Minnesota firms are less able to compete with firms located in states where such taxation is lower.

Competitiveness. Governor Ventura used the relative position of Minnesota’s sales taxes among neighboring states as an argument for lowering the rate. He specifically mentioned South Dakota (4%), Iowa (5%), and Wisconsin (5%). Before his proposals were presented in detail, the governor sometimes mentioned lowering the sales tax rate to 5.5 or even 5%.

As the governor’s critics were quick to point out, the extension of the sales tax to services would necessarily increase the attractiveness of making some purchases across the Iowa and Wisconsin borders (South Dakota already taxes services). But the competitiveness problem with the Ventura proposal went well beyond Minnesota’s rates compared



Governor Ventura’s reform proposals died in the state legislature in 2001, and attempts to revive part of the package during the 2002 legislative session were unsuccessful. In retrospect, the failure of the governor’s sales tax proposals is not surprising given the political forces arrayed against him and the questionable public policy benefits of his proposed reforms.

with those of neighboring states. Most states, including Minnesota, nominally exempt from the state sales tax exports to other states or nations, and this would appear to leave business activity aimed at interstate and international markets undisturbed. Such an assumption is unwarranted, however, again because most of the sales taxation buried in business input prices is not recognized in the tax system.

The governor encountered opposition to his proposed taxation of business services because those negatively affected by the proposal argued forcefully that the plan would hurt state competitiveness in a global marketplace. Under the governor’s proposal, when a Minnesota firm sold out-of-state, its cost of doing business would be increased by the extra 6% that it would have to pay for legal advice, accounting, advertising, computer services, and the like. Some firms could avoid such taxes by bringing the activity in-house; these would tend to be larger firms that use enough of the service to make vertical integration the

lower cost choice. Multistate firms would hold a special advantage in their ability to concentrate the purchase of a needed service where it is untaxed. In sharp contrast, smaller firms forced to purchase the services locally would suffer even though they might be more effective in performing the core activity.

The issue of intentional evasion, and not just tax avoidance, also must be considered. Under the Ventura proposal, the “bootlegging” of business service inputs would have joined the unknown volume of untaxed inputs that have been there all along. Audits reveal widespread underpayment of sales and use taxes everywhere. Because of less physical evidence, tax cheating at the consumer level is almost certainly more of a problem for services than goods. The most frequently cited example is the plumber who charges less if the payment is made in cash. For the same reason, cheating on business services is probably more tempting as well.

In the long run, however, the biggest danger of taxing business service

inputs is business mobility. If a firm finds that much of its menu of service purchases has considerably increased in price and it is not feasible to bring them in-house, the firm may consider moving its operations to another state that does not tax such services.

A note of caution should be sounded. The level of interstate tax competition and the effects of differential taxation are hard to document and are the subject of considerable disagreement among observers. Nearly all agree on two points, however: that there is little evidence of convergence among the states on the level of various tax rates, and that tax competition as a whole is only one element of overall economic competition. The most obvious missing element is a state’s expenditure policy: if one looked only at Minnesota’s tax level, for example, its competitiveness would be seriously underestimated. All of that said, any straw may still break some camel’s back, and it could be a large camel.

Revenue. Why did the Ventura administration not propose sales tax

reforms that made better economic sense? More specifically, why wasn't reform aimed at expanding the consumption base of the tax while minimizing or eliminating the taxation of business inputs that get passed on in arbitrary ways and distort the operation of the economy? The answer may be the same as Willie Sutton's when asked why he robbed banks: "That's where the money is." Under the present tax system, the Minnesota sales tax pulls in about 44% of revenue from the taxation of business inputs. Business taxation revenue would have risen with the governor's proposal whether or not the percentage of total sales tax revenue from business rose. In fact, Florida's similar 1988 expansion of the sales tax to services was estimated to have drawn 80% of new revenue from business users.

The *Star Tribune*, recognizing both the importance of service taxation and the damaging thrust of increased input taxation, argued in an editorial during the 2001 legislative session for an easing of the latter without a rate cut. But imagine what would have happened to the already tepid political support for the governor's plan if it had included an unchanged, let alone an increased, sales tax rate. This is true even though the revenue must still come overwhelmingly from final purchasers, directly or indirectly. This underscores an important barrier to reform: Much of the political attraction of the sales tax rests on its low profile. This is most clearly true of the huge amount buried in taxes on business inputs that does not appear on any final consumer's bill. Despite clear theory and evidence to the contrary, even some legislators and voters who know how large those revenue numbers are may believe that business is absorbing an important part of the tax burden.

The governor argued for an expansion of the sales tax to services because of the greater responsiveness of services to growing state income. If more services were included, tax revenue would grow more rapidly without a change in rate or base. Unfortunately, getting the base right in the first place would cause such a *decrease* in revenue that few states have ever moved much in that direction. Although the most recent comparison is more than 10 years old, all of the states together had only a slightly lower level of sales taxation of business inputs in 1989 than they had in 1979.

Looking to the Future

The sales tax elements of Jesse Ventura's Big Plan died and, as I have shown, the most important ones fared poorly against accepted criteria anyway. Nevertheless, the best single forecast for the future of the sales tax in Minnesota probably remains some variant of what Governor Ventura tried and failed to do. Quite simply, it amounts to expanding the base without reforming the tax, and the impulse behind it will be the same one that the governor claimed as part of his motivation for change: the failure of the base to expand sufficiently with the growth of the state's economy. One substantial expansion, in isolation from any other reforms, makes good sense; the current clothing exemption throws away a lot of revenue while giving away proportionately more to the rich than the poor. Otherwise, base expansion will most likely take place through a piecemeal extension of the sales tax to selected services on the basis of least political resistance rather than any accepted economic principles.

