

What matters to students and their performance? The Changing Definition of 'School' and 'Schooling'

Notes from session three of a national leadership conversation designed to help build the case for a much greater emphasis on creation of new and fundamentally different schools within state and federal initiatives to improve student learning.

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Opening Remarks:

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Adolescence is a uniquely critical time in the development of young people. For example, a wide range of educational research has found declining levels of motivation, engagement and achievement in adolescence. Developmental and clinical psychologists have discovered that psychological disorders like depression and anxiety often emerge in adolescence. Social psychologists have found an increase in high-risk behaviors during these years, such as alcohol and/or drug abuse, delinquency, and teenage pregnancy. Experiences in adolescence can impact life trajectories (i.e., overall educational attainment, employment opportunities) in significant ways. As a major component of the adolescent life experience, secondary schools can play a major role in the lives of young people.

Unfortunately, evaluating schools solely in terms of test scores oftentimes does not reveal the true nature of the learning environment and how that environment contributes to adolescent mental health and adjustment. What is needed is a means by which schools could be assessed as cultures that create a set of relationships, norms of behaviors, values and commitments that lead to the development of healthy and productive students. According to developmental psychology, school environments can achieve this objective by providing for students' basic psychological needs: autonomy (choice, self-management); belongingness (strong teacher and peer relationships); and, a positive goal orientation (uniformly high expectations, recognition of effort), which encourages perceptions of competence. Developmental theory states that students in these sorts of supportive environments should respond by engaging more directly in their learning and, over time, gaining confidence in themselves as achievers.

Thus, the Hope Study was constructed to assess school environments using the developmental perspective outlined above. The Hope Study measures the degree to which the school context supports the students' developmental needs. In addition, we measure student behavioral and emotional engagement in learning and their psychological adjustment, or "hope". Hope is a construct that reflects a student's perception of him or herself as a success, a problem-solver, and an achiever. In a psychologically healthy environment, student perceptions of the learning environment (as measured by autonomy, belongingness, and goal orientation) should be more positive, and students should respond with higher levels of engagement, and, over time, growth in hope.

By increasing student engagement and hope, schools can realize benefits in terms of student behavior, attendance, and academic achievement. For example, research shows that higher-hope students not only set more challenging school-related goals for themselves when compared to lower-hope students, but also tend to perceive that they will be more successful at attaining these goals even if they do not experience immediate success. Higher-hope students also perform better in college and are more likely to graduate. Finally, higher-hope people report more optimism about life, more physical health and greater levels of happiness, as well as less anxiety and depression.

Dr. Ron Newell

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The Hope Study; Assessing What Really Matters

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Ted Kolderie's opening remarks included these statements:

"The failure to organize school around motivation says a lot about the way K-12 was built... It is now possible to have schools that make motivation central. Such schools will be different."

When considering rigorous study, too often schools develop curriculum (more AP courses, more math classes, etc.) and do not consider the relationship between Relationships, Relevance and Rigor. Simply increasing the difficulty of curriculum is not motivating to those who are at-risk of dropping out. What motivates students happens in the realm of Relationships and Relevance.

For example, little time is given to the establishment of relevant learning opportunities. Adolescents need to exercise their autonomy, their decision-making powers, by studying what is relevant to their world. Teens need to know that their questions are valued, that adults will be concerned about what they need to know in the moment.

Along with relevance, adolescents need good adult relationships, ones built on mutual respect and concern for growth as a person. Both academic and personal support must be perceived as strong. The research cited by Mark Van Ryzin clearly shows that adolescents do not perceive that typical comprehensive high schools offer them relevance or good relationships.

The survey components of autonomy, belongingness and goal orientation indicate healthy engagement in learning; engagement in learning indicates dispositional hope. By giving the surveys and doing the data crunching, a school can learn about its own health and the psychological health of its student body. The assessment of the process that students go through is as important, if not more so, as assessing for learning via tests.

A school that pays attention to the levels of autonomy, belongingness, and goal orientation of its student body will pay more attention to developing a program that can personalize. To personalize education for adolescents may mean programmatic change. It certainly means having to create school-improvement plans that consider design elements that support autonomy, belongingness and positive goal orientation.

Innovative schools such as EdVisions Schools and Big Picture Schools have changed programs significantly in order to fulfill the promises of relevance and relationships. When the design elements are put into place that support autonomy, belongingness and positive

goal orientation, engagement inevitably follows; in other words, rigor is an eventual outcome.

