PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE
IN ST. PAUL:
Is it working?

December 1992

A report prepared by the
League of Women Voters
of St. Paul, Education
Committee

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An Impetus for Study: Racial Balance and Program Choice

"Even now when my child is in school, I still don't understand how magnets differ from neighborhood schools. I do not understand the system."

—Focus group participant from Macalester-Groveland neighborhood

Since 1976, the St. Paul Public School District (SPPSD) has used magnet schools to desegregate public schools. By allowing parents to choose schools based on criteria other than race—i.e., interest area, enrichment programs, teaching philosophy, etc.—the District, much to its credit, has brought schools into compliance with racial balance guidelines without federal or state court orders.

Not all district schools are magnets. Parents may enroll their child in a more traditional “neighborhood” school instead. However, parents are not guaranteed access to the school they choose. School assignment depends upon current District policies and racial balance requirements.

As new magnet schools are opened and new application procedures are implemented, it becomes increasingly important for parents to be fully informed about educational options for their child and about school assignment policies and procedures. At the initial meeting of the League of Women Voters of St. Paul (LWVSP) Education Committee,¹ parents, teachers, and community members expressed concern that a family’s failure to understand the complexities of the registration and selection process potentially result in inequities of choice. The Education Committee resolved that understanding how school assignment policies work and why they are necessary was essential for parents, teachers, the St. Paul School District, and the broader community.

The St. Paul League of Women Voters (LWVSP) began observing District policies in 1988 when its Education Committee noticed that parents registering their children for school were complaining that they felt lost in a bureaucratic maze. Parents seemed to feel that complete and accurate information was not readily available from the District. Consequently in 1988, the Education Committee urged the District (SPPSD) in letters² to make information more accessible and to consider the development of a simpler selection and registration process.

The District took the matter under consideration. By December 1990, at an “Education Forum” sponsored by the LWVSP, one parent appeared to express the frustration of many when she said: “I’m sure there’s a school in St. Paul

2. July 11, 1988 and December 13, 1988
that’s right for my child, but I don’t know how to get information about the schools or how to get my child in.”

Information is available, of course. A magnet brochure, Magnet and Specialty Choices, is mailed to every address each spring. Generally, notices go out to parents informing them of key registration and testing deadlines. Nevertheless, the parent quoted above needed more: not only easily understandable descriptions of the various schools, but, equally important, more information about how to improve her child’s chances of acceptance in her school of choice. This parent lacked an intimate understanding of the policies and procedures such as the various preferences some children have over others in gaining access to a particular school. In order to understand the system, she and other parents would need to be able to answer questions such as; “What is sibling preference? What is a neighborhood school and how is it different from a magnet school? What is an attendance area? What is reassignment? What constitutes racial balance? What is the current racial balance at the neighborhood school? Is my first choice out of reach?”

At its 1991 annual meeting, LWVSP initiated this study of current student assignment policies and procedures in the St. Paul Public Schools (SPPSD). The Education Committee’s efforts began with the identification of the following concerns:

- the stability and continuity of the school assignment policies;
- the reliability and timeliness of information to parents about the school selection process; and
- the impact of the policies on students, parents, the District, and the city.

The Education Committee then focused its fact-finding efforts in two major areas:

1. identifying current student assignment policies and procedures for elementary schools; and

2. identifying current methods used by parents to get information and methods the District uses to disseminate information.

The Education Committee’s findings were reported to LWVSP members, the SPPSD, and the community at a public meeting in December 1992. Information gathered by the study is now available to parents seeking insight into their school options and how to gain access to them (see especially “Finding Your Way: Public School Choice in St. Paul” on page 29).

The LWVSP Education Committee hopes that it’s findings will encourage administrators, parents, students, and community members to increasingly collaborate in future planning for the District. The anticipated evolution of changes
in the education system and changes in urban demographics has the potential to thrust the collaboration of affected parties on the forefront of a healthy, viable District and community.