Could substantial sales tax reform ever take place in Minnesota? It's not impossible, but there are no real models. There are now states that tax consumer goods heavily and exclude production inputs (e.g., West Virginia). There are also states that tax a very broad base of goods and services (e.g., South Dakota). No state combines comprehensive taxation of consumer expenditure with a broad exemption of business inputs. Nevertheless, some pressure for reform exists. In New York, for example, state senate Democrats went on record in both 1999 and 2000 as favoring the abolition of the sales tax on business inputs.

Both the European experience and common sense suggest a route of political compromise for expanding the sales tax consumption base as business inputs are made exempt. Income protection for the poor could be achieved in part by refunding estimated sales tax payments one or more times during the year. A major objection to this approach stems from the inevitably incomplete coverage of even the best rebate program. Perceived benefits to low-income Minnesotans might still make this route politically acceptable, however. From the total amount raised by including food, clothing, and heating fuel in the tax base, considerably more money could be devoted to programs for low-income populations than the estimated revenue drawn from these populations. This could include not just a rebate program,

but the provision of other goods and services as well. In addition, rebate programs could be refined and made more effective in reaching those eligible, perhaps by being combined with other income-support programs through a debit card system, as was done with an experimental program in Ramsey County more than a decade ago.¹

As even the most defensible sales tax reforms are considered, it must always be remembered that the U.S. sales tax lacks the cross-checking element to prevent evasion that is built into Europe's VAT. Given the rising reward for evasion as the tax rate increases, there will always be a sharp limit on how much of *any* state's budget can ever be supported by the general sales tax. The maximum feasible rate may not exceed 10%. The most constructive question for the future may therefore be quite modest: Can we move incrementally toward greater reliance on a broader base of exclusively consumer goods and services while not increasing the burden on low-income Minnesotans? Minnesota's political landscape in 2001 provided no grounds for optimism, but other times and new political coalitions could yield a different result.

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¹ Perhaps the most novel approach to providing equity while maintaining the sales tax base is a continued exemption of the sectors at point-of-purchase with estimated (and contestable) sales tax liability on state income tax forms. No poor person pays the tax related to the exempt sectors. Unfortunately, because no one—rich or poor—actually faces the true relative prices of exempt and nonexempt goods and services when they are purchased, there is an efficiency loss for the whole community.

Reading Achievement in an Urban School: Collaboration for Reform

by Marika Ginsburg-Block and Susan Watts-Taffe

According to the U.S. Department of Education's *The Nation's Report Card: Fourth-Grade Reading 2000*, 37% of fourth-grade students have not yet mastered the basic skills of reading. Although this represents an increase in performance from previous years, African American and Latino/Latina students continue to lag behind their White and Asian peers; students attending central-city schools have lower average reading scores than their counterparts in rural or suburban schools; and students who are eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch program have lower average reading scores than students who are not eligible for the program. Similar trends can be found in Minnesota.

Some observers place responsibility for reading failure on families, arguing that factors such as lack of early literacy experiences put students at risk for reading failure. Others place responsibility on schools, arguing that a lack of understanding of the complete range of home and community literacy experiences found among culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students leads to discontinuity between home and school experiences, resulting in reading failure. A third perspective explains the development of children's academic competencies by emphasizing the importance of the multiple contexts in which learning occurs.

The basic premise of our work is that collaboration across and within systems is a key factor in increasing literacy achievement. Such collaborations include those among students, teachers, families, and community members. The purpose of this study was to learn firsthand about the process of collaboration with Jordan Park School of Extended Learning, a Minneapolis public school. The Center for Urban and Regional Affairs supported our work with the Jordan Park School during the 1999–2000 academic year through a grant from its Program for Interactive Research. Researchers and educators at the school worked together as a collabo-