More importantly, however, growth in hope is an outcome of engagement. This means that personality traits can be changed. No longer do students have to come to school with high hope levels in order to be successful; now we know of ways to build hope, helping students develop the agencies and pathways that lead to success.

These facts raise two major questions for the education establishment:

1. Why continue doing the old model of comprehensive high schools when research clearly shows that positive dispositions are not enhanced? Or, conversely,
2. If new and innovative models of schools are enhancing dispositions (character, traits), why are they not being embraced by the mainstream?

Innovative schools that provide healthy places for adolescents need to be supported. Anything the public can do to continue that support must continue. Public education and its supporters must begin paying attention to the Research and Development arm (i.e. charter schools), because they are developing some very important new innovations that are benefiting public education.

Panel (moderated by Curt Johnson)

Participants included:

- Travion Allen, senior at Oh Day Aki (Heart of the Earth) Charter School
- Lars Johnson, graduate of Minnesota New Country School
- Abdirizak Mohamed, senior at Ubah Medical Academy
- Gina Parker, senior at Avalon Charter High School
- Codie Wilson, graduate of High School for the Recording Arts

Please note descriptions of all of the panelists' schools are included at the end of this document. Also note that these are notes and not a transcript of the panel.

C. Johnson: Give us the short explanation for how you ended up in a new and different school.

Mohamed: I could not really survive in the big school environment. Coming into high school I was very immature. I needed adult guidance, and you're not really gonna get that in a big public school. I hung out with people who influenced me to do bad things, like skipping class. Teachers weren't noticing. They don't form a relationship with you. My mom saw the grades I was getting, and we decided to switch schools. A friend told me about Ubah Medical Academy. A small school environment. Very easy to survive. Teachers develop a strong relationship with me. If I hadn't found the school, I would not be college bound. I'd be dropped out somewhere. I had no sense of direction.

Parker: I was at Central High School [in St. Paul]. It wasn't good for my mental health. I looked at Avalon my freshman year. A girl I knew went there and she said every day when she woke up she was pumped to go to school. Hearing that from this particular person was really shocking. My mom wasn't really convinced when she first saw the school. Thought I needed more structure. I had a couple of good relationships with some teachers at Central...but it wasn't enough. At Avalon, I had a lot of freedom to figure out what I wanted

to do with my life and what I wanted to learn. The set curriculum at Central did not allow for this. Avalon has been a really healthy change. Had I not switched, I probably wouldn't be in school.

Allen: I went to Edison High School in North Minneapolis. I was immature. I wasn't mentally prepared for high school. Kids were not on the same page that I was. It was difficult to get help from teachers. I started getting Cs and Ds, and not receiving individual attention held me back. I got further and further behind when teachers told me to wait until after class instead of taking the time to help me right away when I wasn't understanding something. I thought about dropping out. What's the point? I felt dumb in that school. I stopped going more and more. My mom got tired of it. She suggested I go to a different school. My grades went from Ds and Cs to As and Bs when I transferred to Oh Day Aki. They help you more. They help you understand what you are doing wrong.

Wilson: I went to Roosevelt HS in Gary, Indiana. I came here because I heard about HSRA. When I recorded I got to speak how I feel. I loved music. I was on probation and a ward of the state. They thought I was crazy when really I was a kid going through trauma at home. I couldn't leave the state, but my brother moved with my mom and he went to HSRA. My brother made me excited about the school. I left the state although I wasn't supposed to... I'm probably the first to violate probation to go to school. I thought I'd explain it once I was in St. Paul. To this day I talk about this school in Gary. I mailed my first song down to Indiana to show 'em what I'm doing. I was into gangs. Drugs. I had never seen a school give students what they want. A lot of kids want to be the next 50 cent. The next Eminem. You can target students based on those interests. Before I left I got shot. I was going to be dead or in prison.

L. Johnson: I was getting As when I left my school, but I wasn't feeling satisfied. I left conventional schools when I was in 6th grade. I was not motivated. I was not satisfied. I wasn't enjoying going to school. I started going to the Village School in Northfield, [Minnesota]. There weren't credits; no system of evaluation. Then I transferred to MNCS. I was attracted to a bit more structure offered there. I was purposefully harming my grades at the end of middle school because it wasn't cool to get good grades. The social situation at the huge school was holding me back. Today I am going to Macalester College in St. Paul. I'm traveling the world. I study chemistry and I am a musician and a Web designer.

