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**“The question before us is whether...we accept bureaucrats choosing careers for our children and directing our economy, or whether liberty will remain our children’s future.”**

—Senator Michele Bachmann,  
*Fed Ed in Minnesota Classrooms:  
Smaller Learning Communities  
Preparing Workers for a State Planned Economy.*

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The following discusses federal education reform laws that are intended to apply to **ALL public school students in ALL 50 states**. The same reforms will threaten **private/home school students** via federal funds linked to initiatives like school choice and vouchers. (Where federal money goes, so will go the federal objectives.)

Please circulate this information in your state. Informed advocates CAN stop the dumbing-down of education and thereby insure that opportunities will continue for future generations.

The following originates from a booklet written by Senator Michele Bachmann (2002). Reproduced with permission.

# Fed Ed in Minnesota Classrooms: Smaller Learning Communities Preparing Workers for a State Planned Economy

By Senator Michele Bachmann

## Educational Reform

Parents have sensed for decades that something is amiss in American K-12 education. In the 1950's they wondered why Johnny couldn't read. In the 1960's they puzzled over "new math". In the 1970's they wondered why Billy had to have his values clarified.

By 1983, when the landmark report *A Nation At Risk* was released, the blue-ribbon panel commissioned to study American education recognized that social promotion had gone too far. They made the perilous announcement that "a rising tide of mediocrity" had descended upon our public schools.<sup>i</sup>

Until 1965, public education had been a truly local affair, with state departments of education stepping in to assist local school districts. In an unprecedented move, President Lyndon Johnson created the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which for the first time provided federal money to the local classroom.<sup>ii</sup>

Federal money was targeted specifically to lower income students to help "level the playing field" for educational opportunities. Unfortunately, the practical effect of pumping millions of federal dollars into the classroom was to *lower* the playing field, not *level* it.

With the public clamoring for answers, in 1994 the federal government responded to America's educational doldrums the only way it knew how, by creating a top-down reform movement known as Goals 2000/School-to-Work/Workforce Investment Act.<sup>iii</sup>

Designed as a **mandate for ALL publicly educated youth**, the three federal bills work together like interlocking puzzle pieces to reveal a picture of a restructured American society, focused, not surprisingly, on the best interests of the state, rather than the best interests of the child.

Heavy on bureaucracy, light on academics, Goals 2000, and the accompanying reauthorization of the ESEA, now called No Child Left Behind (NCLB), forced the fifty states to accept federal education standards. NCLB continues the school restructuring

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that was set in motion in 1994 with Goals 2000/School-to-Work and HR 6. Assistant Secretary of Education, Mike Cohen stated in a presentation to Fordham Foundation's NCLB conference of February 2002, "This legislation builds squarely on the foundation laid in 1994, and extends it...". NCLB seeks to "raise academic standards for all" in a bizarre twist: by *lowering* the bar of achievement to a level where *all* children could pass the tests.

Educational bureaucrats decided in a fit of wishful thinking to eliminate the bell curve, by focusing on the floor of achievement, rather than on the ceiling. In other words, NCLB requires equality of student education outcome, rather than equality of opportunity. Realistically, there was only one way to achieve this goal—lower the bar of student achievement.

Goals 2000's eight national standards focused heavily on attitudes, values, and beliefs instead of on academics, giving us dumbed-down national standards, a national test, and national teacher licensing standards.

Known variously as Outcome Based Education, Mastery Learning, Results Oriented Education, and Minimum Competencies, while the name of the theory changed, the *results* of the theory remained the same: dumbed-down academics. The public was told that state adoption of federal education standards would lead to "all boats rising" for student achievement. Instead, the USS ship marked "academic achievement" is sinking.

After nearly a decade of educational reform, the cure seems to be worse than the original diagnosis. The fruit of Goals 2000 has proven to be exactly as the critics foretold: dumbed-down academics, functional illiteracy, demoralized classrooms and a false sense of student self-esteem. It was enough to make a parent, student or teacher long for the days of "a rising tide of mediocrity".