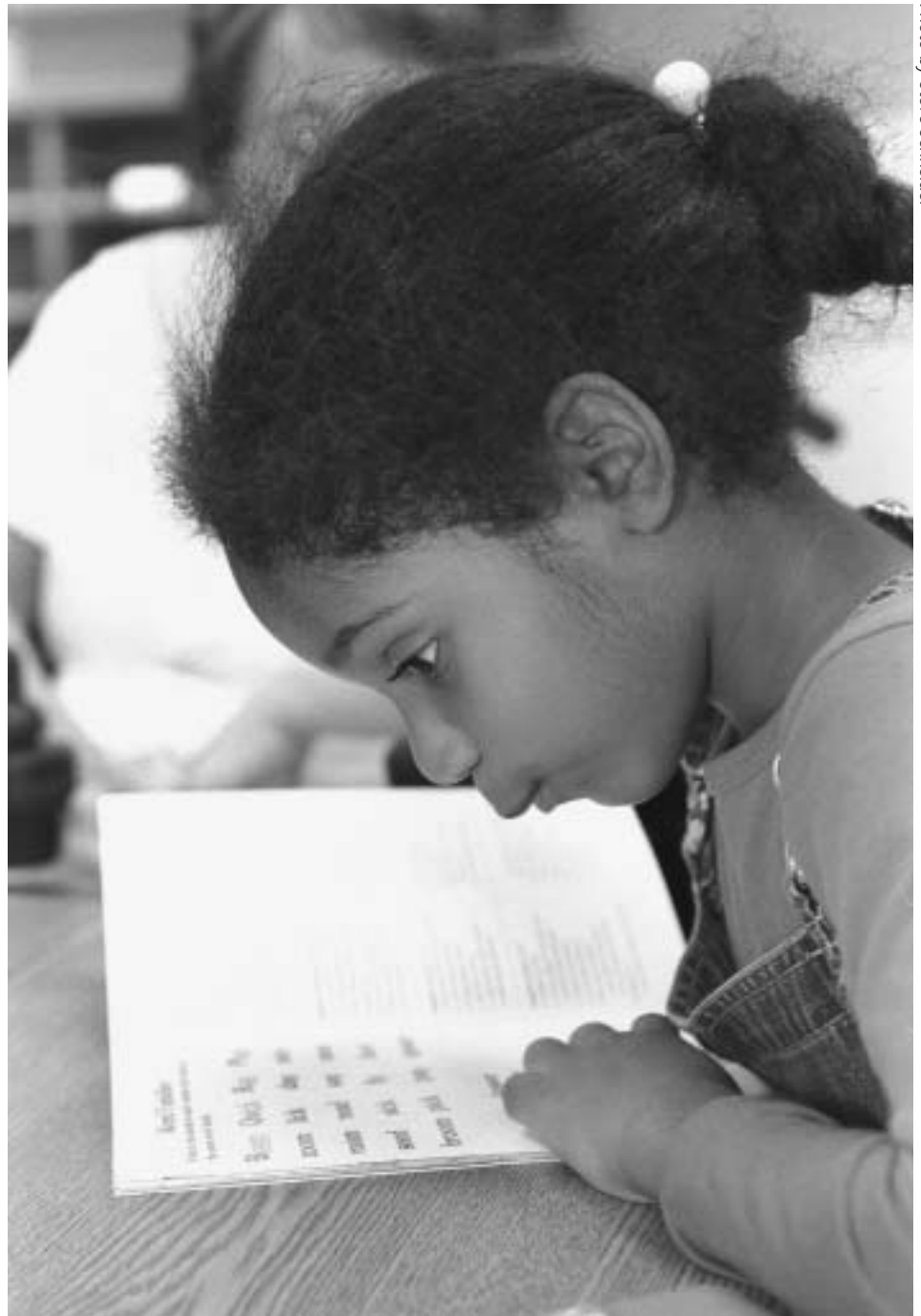


Photo by Steve Schneider

rative team to document, evaluate, and enhance the school's literacy program. The unique philosophy by which the Jordan Park School was organized, along with the dedication of its staff to continuous improvement, made the

school an appropriate partner to share in this opportunity. As researchers, our long-term goal was to understand what needs to occur to advance more widespread systemic change in literacy programs for urban schools. Our

short-term goal was to establish a partnership that would make this goal possible.

A Case Study in Collaboration: Jordan Park School of Extended Learning

Jordan Park School of Extended Learning, affectionately known as SOEL (pronounced *sole*), has been part of the Minneapolis Public School District since 1994. The school serves students in kindergarten through eighth grade, offering them opportunities for extended learning in two ways. First, the school day is extended to 9 hours, compared to the Minneapolis average of 7 hours and 45 minutes. Second, the school year is extended to include the summer months. Thus, the school year begins in July and ends in June, with three intersessions during which attendance is optional. This extended-day, extended-year schedule is shared by only a handful of schools nationwide.

The principal of the school, Dr. Carole Gupton, developed SOEL in an effort to get around the institutional and organizational barriers that she saw for so many students who struggled with academic achievement. Dr. Gupton developed the idea of a school day during which students would have long, concentrated blocks of time devoted to subject matter, as well as academic enhancement during what were formerly after-school hours. She also envisioned a structure that would allow staff to grow and develop professionally, including a regular block of time devoted to team planning, staff development, and reflection, as well as intermittent periods of rest for teachers throughout the school year.

Students and Staff at SOEL. At the beginning of the 1999–2000 school year, 392 students attended SOEL. The student population was 74% African American, 12% White American, 12% Asian American, and 1% Latino/Latina American. Three-fourths (75%) of the students were eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches, and there was a 33% turnover in the student population during the year. The staff consisted of 72% White Americans, 23% African Americans, and 5% Asian Americans. The majority of teachers were new teachers with less than five years of teaching experience.

School district data for 2001 revealed that 37% of third graders at SOEL demonstrated grade-appropriate proficiency or above on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA), compared to 57% districtwide and 82%

statewide. Among fifth graders, 49% demonstrated grade-appropriate proficiency or above, compared to 61% districtwide and 49% statewide.

Collaboration between SOEL and University Faculty. The seeds of our relationship with SOEL were planted when the College of Education and Human Development “Building Connections Lab School” grant¹ was funded by the Department of Children, Families, and Learning in 1998. The grant was developed to forge and sustain partnerships between our College and three Minneapolis public schools—as well as across the three schools themselves—to improve communication and planning across the spectrum of grades K–12. It was this grant that brought one of the authors (Susan) into contact with Dr. Gupton, who arranged a formal meeting involving several administrative staff members at SOEL, Susan, and her graduate assistant, Kathy Byrn.

It was clear from the start that we were on the same page. We wanted to work *together* to create a shared agenda and then work *together* to carry it out. Essentially, SOEL wanted to tap into our expertise as researchers and we wanted to tap into theirs as practitioners. Each of us saw the other not as a resource to be used in fulfilling a personal, predetermined agenda, but as a partner to work with in creating a shared agenda. We believed that this shared agenda would be more valuable and vital than any plan each of us could create in isolation, and we all valued the process.

Marika’s involvement was a part of that process. She learned through a contact at SOEL that the school was interested in greater opportunities to connect with the community and, ultimately, provide opportunities for parents and community members to become more engaged in children’s literacy growth. This seemed a good fit with Marika’s background and interests, as she had already partnered with several colleagues to develop the Literacy Tutor Training Taskforce. During the course of several years, this taskforce—led by Robyn Cousin of the Minneapolis Public Schools, Rob Podlasek of the Minnesota Literacy Council, and Rosemary Miller and Marika Ginsburg-Block of the College of

¹ The Building Connections Laboratory School grant was a joint effort of the College of Education and Human Development, Minneapolis Public Schools, and Minneapolis Federation of Teachers, and was funded by the Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning.

Education at the University of Minnesota—has developed and implemented a training program serving hundreds of literacy volunteers throughout the Twin Cities.