Study Procedure and Methodology

The Education Committee consisted of parents, teachers, and community members that currently belong to LWVSP and were responsible for conducting this study. The members read widely and sought the cooperation of affected SPPSD staff, parents and community members district-wide to gather the necessary information for this study. Research assistance was funded through the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) at the University of Minnesota. Expanded documentation for this study is on file at the St. Paul office of LWV. Information was gathered using the following methods:

- **Interviews**: Education Committee members interviewed school personnel, educational consultants, staff at the State Department of Education and community members district-wide to gather historical data and information concerning current policy and procedures.¹

- **Communications analysis**: The Education Committee examined the range of information available to parents. Members read district publications, data sheets, announcements, and other written communication. Members attended the annual Magnet School Fair as well as school board and board-committee meetings. To determine the reliability and consistency of information given to parents over the telephone, either from the district or from staff at schools, the Education Committee recruited parents to make phone requests following an identical set of questions.²

- **Focus Groups**: The Education Committee conducted eight focus groups. Forty-six parents from across the city participated. To ensure geographic and racial diversity, the committee recruited parents through the city’s community councils. The Hmong, Native American and African American focus groups were recruited with the help of the Supporting Diversity in the Schools (SDS) project. Social-service agencies, community organizations, and prominent members of these communities also participated.

Focus-group responses are not evaluated as representative samples of a particular population's attitudes; rather they are used to illuminate the full range of issues pertaining to a topic, providing insights that may or may not be verified later through traditional, more scientific surveys. Each focus group was asked the same five questions. For the complete list of questions and trends observed, see “Focus Group Summary” on page 26.

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1. Refer to expanded documentation file.
2. ibid.
The original LWVSP Education Committee’s study design included a survey of parents with children in St. Paul elementary schools. A professionally conducted survey to determine parents' knowledge level of student assignment policies was thought to be ideal, since parental experience of the current system needed objective evaluation. The LWVSP was unable to secure funding from the private sector to conduct such a survey.
History of Voluntary Desegregation in St. Paul

Parents initiated the first desegregation efforts in St. Paul. Prior to school desegregation, children living in a particular attendance area generally went to the same school. This was their "neighborhood school."

In 1964 a group consisting of African American and Caucasian parents formed P.I.E., Parents for Integrated Education. The following year P.I.E. proposed that students at McKinley and Maxwell elementary schools, both predominantly African American, be voluntarily bused to the traditionally white majority, uncrowded elementary schools in the Highland Park area. To convince the District that desegregation could work, P.I.E. raised the money to pay for transportation during the first three years, after which the District assumed the cost. The success of this early, limited desegregation effort was due to the involvement of parents from both communities, their dedication, and careful planning.

The District's responsibility to desegregate acquired legal definition in 1970 when the Minnesota State Department of Education adopted its desegregation rule. According to the statute, a "majority" child is Caucasian; Asian, Hispanic, Native American, African American, and non-native children are "minority." Until this rule, no formal definition of a segregated or desegregated school existed in Minnesota. In writing the rule, a special task force finally decided that:

segregation occurs in a public school district when the minority composition of the pupils in any school building exceeds the minority racial composition of the student population of the entire district, for the grade levels served by that school building, by more than 15%.¹

The statute does not dictate what method must be used by school districts to desegregate but does require districts to submit yearly reports on the number of minority students per school and desegregation plans, if necessary.

The statute's 15% rule established a ceiling for the number of minority students in a particular school but did not mandate that each school must have at least a minimum number, based on the District average, of minorities. Theoretically, a district could continue to have 100% majority (Caucasian) schools while it desegregated other schools. Although the statute states that minority students should not disproportionately bear the burden of desegregation, the language of the 15% rule does place the primary focus of desegregation efforts on the moving of minority students.