## School-to-Work/ Smaller Learning Communities

Goal 6 of Goals 2000 states in part, "Every major American business will be involved in strengthening the connection between education and work." **Implicit in Goals 2000 was the creation of a space for the silent, but more revolutionary twin of the educational reform movement: School-to-Work.**<sup>iv</sup>

School-to-Work/Smaller Learning Communities (STW/SLC) is actually the star and the purpose of education reform, and it is mandated for ALL children and adults in the public system.<sup>v</sup>

It is a philosophy, and it is the focal point of the new restructuring of American society. It is a means for appointed bureaucratic central planners to link *government-directed* education with *government-directed* economic development and *government-directed* workforce preparation systems.

School-to-Work, like Goals 2000, is also known by several names: School-to-Career, Career Clusters, Career Pathways, the Knowledge Supply Chain, and now under the recently adopted federal education bill, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), School-to-Work has been renamed Smaller Learning Communities (SLC).

Children are slotted into career clusters, which determine their high school coursework, often by the 8th grade. The only career paths available to students are those determined by bureaucrats appointed to seats on state and local workforce boards.<sup>vi</sup>

Career paths are pre-selected by local workforce boards based on *their* perceptions of the needs of local industries, and guided by government generated labor market statistics.

Children are, in practice, human resources for a centrally planned economy. Taxpayers shoulder the burden of financing businesses' job

training bills. Academics are substantially reduced, while vocational education for ALL is mandated. Local control means local implementation of pre-specified results, as dictated by government created workforce boards.<sup>vii</sup>

While STW/SLC is a revolutionary approach for *American* schools, the concept is anything but new to nations across the globe. Implemented particularly in the last century, STW/SLC is the practical outworking of a state planned economy, with government bureaucrats making basic life choices once properly deferred to the individual. Freedom to truly choose an occupation is gone under this system.<sup>viii</sup>

In South Carolina, the Career Pathways program begins tracking students in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, and suggests



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"selecting" a career pathway by 6<sup>th</sup> grade. All classroom studies from that point forward will focus on the skills required by the student in their career path.<sup>ix</sup>

Texas was the first state to widely implement STW/SLC, with Dallas area 10<sup>th</sup> graders spending part of the school day learning how to place lemon wedges on luncheon glasses.<sup>x</sup>

In Minneapolis, MN 100% of ALL 8<sup>th</sup> graders were required to "apply" for a career cluster by January 2002. Only 60% of the students applied, the other 40% were *assigned* a career. Students

will spend the next 4 years focusing on a career in beauty, or automotive mechanics, or childcare, taken from government pre-selected options.

A liberal arts career-track exists, but it will accept only a limited group of applicants. There is no longer a traditional, academic, 4-year high school education available for ALL Minneapolis youth.

By September of 1998 ALL 50 states had accepted federal School-to-Work implementation grants.<sup>xi</sup>

## School-to-Work/Smaller Learning Community Evangelists

The adjective most often employed by early promoters of STW/SLC was the word, "revolutionary", and unfortunately they weren't kidding. Author and apologist, Lynn Olson wrote, "a new kind of education is emerging," in fact, "this revolution is already happening."<sup>xii</sup>

Dr. Robert Beck of the University of Minnesota wrote a 1990 report urging American schools to adopt an eastern European version of School-to-Work called Polytechnical Education.<sup>xiii</sup>

State marketing literature promoting STW/SLC stated, "School-to-Work is a whole new way of thinking, a *revolutionary* approach to education and workforce development."

Marc Tucker, originally of the Carnegie Forum, and later President of the National Center on Education and the Economy was an early, but key player in promoting STW/SLC. Tucker became one of the largest commercial distributors of STW/SLC promotional materials, thus parlaying his efforts into a multi-million dollar money transfer scheme of U.S. tax dollars through his various non-profit organizations.