Common Goals: Developing a Shared Research Agenda

A key feature of collaboration is the identification of common goals. The interactive research grant from CURA provided us with an opportunity to make our goals concrete and to develop a corresponding plan of action. The goals we developed in conjunction with the grant were to

1. document current literacy practices at SOEL,
2. assess the strengths and weaknesses of SOEL’s literacy practices and identify available resources that could be used to further strengthen literacy practices at the school,
3. develop and implement literacy initiatives that incorporated available resources and further strengthened literacy practices at SOEL, and
4. evaluate both the degree to which these initiatives were implemented and their relative contribution to schoolwide literacy practices at SOEL.

The documentation of literacy practices at SOEL started in 1998 and took the form of classroom observations, teacher and staff interviews, and observation of and participation in a wide variety of meetings focused on instruction. Based on our research, we identified three unique features of SOEL’s literacy program: the breadth of instructional experiences provided for students, the use of child study as a catalyst for instructional improvement, and community connections that foster student development.

Breadth of Literacy Experiences: An Extended-Day, Extended-Year Model.

Perhaps the most striking characteristic of SOEL is its organizational structure. By extending the length of the school day, Dr. Gupton has opened the door for fresh thinking on not only the use of time in school, but also the way teachers, paraprofessionals, resource teachers, and students work. This innovation has created a new way of approaching literacy instruction—as an integral part of the entire school day. Here’s how it works.

The daily schedule at SOEL is depicted in Figure 1. The school day begins at 7:30 AM and ends at 5 PM. Classroom literacy instruction occurs between

Figure 1. Jordan Park School of Extended Learning (SOEL) Daily Schedule

7:35	8:00	11:30	12:30	1:30	2:00	3:30	5:05
Breakfast/ Assembly	Classroom Instructional Time	Lunch/Recess	Collaborative Group	Classroom Instruction		Humanities Instructional Period 1	Humanities Instructional Period 2
		Collaborative Group	Lunch/Recess				

8:30 and 11 AM in a concentrated, uninterrupted block of time. During this time, children are engaged in both whole class and small group instruction, as well as independent work in reading and writing. Classroom aides assist with small groups and individuals. The Houghton Mifflin basal reading series, adopted by the Minneapolis Public School District in 1998, provides the core curriculum for this instructional block.

In addition to a long uninterrupted block of time for literacy instruction, Dr. Gupton envisioned a way of meeting individual academic needs without pulling students out of the regular classroom. Thus, students' individual needs are met during a one-hour collaborative group time each day. During this time, students who struggle with reading are provided with services by specialists, while others pursue their own areas of academic need, interest, or giftedness in a small group setting.

Later in the afternoon, students take part in humanities options, which are taught by community members and resource teachers with expertise in specific areas. The humanities option was designed to expose children to the arts, and it often connects with the academic work they pursue at other times of the day. So, for example, a child might study the art found in award-winning picture books and, as part of this investigation, study the relationship between artistic detail and details found in the text. Children might study one particular illustrator to learn how he or she uses art to enhance the story told in words, and might write and illustrate their own picture books to get firsthand understanding of how stories can be told using words and pictures. Music, media, physical education, and art are taught as part of the humanities block.

Child Study as a Catalyst for Instructional Improvement. In addition to setting aside blocks of time for particular literacy experiences, Dr. Gupton and her administrative team work hard to create a "child study" mentality among staff. This means an awareness that the way instructional time is used should be integrally related to what teachers learn about student strengths and weaknesses through regular progress monitoring. This child study approach led to the Kindergarten Assessment Project and is regularly enacted in reflective analysis process (RAP) meetings.

The Kindergarten Assessment Project, which began in 1998, was spearheaded by three resource staff members: Cynthia Peyton, speech and language pathologist; Wendy Timberlake, collaborative educational resource teacher; and Clare Jewell, family partnership coordinator. The project began in response to the shockingly low performance of primary-grade children on district achievement tests, combined with observations that kindergarten students seemed to lack the beginning language skills needed to benefit from typical kindergarten instruction. Students were, as one teacher put it, "starting so low that their growth doesn't even show up on the district tests." Peyton, Timberlake, and Jewell worked to compile an assessment tool that would be sensitive to various levels of development and would provide teachers with some direction in planning instruction that would meet students' needs. The comprehensive assessment taps concept knowledge, letter knowledge, knowledge of letter sounds, and other skills associated with reading success. According to Timberlake, "One of the collaborative goals of our work was to design other assessment procedures that would provide information that teachers could

use to make instructional decisions about individual students."

Reflective analysis process meetings are regularly scheduled times when teachers and resource staff take an in-depth look at student learning with the goal of identifying specific weaknesses that need to be addressed through instruction, as well as strengths that can be capitalized on to overcome these weaknesses. During the time of our study, RAP was an acronym for *reading analysis process*. Teachers were invited, but not forced, to meet with others to focus on one or two students who they felt were not making sufficient progress in class. The group worked together to identify potential instructional changes that could better meet the student's needs and set into motion a plan of action for making the change. Since then, RAP has evolved into *reflective analysis process*, and is focused on analyzing student work (rather than students per se) in an attempt to better understand the processes by which students are learning in specific settings, as well as to identify ways to better evaluate student work and assess student achievement.

Community Connections. Since 1994, SOEL has developed several collaborative partnerships with local businesses, educational institutions, and community groups. For example, a dozen third and fourth graders work with business mentors on reading, math, and work skills through First Bank Corporation/Piper Jaffray. Other partnerships with local businesses include a recently awarded grant from the Cargill Corporation to support math teaching and learning. In other types of partnerships, a dozen high school students from the Breck school work informally as classroom volunteers and approximately 30 of SOEL's 8- to 10-year-old girls are



Photos by Steve Schneider

One advantage of the extended-day schedule is the availability of concentrated blocks of learning time. During the morning session at Jordan Park School, children are engaged in whole class and small group literacy instruction (above), as well as independent work in reading and writing. In the afternoon, students take part in humanities options, which are designed to expose them to the arts.



involved in the University of Minnesota's GEMS health, nutrition, and exercise program. Community connections include the Jordan Jam—an informal network of community-based faith, social service, educational, and resident organizations—as well as work with the Jordan Area Community Council.