¹. Minnesota State Board of Education Desegregation Statute Chapter 3535.
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The SPPSD initially attempted to desegregate by creating learning centers. These centers were half-day programs with a specific subject focus, designed to encourage voluntary student movement. When the state objected to part-time desegregation programs, the District adopted a cluster concept. Clustering divided the District into six pie-shaped clusters, drawn from the center of the city stretching out to the edges. Administrators, teachers, and parents were asked to develop plans for desegregating the schools within each cluster.¹

One such cluster, the Jupiter cluster (all the clusters were named after planets) proposed that Webster Elementary offer incentives such as smaller class sizes, foreign languages, and vocational and science programs to encourage voluntary desegregation. The District had previously opened two alternative schools, Open School and Benjamin Mays, but Webster was the first public school in St. Paul specifically designed to maintain racial balance. Webster was successful in attracting majority students to what had previously been a highly segregated minority school. However, minority students who lived outside the attendance area for Webster found that the new program was virtually off limits to them; accepting all minority applicants would have upset the racial balances defined by statute.

As a result of Webster’s success, the Saturn cluster established a music magnet at Franklin Elementary School. The Neptune cluster decided to pair elementary schools by having K-3 at one school and 4-6 at the other. The cluster concept, however, did not effectively desegregate the schools. Throughout the rest of the 1970s and into the early 1980s, the District continued to modify its desegregation plan. Attendance boundaries for some schools were changed and a few schools were closed.

By 1982–83 eleven elementary schools in the District were out of compliance with the state desegregation statute. A Citizens’ Desegregation Planning Commission (CDPC) proposed that the District adopt a magnet school approach to address desegregation. It was hoped that magnet schools would provide a long-range method of voluntary desegregation. The commission’s plan divided the District into four quadrants that were more balanced in terms of their total number of majority to minority students. The commission also suggested placing more magnets in majority areas so that minorities could more easily gain access to magnet programs.

The school board, which must approve District policy by a majority vote, agreed with the CDPC’s basic approach to use magnet schools to promote voluntary movement. At the time that Dr. David Bennett became the new District superintendent in 1984, the board was planning to replicate the Webster magnet in several schools. Dr. Bennett believed that single-focus magnets would encourage greater voluntary movement. Instead of having magnets with the

¹. See interviews in expanded documentation file.
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same program or focus, each magnet would be unique. Teams of parents, teachers, and administrators formed to develop the focus of each magnet.

Two important decisions by the board under Dr. Bennett shaped the District's magnet-school efforts to desegregate. The first decision indicated initiative on the part of the District and stated that magnet schools would not only have a ceiling or upper limit on minority enrollment as imposed by the state, but would also have a floor or lower limit. To establish the new magnet programs and to receive additional federal funding for desegregation purposes, a significant number of minorities would need to participate in these magnet programs.

The second board decision preserved attendance areas. Students living within a magnet school's attendance area would have first preference for attendance to that school; within racial balance guidelines. Nationally, most magnets in other cities were available district-wide only on a lottery or application basis, so St. Paul's decision was an innovative one. Preserving attendance areas maintained the tradition of neighborhood schools, and while it did not insure that students already enrolled would not be displaced when their school became a magnet, it improved their chances of attending their neighborhood magnet. Attendance area designations were employed to control transportation expenses. Unfortunately, this decision also meant that children's educational opportunities would, however, be eminently more affected by where they lived in the District.

In early 1985 the District created a magnet planning office and in September of that year five elementary magnets opened. The number and variety of magnets has expanded to meet desegregation goals and to respond to community interests.\(^1\) Currently, St. Paul has 27 elementary magnet programs. “Programs” and “schools” are not always interchangeable terms. The Education Committee found it necessary to use the term “school” for all magnet programs/schools. The Education Committee also found it necessary to create the term “non-magnet school” for clarity during the data gathering phase of this study.

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1. See interviews in expanded documentation file.
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Policy and Procedure

The policies and procedures relating to student assignment are complex. They can be difficult to access—even for school staff—and evolve from year to year. They exist with limited notice to, and fragmented input from, parents and other affected parties.¹

Betty, an American Indian single parent, has two daughters. Her busy schedule of work and other commitments made it crucial that her children attend the same school. Betty did her homework, decided on Webster Elementary and applied. She did not live in the attendance area and since her children were minority they were not accepted (Webster needed white students that year). After even more homework, Betty discovered that sending her younger child to daycare in the Webster attendance area qualified her for admittance to Webster. Betty persuaded the daycare provider to sign a form saying she was caring for Betty’s older daughter as well (although she wasn’t). As a result, both children were admitted to Webster and Betty “stayed sane.” She observed that it’s a pity the school system forces parents to “lie, cheat and steal” in order to get rational placements for their children.