C. Johnson: We [meeting participants] spent a lot of time yesterday debating what differences are important in a school. What do you think are essential differences?

Allen: Social relationships. I knew everyone's name by the end of two months, from Kindergarten to 12th grade and all the teachers. No one is anonymous. If someone knows you by name they know your problems and can help you with them.

Mohamed: Family experiences. You feel like you really know everybody, as [Allen] said. You feel like you really belong. You're all striving to be successful, and you feel like you will all do that together. No sense of competition.

Parker: The relationships made a big difference in my motivation. My advisor inspires me to get back on track if I'm not motivated on a project.

C. Johnson: Do you have a different sense of obligation to perform?

Allen: At Edison [High School] I felt like I couldn't actually show it [my academic ability, what I can do]. Everything was so hard. No one held me back. No one pushed me NOT to

do it. Students earn credits at their rate. Whatever they are having problems in you can work at that first. I went from "Why should I do it?" to "Why shouldn't I do it?" People are taking the time to help you.

C. Johnson: Codie [Wilson], if HSRA was a school for medical sciences, would you have gone?

Wilson: No. The specialties kept me in. I'm graduated, but I work there now. I can't leave. I won't leave.

C. Johnson: Lars [Johnson], you are graduated from an unconventional school. Is there anything you would do differently, now—looking back?

L. Johnson: It's hard to answer that because so much of who I am now is based on the decisions I made. I studied music exhaustively in high school, so I majored in chemistry in college. I might have majored in music if I didn't have the opportunities I did in high school.

C. Johnson: What if someone had turned you on to science in high school?

L. Johnson: There were some requirements, and I took some post-secondary education to meet those. Had someone tried to force me to study more, though, I'm not sure I would have been receptive to it.

C. Johnson: Many students say they drop out because they are bored. They come to school to watch teachers work. I see you all nodding your heads. You are describing that something is different about what teachers and students do...

Wilson: Some learn quicker than others. There is a lot of low self esteem. If you don't know something you will not raise your hand and ask for help. You'll just miss it; lose out because of your self esteem. Class is over and you're not motivated. You go to the next class. At HSRA it is personal. You deal with each other individually. It's easier for a teacher to work when they have just 8 students. They have time. When you're working with 30 kids to teach a lesson, teachers won't stop to help you out. Sometimes they don't even know because you don't raise your hand.

C. Johnson: Are students helping other students?

Mohamed: When some students know stuff they will try to help you out and get the other students along.

Wilson: At HSRA we have a shadow. When a new student comes in, they are a current student's shadow. The current student supports them in learning about the school.

Parker: You can ask anyone and they'll help you out with a project. There are a lot of student-run groups. Students mentor new students to learn about the program.

C. Johnson: Are you learning in these schools? Is what you are learning contributing to your success?

L. Johnson: I'm doing well where I am now.

Allen: For anyone that says the work is too easy in unconventional schools—um, no. At Edison we were learning sine, cosine, and tangent and I never understood it. I took a test

and aced it at Oh Day Aki. I'm doing the same work, but I am learning it in a different way that works well for me.

C. Johnson: Do student opinions influence school decisions?

Parker: With student congress at Avalon, students have a legitimate voice in the school. Also, we are required to meet in circle every day and talk to one another about issues we are having with one another. Getting these issues out allows you to learn.

Mary K. Boyd (MKB and Associates, Roseville): Did the culture of the individual play a part in their decision to attend a different kind of school?

Mohamed: My school places a big emphasis on culture and it played a big role in my decision:

Allen: I thought I was a young black boy, but I now understand I have Native American roots, too. We did my family tree. I felt I belonged at the school.

Mark Van Ryzin: How did "who you are" come out at your schools today, to bring out your motivation?

Allen: I wanted to be class president at Edison, but it wasn't going to happen. The relationships between students, and between students and teachers, are better. We consider ourselves family. Everyone knows each other and our weaknesses... We want to help each other.

C. Johnson: You WERE motivated, but couldn't succeed. What about Oh Day Aki made it possible for you to succeed?

Allen: Fewer people. It took me all year to find out who my guidance counselor was at Edison. I don't condemn large schools. If you have the help, then stay at it. For me personally I wasn't getting the help. So I decided to make a change for myself.

C. Johnson: So do you think it is true that schools can leave some behind, but bore others?

Students and recent graduates: All nodded their head 'yes'.