Developing and Evaluating Literacy Initiatives: Addressing Weaknesses, Building on Strengths

While working with SOEL, we developed several initiatives focused on teacher

development and community involvement. A real strength of SOEL's literacy program is teachers' engagement in studying children's learning processes and outcomes. However, several teachers felt inhibited by the lack of a "personal vision" of literacy development. Thus, we helped teachers at SOEL become engaged in various forms of self-study, which involved looking at their teaching processes in relation to student learning. Building on SOEL's commitment to community involvement, we also initiated the Partners in Reading program.

This formalized literacy volunteer initiative addressed the issue of maximizing volunteer efforts by providing a structured program. In the following sections, we elaborate on both the teacher-based and community-based initiatives.

Teacher Development Group: Studying Literacy Instruction through Inquiry and Reflection. Beginning in fall of 2000, a group of nine teachers began to work with Susan to study their teaching practices using methods of inquiry and reflection as a means of ongoing professional development. Simply stated, they pose their own questions, based on their everyday experiences in the classroom, and decide, as a group and individually, how best to pursue those questions. The questions they pose are related to their annual professional development plans. The processes of professional development are based on a supporting community of colleagues that meets regularly, as well as recent research suggesting that professional development should be ongoing, site-based, and driven by the professionals themselves rather than "expert others." The Teacher Development Group initiative is designed to maximize the commitment to innovative professional development that has existed at SOEL for years, while also addressing the fact that the abundance of professional development opportunities was, for several teachers, overwhelming rather than empowering. In addition to lacking the time to fully integrate into their own teaching what they were learning, several teachers lacked models of teacher change. The purpose of this group was to use inquiry and reflection as two methods of approaching change.

Despite that there is no funding to support this current work, and that it is "one more thing to do," seven of the core group of nine teachers attend regularly. As teachers taking ownership of their professional development, they are better able to take advantage of the opportunities available to them. It is important that membership in the group is completely and consistently optional and is driven entirely by teachers' own questions and teaching processes. The teachers determine the content and method of their professional development, which has included discussing professional readings, working collaboratively on the creation of professional development plans, working collaboratively on assessing student writing, and developing

instructional plans for writing. According to Rachel, a fifth-grade teacher, "I try to see this group as kind of a support system, a group that I can bounce ideas off of." Peter, a seventh-grade teacher, states:

We don't have to solve any problems. We are not talking about school problems, behavior problems or any logistical things. Most of our other committees, even our team meetings, are [focused on logistical concerns] more than talking about literacy issues.

Partners in Reading Program.

Sixty-six members of the SOEL staff were involved in developing the Partners in Reading program through their participation in a volunteer needs assessment. Classroom teachers and support staff saw this effort as a way to promote skills, enjoyment, and confidence in reading among students in the early grades and to build positive relationships between students and community members. Consistent with the literature on volunteer programs, essential program features recommended by staff included training, ongoing support, and program coordination. Several specific suggestions were incorporated into the volunteer recruitment and support efforts, the content of the literacy tutoring activities, and the evaluation procedures.

Marika and Clare Jewell coordinated the program with support from colleagues and the Literacy Tutor Training Taskforce (LT3). Training consisted of at least four hours of discussion, modeling, and practice of tutoring strategies, followed by support during an actual tutoring session and continuing support for as long as tutors required assistance. Meetings were held on at least a monthly basis to provide volunteers with an opportunity to share their experiences and learn new strategies. Several meetings were held during the school day, during which teachers were invited to learn more about the program, share their ideas, and meet the volunteers.

The LT3 partners worked together with SOEL staff to develop a protocol for a 30-minute tutoring session for students in grades K–2. The tutoring curriculum was based on practices endorsed by SOEL's staff and demonstrated by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development's National Reading Panel to be most effective for early literacy instruction. The practices included attention to



Photo by Steve Schneider

Reflective analysis process (RAP) meetings are regularly scheduled times when teachers can focus on understanding how students learn in specific settings and identifying ways to better assess student achievement.

letter-sound correspondence, comprehension, and the development of sight word vocabulary. Each tutoring session included reviewing a known story, introducing a new story, reading the story together, and engaging in a skills activity. In all, five community literacy volunteers provided 10 students with 4 to 16 tutoring sessions during a 12-week period in spring of 2000.

The satisfaction of students, volunteers, and teachers was monitored to learn how the program supported each of these groups. All nine participating teachers indicated that they would recommend that other teachers participate in the program. A kindergarten teacher who had two of her students in the program commented, "The students seemed to enjoy going with their tutors. Some of the students have improved a lot in their letters and letter sounds. It is a great program." Volunteers also responded favorably to the program. Two of the original volunteers continue to participate in the program today. One of these volunteers commented, "I enjoyed my time spent with the children and all the others I've met." Students overwhelmingly responded in a positive manner to the satisfaction questionnaire as well. One student nicely captured the sentiments of his fellow participants: "Miss Bessie was a nice lady. She helped me to learn better. I like reading to Ms. Bessie."

Student progress was also evaluated prior to, during, and after students'

participation in the program, but the level of program implementation was insufficient to obtain meaningful results from group comparisons. During the subsequent two years, however, we have found that tutored students demonstrate significantly greater skills in *phonemic segmentation*—the ability to break up a word into its component sounds—than their classmates who have not received tutoring. This skill is considered to be one of the foundational skills necessary for fluent reading.