(Note: Names have been changed to protect individual privacy.)

Racial balance and space availability are the two primary factors determining student assignment.

However, as the table on page 32 shows, as many as twelve other factors may also enter in. These represent the District’s well-intentioned effort to address a changes in demographics, to alleviate financial pressures within the system, and to respond to pressure from citizen groups. (“Admission Guidelines to Magnet Schools” on page 32.)

In 1975 the St. Paul Public School Board of Education adopted the policy that “every student shall be assigned to a designated school determined by attendance boundaries set by the Board of Education.”² Factors considered when setting these boundaries included building capacity, racial and economic integration, physical obstructions, transportation, and student educational needs.

¹ See phone surveys in expanded documentation.
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Drawing a map that addresses all these factors is not easy. Today St. Paul has several geographically non-contiguous attendance areas. For instance, Mississippi Elementary School is not even located within its own attendance area, and does not include the neighboring McDonough Homes, a housing project with a high minority population. Why? Because including McDonough would have put the school out of compliance with the state’s racial-balance guidelines stipulating that minority enrollment at a school cannot be 15% greater than the city-wide average.1

An explicit confusion level exists in the community. (See also “The Need for Understanding” below.)

District staff and parents alike often refer to “neighborhood” schools as being a student’s alternative to magnet schools. As used by the District, the term “neighborhood school” is a misnomer. There are only magnet and non-magnet schools; the District designated “neighborhood” schools are more accurately “attendance-area” schools that are not magnets. Some magnet schools also have attendance areas. Under the District’s attendance area policy, a student’s assigned (non-magnet) school is not necessarily the school closest to one’s residence or in one’s “neighborhood” as traditionally perceived and may not even be on the same side of town. Conversely, magnet schools which have attendance areas effectively are the neighborhood school.

Families in a magnet school’s attendance area don’t have the “neighborhood” school fall-back if a) they don’t like the magnet’s focus or b) they’re put on the waiting list because the school has filled its minority or majority openings.

Parents and students may not learn which school they’ve been “reassigned” to until a few weeks before school starts. They may discover that their new school is far across town. Clearly, there is no neighborhood-school option for these families. In the fall of 1991, 12 of the 25 elementary magnet schools were also “neighborhood” (attendance-area) schools.

Holly moved to St. Paul in August from another state. Knowing school would start soon, she went directly to the District office on Colburn to get information. When she asked about enrolling her child, she was given no written information. The magnet system was not explained to her. When she told the staff person she lived near the Cathedral, the staff person walked over to the map and placed her finger on a school in the Highland Park area and said, “This is your child’s school.” The young boy was the only African American in his class. There were no African American teachers. This single mother, who works two jobs to support herself and her son, has to take two

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buses across town every time there is a school activity, conference or problem.

The student-assignment process is complicated by the addition of special terminology.

Parents must come to grips with terms such as tier preference, Rondo preference, sibling preference, one-year carry-over preference, and corporate preference (see “Admission Guidelines to Magnet Schools” on page 32). These student assignment preferences are rank-ordered and do not apply to all schools within St. Paul; further complicating a parent's ability to identify which terms are appropriate for their child's situation. This study’s intention, however, was not to question the individual merits of each of these preferences, but to discover whether the terminology increased the complexity and confusion within the community.

The system’s complexity is acknowledged by the District's staff. At a public meeting of the Ad Hoc Sibling Preference Committee in November 1991, a District administrator spoke about the difficulty of explaining admission guidelines to parents. District staff further urged the sibling preference committee to recommend policy that would simplify rather than further complicate school entrance criteria.¹

The District’s student-assignment policy does not appear to be readily accessible to the general public and some parents have trouble keeping up with frequent policy changes.