Dr. Shirley McCune of the U.S. Department of Education said, "What

we're into is the total restructuring of society. ...What it means for education is that we no longer see the teaching of facts and information as the primary outcome of education."

Dr. McCune wasn't shy about disclosing the radical goal of STW/SLC when she said, "What we're into is the total restructuring of society."<sup>xiv</sup>

Initially promoted for acceptance by all nations through UNESCO,<sup>xv</sup> the educational and cultural arm of the United Nations, STW/SLC was designed to bring about third-way economics similar to that promoted by renowned economist Peter F. Drucker.

In his book *Post-Capitalist Society*, Drucker called for a new economy based not on proven free market principles, but rather on an economic hybrid somewhere between capitalism and socialism. That's like arguing a mother is "just a little bit pregnant." An economy is either free market based, or it is at some level of slippage toward centralized economic planning.<sup>xvi</sup>

Drucker proposed that America should move even further away from the concept of freedom of individual economic choice. But what would this mean? Economic choices would continue to be made, but the question is who would make them? Advocates of STW/SLC long for an economy that puts greater choices in the hands of business and government conglomerates, thus reducing economic choices available to the individual.

Economic socialism has long been the goal of radical economic progressives, but socialistic philosophy has consistently failed to take root in American experience and culture. Why? American public schools, for the most part, taught young minds the basics of free market thought. STW/SLC changes all that by teaching a new way of thinking through the new federal curriculum, and by restructuring the school experience.

### School-to-Work/ Smaller Learning Communities Philosophy delivered through the new Federal Curriculum

Newly adopted national education standards, promoted through federal Goals 2000 efforts, have profoundly influenced the nation's leading textbook publishers since 1994. **In effect, American classrooms now have a federal curriculum based on the newly written national standards, as measured by the National Assessments of Educational Progress (NAEP).** Chief among the newly adopted standards is civics education, as written by the federally subsidized nonprofit organization, Center for Civics Education, (CCE).

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Adopted January 2002, the newly reauthorized ESEA, known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), **mandates that schools receiving federal ESEA money must assess children in grades 3-8 with state tests that mirror the national NAEP test. The NAEP in turn, is based on the national standards, such as those written by the CCE during the 1990's.**

However in practice in the classroom, the simple maxim prevails: Tests drive the curriculum.

**National tests, based on national standards, now drive locally administered curriculum.** Objective academic tests have morphed into subjective assessments that often mea-

sure more about attitudes and values than about academic knowledge. The burning question becomes, what information or attitudes are assessed on the newly mandated national tests?

The answer is, it is difficult to determine what is measured, because NCLB federal law actually prevents parents or citizens from discussing the content of the mandated tests, stating specifically that revealing a test question is punishable as a felony! Without meaningful public access to the nationally aligned assessments, accountability to the public is a near impossibility.<sup>xvii</sup>

Though NCLB prohibits discussion of the actual content of the NAEP,<sup>xviii</sup> we can review another government document that tells us **what 9<sup>th</sup> graders are learning in Civics education.** In April 2001, the National Center for Education Statistics issued a report entitled, *What Democracy Means to Ninth-Graders: U.S. Results from the International IEA Civic Ed Study.*<sup>xix</sup>

Results showed 84.2% of American 9th graders surveyed believe it is government's responsibility to keep prices under control, 65.4% believe it is government's responsibility to guarantee a job for everyone who wants one. 63.5% believe government should reduce differences in income and wealth among people, 66.2% believe government should provide industry with the support they need to grow, and 87.6% believe government should provide basic health care for everyone.

The **new federal curriculum** appears wildly effective in capturing the hearts and minds of the uninitiated into its philosophy, as **youth now overwhelmingly demonstrate agreement with the socialistic basis for a state planned economy.** With the next generation buying into third-way economics, they may hardly blink an eye when they find their school day restructured around entry-level job skills training.