Challenges and Successes

Like others who have studied school-university collaborations, we found that the collaborative process was neither smooth nor linear, but it was a powerful mechanism for effecting change. In this section, we consider both the challenges and successes of this particular collaborative process.

Challenges. Participants in the collaborative process at SOEL faced four challenges, each of which we consider in turn.

Competing Demands. On the surface, perhaps the greatest challenge we faced was the lack of time. However, there was an additional pressure of competing demands for the time that was available. The kindergarten assessment provides a good example. Although three staff members were given time to conduct the assessments and present results to primary-grade teachers, they did not have time to



Photo by Steve Schneider

Often this can be a challenge, particularly when collaborators are communicating across systems that operate on different schedules and with different norms. On more than one occasion, Susan arrived at SOEL to participate in a meeting only to find that it had been canceled and no one had remembered to let her know. When one community volunteer arrived half an hour after her regular time for a tutoring session, her student was no longer available. We found that competing demands often hindered communication, which was critical to buy-in as well as resource maximization. Collaborators need to work together to prevent miscommunication or lack of communication.

Successes. Despite these challenges, we found the collaborative process to be a powerful mechanism for effecting change. Below we highlight the collective benefits of our collaboration in terms of reciprocal development and interdisciplinary collaboration.

Reciprocal Development. The teacher and volunteer development that has resulted from our collaboration is not one-sided. A unique outcome of this collaboration is our (the authors') development as university teachers and scholars. The collaboration led to the realization that we must better prepare teachers and school psychologists for urban settings. As a result of what we have learned at SOEL, we have incorporated resiliency into our instruction by teaching our students not only how to teach and consult, but also how to work effectively in barrier-ridden circumstances. To our pedagogical emphasis on diversity in today's schools we've added a component on how to deal with externally imposed innovation, building this theme into the decision-making models we use now.

In addition, our collaboration with SOEL has opened up opportunities previously unavailable for our students. Several preservice teachers have been placed at SOEL for one of their field experiences, and several graduate students in school psychology have gained research and practical experience at SOEL through their direct work with students, teachers, and community members. In addition, one SOEL teacher has been a guest speaker in a literacy methods class.

In terms of effecting long-term change, the impact of our experiences as members of the culture of SOEL is critical to our work in preparing the hundreds of preservice teachers and

The Jordan Park School has developed collaborative partnerships with local businesses, educational institutions, and community groups. These community connections foster student development by providing mentors and volunteers who work with students on basic skills such as reading and math.

follow through with teachers across the school year. Given this reality, Timberlake and Peyton suspected that the test results might have a greater impact on teaching if the teachers themselves were involved in gathering the information about their students. Yet, when teachers were offered the opportunity to do some of the testing themselves, they indicated that they did not have time. Although the information teachers would gain from such an assessment would almost certainly make their planning easier and their instruction more effective, the pressure they felt to focus on planning and instruction did not involve time for gathering this information. Another example is the Partners in Reading program, which struggled to identify community members who were consistently available to tutor students.

Buy-In. Another challenge faced was that of buy-in on the part of teachers. Although it was clear from the beginning that the administrative staff and a handful of teachers shared Dr. Gupton's vision for literacy achievement in the school, this vision was not shared by all. Thus, the first two years of the collaboration involved relatively few teachers—those who were actually providing instruction to students. It wasn't until the third year that a large number of teachers representing a variety of grade levels joined the collaboration. Research has shown that forced change is an

oxymoron; real and lasting change cannot be mandated. On the other hand, collaboration requires buy-in, and buy-in takes time.

Preparation for Resource Maximization. One of the most striking results of our collaboration is an understanding of the difference between providing opportunities and equipping people to take advantage of opportunities. Many of the resources associated with long-term, substantive growth have been in place at SOEL since its inception. Teachers have long blocks of time each day devoted to literacy instruction and for shared instructional planning within grade levels; teachers have numerous professional development opportunities in the form of workshops and conferences; and, of course, students have more time each day for learning than their counterparts in other schools. The challenge is determining how these opportunities can be maximized. The Teacher Development Group provides teachers with the opportunity to direct their own professional development with support from fellow teachers. It is a forum that helps them make sense of myriad information, received through a variety of channels, in ways that apply to their students and their daily professional lives.

Communication. Communication among collaborators is an important component of successful collaboration.

school psychologists who go through our program each year. Although it is too soon to know the impact of this reciprocal teacher development on our practice in the classroom, student evaluations suggest that Susan's recent students have felt a greater connection between what they learn here on campus and what they experience in their field placement than did students in the past.

Interdisciplinary Collaboration.

There is another collaboration worthy of discussion, and that is the most obvious one: the collaboration between us. Although we are both in the College of Education and Human Development, we represent two distinct areas of expertise: educational psychology and literacy education, respectively. In this trying time of heightened expectations for literacy attainment, an interdisciplinary approach is needed to make lasting change. At the same time, working across disciplines requires building new understandings based on shared knowledge and shared experiences. In fact, we believe that the "reading wars" that have received great media attention of late and have raged for a good portion of the 20th century are as much about lack of shared understandings and proprietorship of knowledge as they are about real differences of opinion or opposing facts.

Conclusion

There are several key lessons to take from our collaboration with colleagues at SOEL. Stated simply, collaboration is hard; it takes time; it can be powerful; and schools, families, and communities should do it. In order to heed this advice, individuals will need to develop creative solutions to maximize their time, recognize the importance of collaboration, strive to create an environment of empowerment in which all participants have a voice, and emphasize communication and coordination within and between systems.