District personnel, who are often the parent’s primary source of information also have trouble keeping up with policy changes. For example, on May 20, 1992, the Magnet and Specialty School Planning Office sent out a memo to all magnet school principals informing them of the board’s decision that sibling preference would be given at several schools during the 1992–93 school year. The memo, revising admission guidelines, came more than six weeks after the admission application deadline.

If the District's response to the Education Committee's requests for information is representative, the above finding is not overstated. In meetings, mail and via phone, the Education Committee posed questions regarding choice policy and the definitions of its terms. The Education Committee also requested that student-assignment data be identified by category and that budget figures indicate an estimated cost of administering the seven-year-old assignment system. Some of the information was never received from the District; some came only after repeated requests.

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After many meetings extending over more than nine months, the Education committee did finally obtain a copy of the District’s policy document, “Procedures Manual for Application and Registration.” The manual did not, however, include new policies on sibling preference or the one-year carry-over waiting list (then in effect, now abolished).

Katie and George, a Caucasian couple, enrolled their child in the all-day kindergarten at Rondo Center, which was described as the neighborhood kindergarten. They were glad their child would walk to school and hoped this kindergarten would help him make friends in the neighborhood, since they had just moved there. After about six weeks of school, Katie and George discovered that although the neighborhood kindergarten was administered by the Museum Magnet, it was not considered part of it. The neighborhood kindergarten was not attached to any school. These students had nowhere to go for first grade and their younger siblings would have no preference to stay in the neighborhood. Because of the one-year-carry-over waiting list (Katie did her homework), her son would be at the bottom of every waiting list in town for first grade. To ensure a first-grade school close to home, the parents moved their son to a magnet program that had a kindergarten opening for second semester even though the family liked the neighborhood kindergarten. Their son lost an excellent teacher, and the neighborhood friendships he had just begun to build.

The Need for Information: Understanding “the Big Picture”

All parents (guardians) need readily available, easily understandable, complete and accurate information sources when choosing a school for their child in order to have trust and confidence in the choice system.

A Policy Makers Guide to Choice, published by the Education Commission of the States, lists information families need to make reasonable choices that are in the best interests of their children. Their list includes:

- how the choice plan works
- how to make an educational choice
- what choices are available
- specific choice plans.¹

These same topics are cited in numerous other publications and books such as Smart Schools, Smart Kids by Ed Fiske, School Choice by Joe Nathan and Savage Inequalities by Jonathan Kozol. Not surprisingly, this “big-picture”

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understanding was also requested by the study focus groups. Parents needed and wanted a broad range of information and they wanted to know how to put it into perspective. Some needed general advice on how to “match” a program to their child, while transportation and day care were key issues for others. Some wanted to know how to maximize their chances of getting into a particular magnet program. Some wanted test scores, curriculum content and information about discipline policies.

The annual Magnet and Specialty Choice brochure is the District's primary method of informing parents about programming options and access to these options.

Mailed each winter to all residents, it describes all magnet and specialty school options, gives information about accessing magnet programs, and includes applications to elementary magnets. Directions for enrolling students in secondary schools are also included. It extends an invitation to parents to visit all St. Paul Public Schools and encourages them to contact individual schools for visitations. The calendar for magnet school open houses is included while the dates for non-magnet open houses are not included. The availability of interpreters is noted although the brochure is published in English only.

The brochure provides general information, ranging from reassignment policies and selection of students to magnet schools, sibling preference, waiting list policies, and transportation. Information about early childhood screening and kindergarten procedures is included. A general description is given of each of the magnet programs. There is a listing of neighborhood schools, alternative programs and secondary schools. Maps of the elementary and secondary school locations are also included.

Not included in the brochure, is a complete and clear glossary and a full description of how and why the system works, along with uniform program descriptions. No checklist of the likely steps that a parent may take in making a school choice are included in either the brochure or other mailings. Important telephone numbers for time-crunched parents are not included. Foreign languages are not incorporated into the brochure.