Danny Goldberg (Milwaukee Board of Education): How did you experience rules of structure when you first came to the schools you attend today? Did you encounter any rules you didn't want to follow, but that you decided to follow to stay in a different school?

Wilson: The rules were kind of the same. The difference was that at HSRA I was treated like a young adult. I had a son on the way, and I was treated like an adult instead of like a kid. When people deal with you individually, they get to know you as a person. It was like family.

Parker: It didn't take a while to go along with rules, like the rule that everyone is required to talk in circle. But I don't like the rule that we all have to show up on time everyday. I don't think the time matters as much as what you learn. But we have common respect, so I'm willing to do it.

C. Johnson: What happens when you don't like people at the school?

Allen: I had sit down time with a guy at my school that I felt was stalking me. The only thing I knew about him was that he didn't like me... When the teachers got us together and we talked it out, sat down and talked about issues, we became friends. We hang out now. Go to the movies...

Parker: One of my favorite stories is... At Avalon we have a really active gay-straight alliance (GSA). It bothered me that a student used the word "gay" all the time in his speech. We asked him to come to the GSA meetings and he changed his language.

Angus Davis (Tellme Networks, Rhode Island): We have having some discussions here, wondering if grades are bad [whether they motivate students well]; wondering if you shouldn't have tests. But some of you left your conventional schools because your grades were slipping. You are now motivated by higher grades and you seem to get a sense of pride that you are getting high grades. Do grades matter?

Wilson: I won't say grades are bad and tests are bad. Tests and grades are good. I was always a smart kid. I just couldn't pull out of my drama. I got a 4.0 GPA after all of what I went through. That's important to me. My esteem level is good now. I am going on tour with Mos Def now.

Tim Daniels (Pennsylvania Charter School Coalition): What are your goals? What will you do now?

Wilson: Save lives. My brother was killed. I was hoping to start an HSRA for younger kids. Get 'em into music at 4 and 5. I did a song with my son, who is 5, and he could do it. I want to have my own school and teacher 'em music.

Mohamed: I want to become a counselor for troubled kids.

Parker: I want to go to school and travel. I want to teach sex ed in another country, which I already did through an experience at Avalon—traveled to Mexico. I'd like to be an EMT for a while.

Allen: My hopes and dreams are to go to college. I will go for business management. I am part of a youth leadership program called Youthrive, and I am learning to lead.

L. Johnson: When I graduated high school I wanted to be a rock star. Now I am applying for a fellowship to work with farmers in developing countries to think about the chemicals they are using on their farms.

Allen: We gathered everyone at school and taught them that our hearts all beat the same even though we are different colors.

Morgan Brown (Office of Innovation and Improvement, US Dept of Education, Washington D.C.): How much did it matter that a friend recruited you, as opposed to a billboard? There are people having debates over how to best inform students about options.

Students: Friends and family members who you trust matter. Probably wouldn't read a brochure.

Kim Farris-Berg (Education/Evolving, consultant based in Orange County, California): There is skepticism about whether you are learning in nontraditional environments. Explain what you are learning.

Wilson: At HSRA [where he now works] we have kids coming in from traditional schools who are 14 years old and they don't know how to read a clock. I work with students to understand about how to speak in society, about how to curb your anger, to be able to work with a boss. Bosses don't want to hear any "n" word, for example.

Parker: My biggest struggle when I got to Avalon is that I didn't know what to do with myself. I have learned that I learn the most by having to teach it. Globalization. Issues from Mexico. I communicate what I learn to others. I like working by myself. I'm an independent person.

Maite Arce (Hispanic CREO, Washington D.C.): Did you have a teacher who motivated you in your previous [conventional] school?

Mohamed: I barely even met the counselor at my old school. No, I didn't have anyone.

Parker: I had an amazing theater teacher at Central High School which is why I kept going there even after leaving briefly to go to an alternative school. Our social worker, too, at Central. I had a connection with him. Wherever I went I always found someone I could connect with.

L. Johnson: One of the biggest things that I have learned is that teachers can be receptive to what you have to say. Just because you are a student, you are not a lesser person. The other students I go to school with (in college) are scared to challenge professors and work with them. I felt so separate in the traditional system, like people didn't want to hear my story.

Terry Lydell (Minnesota Association of Alternative Programs): Have you all taken the BSTs? (Students nod "yes".) Did any of you take tests about your ability to build relationships, to be a good citizen, etc. Consider the Hope Study that Van Ryzin talked about. Let's assume you could take tests about your self image and ability to establish relationships. Would they be valuable?