Both of us plan to continue our collaboration with SOEL. Susan continues to work with teachers through the Teacher Development Group. As she continues this work, she is interested in exploring the effect of this teacher development process on teacher practices and student learning. Further, Kathy Byrn, who began as a graduate assistant on this project, became a classroom teacher at SOEL and has recently assumed the position of Language Arts Resource Teacher for the school. In this position, she oversees literacy assessment, provides teachers with support for reading instruction, and recently helped the school obtain a federal grant to support literacy improvement in the primary grades. Along with Kathy's transition have come several retirements during the past two years, including those of Dr. Carole Gupton and Clare Jewell. Marika and others have worked to enhance the Partners in Reading program at SOEL with greater teacher, tutor, and student participation. Marika will continue to explore the salient features of tutoring programs that can be linked to student performance and the contextual factors necessary to fully support such programs. As schools recognize the value of untapped resources such as community literacy volunteers, and undertapped resources such as our teachers, we would like to see that more resources are devoted to fully developing community involvement and professional development programs in our schools.

University faculty members in the field of education are often criticized for failing to remain connected to schools. Field-based preservice education and field-based research are vital to improving schooling in the United States. In this article, we have described how we worked with colleagues rather than just presenting the products of that work. This serves to emphasize a key point: that approaching educational

research from a perspective of partnership is important. In our work, we strive to acquire meaningful results within the context of today's urban schools. Through the examination of SOEL's literacy and community volunteer programs, we are moving toward a greater understanding of how urban schools can apply best practices specific to the populations they are serving. In addition, the connection between university-based educators and field-based educators will significantly enhance the quality of training and research conducted by faculty in university settings.

Marika Ginsburg-Block is assistant professor of educational psychology at the University of Minnesota. Her work emphasizes the need for researchers to collaborate with educators, parents, and community members to develop contextually sensitive programs that enhance children's academic and psychological outcomes. Much of her work focuses on investigating the nature and efficacy of peer- and parent-mediated strategies for urban elementary school students. Susan Watts-Taffe is associate professor of literacy and elementary education at the University of Minnesota, where she has taught since 1991. Her research interests include students experiencing difficulty with reading and teacher preparation and professional development.

This study was supported by a grant from CURA's Program for Interactive Research. The program was created to encourage University faculty to carry out research projects that involve significant issues of public policy for the state and that include interaction with community groups, agencies, or organizations in Minnesota. These grants are available to regular faculty members at the University of Minnesota, and are awarded annually on a competitive basis.

Project Funding Available from CURA

■ **The Communiiversity Program** funds quarter-time graduate student assistantships for one semester to help community-based nonprofit organizations or government agencies with a specific project. The application deadline for spring semester 2003 assistantships is November 18, 2002. For more information, contact Communiiversity program manager Ed Drury by phone at (612) 625-6045, or by e-mail at drury001@umn.edu.

■ **The Community Assistantship Program (CAP)** matches community-based nonprofit organizations, citizen groups, and government agencies in Greater Minnesota with students who can provide research assistance. Eligible organizations define a research project, submit an application, and if accepted, are matched with a qualified student to

carry out the research. The deadline for applications for spring 2003 assistance is November 1, 2002. For more information, to discuss potential projects, or for assistance with applications, contact CAP coordinator Jan Joannides by phone at (612) 251-7304 or by e-mail at joann001@umn.edu, or visit CAP's Web site at <http://www.cura.umn.edu/programs/CAP/cap.html>.

■ **Neighborhood Planning for Community Revitalization (NPCR)** provides student research assistance to Minneapolis and St. Paul community organizations involved in neighborhood-based revitalization. Projects may include any issue relevant to a neighborhood's needs and interests, including planning, program development, or program evaluation. Priority is given to projects that support and involve residents of color.

Applications from organizations collaborating on a project are encouraged. Applications for spring 2003 assistance are due November 6, 2002. For more information, contact NPCR project director Kris Nelson by phone at (612) 625-1020 or by e-mail at nelso193@umn.edu, or visit NPCR's Web site at <http://www.npcr.org>.

■ **The University Neighborhood Network (UNN)** links community organizations to course-based neighborhood projects that students carry out as part of course requirements. For more information about support for course-based projects, contact UNN coordinator Emily Schug by phone at (612) 625-0744 or by e-mail at unn@umn.edu, or visit UNN's Web site at <http://www.unn.umn.edu>.

Project Awards

To keep our readers up-to-date about CURA projects, each issue of the *CURA Reporter* features a few capsule descriptions of new or recently completed projects. The projects highlighted in this issue were made possible through the Community Assistantship Program (CAP), which connects communities in Greater Minnesota with University of Minnesota students. These projects help rural communities take advantage of University resources and expertise, allow students to apply their knowledge and skills in the field, and encourage faculty to become more aware of and involved in rural issues in the state. The projects described here represent only a portion of those that will receive support from CURA and its partners during the coming year.

■ **Asset Mapping for Southeastern Minnesota.** The Experiment in Rural Cooperation (ERC) is one of five University of Minnesota Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships. The regional partnerships work to build and strengthen the relationship between citizens and the University by developing collaborative research, education, and outreach projects that address issues

affecting the sustainability of natural resource-based industries, including agriculture and tourism. This fall, a graduate student from the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs is working with the ERC on an asset mapping project, which involves surveying hundreds of community interests and identifying emerging assets and opportunities that will help shape the future of rural communities in southeastern Minnesota. The student's findings will be discussed in a series of town hall meetings throughout the region, and will be used to gain consensus on major issues and target and leverage resources that can help the region meet its goals.

■ **Fostering Literacy and Learning with FastForWord.** The Mora Public Schools serve the population of Mora, a rural community 65 miles north of the Twin Cities. One of Mora's schools, Fairview Elementary, is piloting a computer program called FastForWord to improve students' language, reading, and thinking skills. The school district is considering expanding the program to include at-risk and low-achieving students at the middle and high school levels. This fall, a graduate student in

the College of Education and Human Development is working with Fairview Elementary to develop a system for analyzing and interpreting the data the program generates about students' performance. This system will enable teachers to individualize their instruction and help students reach their optimal potential, and will be shared with neighboring districts to help attract additional enrollments in summer FastForWord programs.