## School-to-Work/ Smaller Learning Communities Restructure the School Day

Not only is STW/SLC a way of thinking for ALL students, it radically restructures the school experience and the school day by combining with the third piece of the puzzle, the federal Workforce Investment Act. Passed in 1998, WIA erects in every state and local community an appointed workforce board charged with the practical impossibility of determining local economic and workforce needs.<sup>xx</sup>

Bureaucrats then determine which career paths will be offered in local schools, with schools acting as human resource suppliers fulfilling the labor needs for local industry. **“Representatives of industry, higher education, and K-12 schools are working together to design education and training programs that meet the needs of these industry sectors.”<sup>xxi</sup>**

*Never mind* the sovereign choices of local businesses and consumers, *never mind* the occupational desires of local youth, *never mind* that the essential purpose of public education, the transfer of a body of knowledge from one generation to the next is scuttled under STW/SLC. Washington bureaucrats have spoken, and American citizens are expected to lay aside free enterprise and don the coat of economic socialism.

### Core elements common to EVERY state and locally created STW/SLC:



There are three core elements common to every state and locally created STW/SLC:

1. **School based learning** restructures the educational experience so that ALL students learn how academic subjects relate to the world of work and develop skills needed in the workplace. The limited class-time spent on academics will now focus on **how** the particular subject, say math, relates to a career path, say small engine repair. Students will learn only the math, or history or English needed for someone to function as a worker in small engine repair.

Any additional education beyond what a workforce board expects to be utilized in a particular trade is considered a waste of the state's resources. In practice, students will be trained only to the level of their expected station in life.<sup>xxii</sup>

2. **Work based learning** focuses on career exploration, work experience, structured training and mentoring **for ALL students at job sites**. ALL students will *leave the school campus to work off-site, during regularly scheduled school hours*, at local places of employment, most of which violate former child labor laws. Work based learning is the reason why many schools are adopting block scheduling, so students will have the time to leave campus to become a worker/learner.

3. **Connecting activities** impose involuntary community service, invasive career and labor data collection systems, training for mentors and work supervisors according to government standards, and partnerships to match students with participating employers as dictated by government fiat. All are components of the ever-burgeoning bureaucracy necessary to advance a centrally planned economy.<sup>xxiii</sup>

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## Conclusion

Passed in 1994, School-to-Work seeks to change both the *mission* and *purpose* of education by **moving away** from teaching children traditional, broad-based liberal arts academic knowledge sufficient to prepare them for a lifetime of choices. Instead, children are labeled and tracked at an early age into a “career pathway” to learn narrowly tailored, entry-level job skills, as determined by a government created bureaucracy.

School to Work/Smaller Learning Communities emulate the failed systems of centrally planned economies littering the trash heaps of history. America, with its heritage of freedom and free markets has produced the most prosperous and educated nation in the world's history. The question before us is whether through implementing NCLB and the WIA, we accept bureaucrats choosing careers for our children and directing our economy, or whether liberty will remain our children's future.

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## Footnotes

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## About Michele Bachmann

Senator Michele Bachmann, a supporter of traditional education, is a national researcher and speaker on state and federal education reform.

In 2000, she was elected to the Minnesota legislature, and re-elected in 2002. Bachmann has served on Minnesota legislative committees for Capital Investment; Education; E-12 Education Budget Division; Jobs, Housing, and Community Development; Taxes; Property Tax Budget Division.

Prior to running for the Senate in 2000, Michele worked for the U.S. Treasury Department handling civil and criminal tax litigation cases and working as a federal litigation tax attorney in the federal U.S. Tax Court in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Bachmann holds a post-doctorate degree in tax law from the Marshall-Wythe School of Law, College of William & Mary, in Williamsburg, VA; a Juris Doctorate degree from Coburn Law School; and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science and English from Winona State University.

Michele and her husband, Dr. Marcus D. Bachmann, Ph.D., have five children and have been foster parents for more than 20 children. The Bachmann's live in Stillwater, Minnesota.

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