Parker: We take Hope Studies at Avalon. For myself they are not helpful because I know my self-worth. But for some it would be helpful.

Margaret Reece (Chico Country Day Charter School, California): What might have made a difference for you in a comprehensive high school? How can you imagine the community changing?

Allen: More open classes. Teachers' aides working with students. More help and more opportunities for help in school.

L. Johnson: You need to know the person that is helping you.

Bill Zimniewicz (Jennings Experiential High School): Would you believe it was worth having an experiment where no standards were required and teachers and parents worked together to develop learning plans?

Students: Yes, it would be worth it.

Wilson: I find that I am teaching myself, so any opportunity to do that more would be a good idea.

C. Johnson [addressing the panelists' teachers]: What is it like to work with these students?

Andrea Martin: I felt like a professional for the first time at Avalon.

Kevin Kroehler, EdVisions Off-Campus High School (formerly MNCS): Yesterday at this meeting someone said how nice it would be to trust teachers. I think it is wonderful for the first time to trust kids. Collaboration just did not exist in traditional systems. You shut the door and don't work together.

Josephine Baker (DC Public Charter School Board): The atmosphere is risk-averse.

Carrie Bakken: I've always taught in a small setting. I had no opportunity to use classroom management skills or to have a relationship with students, even in other small settings. At Avalon, I am always learning with the students and I really appreciate that as an educator.

Heather (Teacher at Ubah Medical Academy): Students have high expectations of us and we have high expectations of them. We are more conventional than others here, as requested by the community we serve. At our school, religion, clothes, etc. are not issues as they were for students somewhere else.

Ted Kolderie (Senior Associate, Education Evolving): Teachers, how do you connect students' interests to what they are learning?

Zimniewicz: A tenth-grade student I taught said he was not interested in learning anything. I knew he was interested in cars. I coached him to get into the politics and economics of why Tucker cars fell, and also the physics of how the cars worked. He got really into it.

Dee Thomas: At Minnesota New Country School we teach student interests, and standards are the by-product. Before, when I worked in conventional schools, we took standards and the interests were the by-product. This is about learning. Not about teaching. There is a huge difference. Lars [Johnson] was taking noise off of the highway and turning the noise into a non-noise pollution project. I learned a ton. I couldn't understand half of what he was doing, but he did it.

Elliot Washor (Big Picture Company, Rhode Island): What Bill said is really interesting. You can't lead with rigor unless the student is motivated.

Ron Newell: We're still talking about learning. The idea is that learning is fact and you convey concepts. When relevance is on the table, learning becomes something different. Students engage themselves in learning and become reawakened. Their disposition and attitude changes, and they learn processes. You can go from point A to point Z. So how are kids learning these kinds of dispositions? Learning is complex. It involves a lot of cognitive things, emotional things... The definition of "rigor" is bigger.

C. Johnson: Lars [Johnson], can you explain to us what got past Dee?

L. Johnson: I took my interest in music and sound...I applied it to physics. I caught the soundwaves coming off the freeway and tried to convert it into a pleasant sound, but I found it wasn't possible. Sound is multidirectional, so it does not work...

Student Panelists & Their Fundamentally New and Different Schools

Panelist: Codie Wilson, graduate

School: High School for the Recording Arts

Location: St. Paul, MN

High School for the Recording Arts integrates academics and the music industry to re-capture the interest of high school youth who don't find the opportunities they're looking for in conventional settings. School leaders use a project-based learning program to closely tie academics to the music industry and vice versa. Students have opportunities to manage a school-based record label, Another Level Records. Students also run community-outreach programs that seek to educate their peers in the community on issues such as dating violence and HIV/AIDS prevention through music. Each student has his/her own workspace at the school and extensive access to computers and other music-related technology.

Year opened: 1998

Grades served: 9-12

Enrollment: 211

Male: 68%

Female: 32%

American Indian: 2%

African American: 82%

Asian: 1%

Hispanic: 4%

Caucasian: 11%

Limited English Proficiency: 0%

Free and Reduced-Price Lunch: 67%

Special Education: 26%

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*source: MN Dept. of Education School Report Card, 2005-06

Panelist: Gina Parker, senior

School: Avalon Charter High School

Location: St. Paul, MN

Avalon's mission is to be a strong, nurturing community that inspires active learning, local action, and global awareness. The learning program is project-based, which empowers students to develop their own learning plans. Students attend few conventional "classroom classes," spending most of their time working independently and in collaboration with peers (with guidance from their advisor) on their individualized-learning plans. Advisers (teachers) involve students in most decisions related to the school's functioning, including decisions about school operational and curricular policies. Two students serve on the school's governing board. The school provides one computer for every two students and a personal workspace for each student. A teacher cooperative manages all aspects of Avalon, including the learning program.