■ **Sherburne County Never-Married Parents Program.** The Sherburne County Parenting Apart Committee has provided educational programs to divorcing parents since 1996 and has established educational programs and camps for children whose parents have divorced or are divorcing. The committee is developing a new program for never-married parents dealing with issues related to custody, child support, and parenting time. A graduate student from the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs is working with the committee to conduct research on the effects on children when never-married parents are in conflict over custody, visitation, child support, and paternity issues, and on

the educational needs of parents to help them put the best interests of their children first. The student's final report will include the results of a literature review and focus groups conducted with never-married parents in the county. This information will be used by the committee to develop an educational program specific to the needs of never-married parents.

■ **Morris Area History Walk.** The Prairie Renaissance Cultural Alliance aims to provide a sustainable infrastructure that advocates, promotes, and coordinates cultural activities in the greater Morris area. The alliance has task forces on artists and artisans, arts education, beautification, and heritage. An undergraduate student from the University of Minnesota's Morris campus is working with the alliance to develop a Morris-area history walk, a self-guided tour of stanchions located throughout downtown Morris highlighting moments of interest in the area's history. The student will identify appropriate historical moments and research photographs, material items, quotes from contemporary documents, and other information for use on the stanchions and the tour brochure, and will share this information with the alliance and the broader community.

■ **West Central Minnesota Regional Trails Inventory.** The West Central Initiative brings people and resources together to maintain the viability of west-central Minnesota. Its program areas include providing quality employment, supplying skilled labor, empowering communities to address priority needs, and strengthening communities for families. At the request of local units of government and trails advocacy groups, the West Central Initiative has become involved in planning activities involving multiuse trails in the region. An undergraduate student from the University of Minnesota's Morris campus is working with the initiative to conduct a comprehensive inventory of all trails in the region. This inventory will be compiled into a map and database listing trails by location and type of use, and will be used by the regional Trails Planning Committee to develop a

regional trails plan that identifies gaps in the trails system and guides future trail developments. This will help the committee better provide for the transportation, recreation, tourism, and fitness needs of residents of and visitors to west-central Minnesota.

■ **University of Minnesota Legacy at White Earth.** The White Earth Tribal Archives provides many research and outreach functions for the White Earth Band of the Anishinaabe people, including creation and implementation of the U.S. Census survey; development of viable, extensive historical archives; and inquiry into and development of constitutional documents, sovereignty concerns, and interreservation dialogue around key civic issues. During the summer of 2002, a graduate student in the College of Liberal Arts worked with the archives to develop a chronology of University of Minnesota research that has either been conducted within native communities or has had a significant impact on American Indian populations in Minnesota. The student's research included interviews with community members and University researchers, and will help native communities develop strategies for ongoing interaction and partnership with the University of Minnesota.

■ **Shakopee Creek Hydrological Study.** The Chippewa River Watershed Project (CRWP) is a partnership of more than 30 stakeholder organizations from the seven-county watershed working to improve water quality while maintaining a healthy agricultural economy. During the summer of 2002, a graduate student in geography from the College of Liberal Arts worked with CRWP to document and understand the physical hydrology of the Shakopee Creek, a tributary of the Chippewa River. The student applied a known method for estimating stream bank erosion and found that the method is not well-suited to a watershed as large as the Chippewa River basin. He provided CRWP with a summary of his findings; recommendations for further monitoring; and a new method for assessing sediment loads, their sources, and their effects on water quality.

■ **Cultural Diversity in Montevideo: Assessing the Present, Planning for the Future.** The Cultural Diversity Council serves the counties of Chippewa, Lac qui Parle, and Yellow Medicine in west-central Minnesota. It was organized in 1999 to strengthen the network of intercultural human relationships and thereby keep communities peaceful, welcoming, trusting, and respectful. During the summer of 2002, a graduate student in the College of Education and Human Development worked with the council to conduct an assessment of the realities, strengths, and needs of people of color in the area, and of service providers' perceptions of diverse audiences and the resources needed to better serve this population. This information will help the council understand how current community structures are utilized by diverse groups and how they can be improved.

■ **Renewable Energy Assessment for Clean Energy Resource Teams.** Clean Energy Resource Teams (CERTs) is a partnership between public, nonprofit, and private organizations intended to fully realize Minnesota's potential for producing local renewable energy. Regional CERTs are now being formed across Minnesota with the purpose of identifying, supporting, and building renewable energy projects. During the summer of 2002, a graduate student in the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs worked with the Minnesota Project and the University of Minnesota Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships to create a renewable energy assessment for Minnesota. With the guidance of a committee representing a broad spectrum of community energy interests, the student prepared a workbook that identifies opportunities in energy efficiency and renewable energy generation, highlighting various technologies and providing case studies and extensive resource listings for each. The regional CERTs will use this workbook to help communities plan their own local renewable energy initiatives.

New Publication

***CURA Update 2002*. Minneapolis: Center for Urban and Regional Affairs. 2002. CURA 02-4. Free.**

This latest installment of the *CURA Update* includes capsule descriptions of the hundreds of projects and activities sponsored by the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs from 1999 to 2002, as well as descriptions of the many programs CURA supports. The new easy-to-use design makes it simple to locate projects on particular topics and to identify CURA publications associated with specific projects. A comprehensive introduction to CURA's approach to community-related research, this publication is also an invaluable reference tool for nonprofit organizations, government agencies, students and faculty, libraries, and private citizens concerned with public policy issues in Minnesota. Available online soon as a PDF file at <http://www.cura.umn.edu/publications/update02.pdf>. To order a hardcopy of this publication, contact CURA at 612-625-1551 or cura@tc.umn.edu.

The logo for CURA Reporter features a stylized graphic of a city skyline with a lightbulb above it, followed by the text "CURA REPORTER" in a bold, serif font.

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