Year opened: 2001

Grades served: 7-12

Enrollment: 149

Male: 52%

Female: 48%

American Indian: 1%

African American: 18%

Asian: 5%

Hispanic: 8%

Caucasian: 69%

Limited English Proficiency: 1%

Free and Reduced-Price Lunch: 23%

Special Education: 18%

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*source: Gretchen Sage-Martinson, Avalon advisor, 2006.

Panelist: Travion Allen, senior

School: Oh Day Aki (Heart of the Earth) Charter School

Location: Minneapolis, MN

Oh Day Aki's mission is to provide culturally-based education that is respectful to individual-learning styles and interests; to support family and community participation in each student's education, resulting in the strengthening of American Indian culture, while preparing students for higher education and self-sufficiency. As part of its culturally-relevant curriculum, the school offers Ojibwe and Lakota/Dakota language classes, American Indian History, American Indian Art, and American Indian Drum and Dance Club. The school also has established partnerships with institutions of higher education and school-to-work programs to ensure students' smooth transition to higher education and the world of work. Class sizes are kept small.

Year opened: 1999

Grades served: K-12

Enrollment: 213

Male: 47%

Female: 53%

American Indian: 91%

African American: 3%

Hispanic: 1%

Caucasian: 5%

Limited English Proficiency: 0%

Free and Reduced-Price Lunch: 98%

Special Education: 9%

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*source: Center For School Change, Humphrey Institute for Public Policy, University of Minnesota

Panelist: Abdirizak Mohamed, senior

School: Ubah Medical Academy Charter High School

Location: Minneapolis, MN

The mission of Ubah Medical Academy is to provide immigrant and refugee students with a rigorous academic high school education that will prepare them for college and meaningful careers in the community. The school's vision is to provide a means for students, especially students from immigrant and refugee communities, to prepare themselves for higher education and, eventually, careers in medicine or other professions in an environment that supports English Language Learners and sets high standards for academic achievement. The school seeks to meet the unique needs of its largely East African refugee population by ensuring that faculty and students are able to build strong relationships, that class sizes remain small, and that the faculty is sensitive to students' unique cultural assets and needs. It is housed in the International Education Center building, which is also home to the Twin Cities International Elementary School and the Minnesota International Middle School, both of which also serve a predominately East African refugee population.

Year opened: 2004

Grades served: 9-12

Enrollment: 220

Male: 50%

Female: 50%

African American: 100%

Limited English Proficiency: 94%

Free and Reduced Price Lunch: 100%

Special Education: 2%

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*sources: Center For School Change, Humphrey Institute for Public Policy, University of Minnesota and MN Dept. of Education School Report Card, 2005-06

Panelist: Lars Johnson, graduate
School: Minnesota New Country School
Location: Henderson, MN

Minnesota New Country School is the first chartered school in the nation to be created and managed by a teacher cooperative. The academic program is project-based. Students have significant freedom to design their own program of study in collaboration with their advisors and parents, while being held to high standards of academic excellence. The governing metaphor of the school is student-as-worker with parents and teachers as facilitators of learning and parents as essential collaborators. The school prioritizes partnerships with businesses, government, farms, service agencies and organizations to involve students in real-life, meaningful learning opportunities. There are no courses, no bells. Students are free to move around as they please. There is also an L-shaped, office-style desk and computer for every student. Teachers advise/guide “pods” of about 20 students, several of which are located in one very large room.

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| Year opened: 1994 | Grades served: 7-12 | Enrollment: 115 |
| Male: 57% | Female: 43% | |
| African American: <1% | Hispanic: 7% | Caucasian: 92% |
| Limited English Proficiency: 0% | Free and Reduced Price Lunch: 26% | |
| Special Education: 26-29% | | |
| Website: www.mncs.k12.mn.us | Phone: 507-248-3353 | Contact: Dee Thomas, dgthomas@mncs.k12.mn.us |

*source: Dee Thomas, MNCS Director, 2006