Last year, the District expanded and improved the 1992–1993 brochure. The magnet school application deadline is now printed boldly on almost every page to emphasize that important date. The brochure also included non-magnet schools for the first time, which provided a complete list of elementary schools for parents in a single document. However, these non-magnet schools are listed as “neighborhood” schools. The brochure still contains other confusing and inconsistent information. Some examples follow:

The brochure states that students may “choose between magnet schools or neighborhood schools.... Neighborhood schools are available to students who
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*live within the boundaries of the neighborhood school.*¹ The members of the Education Committee discovered that they needed to create the term "non-magnet" for use in discussions with both District administrators and each other for the sake of clarity.²

In a letter from the District’s new superintendent, Dr. Curman Gaines, the magnet brochure expresses his personal goal of providing the best education option for each child. Focus groups indicated that further information or guidelines for matching a child’s talents to a particular school would assist parents in making an appropriate determination for their child. (See “Focus Group Summary” on page 26.)

The magnet brochure has maps to locate both the elementary and secondary schools. The elementary map has some “assigned to” notations, but neither map explains what the lines on the maps mean. The assignments are also non-contiguous geographically.

Occasionally, a topic mentioned in one brochure page is covered only in non-continuous pages. Nowhere does the brochure contain a comprehensive description of the student-assignment process and given its complexity, it would be most difficult to do so. The brochure describes a choice that is inconsistent with the realities of statutory desegregation requirements and that is perhaps, incompatible with the current realities of student assignment policy.

Lack of standard definitions in choice terminology

When the Education Committee sought standard definitions of choice terminology (see “Glossary” on page 37), with senior staff at the Office of Magnet and Specialty Planning and with Student Accounting, inaccurate definitions had to be corrected, then clarified.³ District staff recommended further discussions of the definitions of magnet and non-magnet schools.⁴

The Education Committee then submitted nine drafted definitions to the District.⁵ The definitions were based on the Education Committee’s research over the previous year. The District was asked to verify the definitions for accuracy. The committee was eventually told by the District that eight of their nine definitions were accurate as written but a ninth definition had to be updated.⁶ (See “Glossary” on page 37 for the final definitions arrived at in collaboration with

2. Refer minutes of March 1992 meeting with District.
3. Refer to letters in expanded documentation file.
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The Education Committee does question whether the average parent has time to compile, confirm, and continually update such definitions.

In the magnet brochure the following terms appear frequently:

- magnet school
- non-magnet assignment school
- reassignment
- attendance area
- neighborhood magnet school
- preference zone
- minority/majority
- sibling preference
- non-attendance area
- corporate preference
- preference-zone magnet school
- random selection process
- waiting list
- one-year carry-over waiting list
- tier or zone acceptance
- preference application
- preference waiting list policy
- dual-residency schools
- neighborhood schools
- alternative schools.

No glossary is provided, although there is a question-and-answer section with some loose definitions.

Alternative enrollment procedures, including assignment and "reassignment" to non-magnet schools, determine school selection for children who either were not accepted by or did not apply to a magnet school.

These alternative procedures are not outlined in the brochure or other written materials to parents. Parents largely get information and insight about schools from neighbors and friends, Early Childhood Families Education (ECFE) classes, Head Start, newspaper articles, school visits, and health professionals. The Education Committee's telephone-information reliability check found that the District's central offices were generally accurate and consistent in their

1. SPPSD response September 29, 1992, 4-7.
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responses to parents’ questions. The individual school’s responses were less consistent and often incomplete.

Cou, a Hmong child, began kindergarten in a school close to home. At first, kindergarten was hard because he was not used to English. By the end of kindergarten, however, his teacher had identified him as gifted and talented. He had taught himself to read. The teacher knew that Capitol Hill was always looking for qualified minority children and it was within walking distance from his home. The teacher spoke to Cou’s parents and Cou told his friends he was going to Capitol Hill next year. The parents had successfully enrolled an older child in a magnet program, but they did not realize that there was an additional testing requirement for Capitol Hill and they missed the deadline. For first grade Cou was bused to his “neighborhood school” on the far east side of St. Paul.

Networking with others appears to provide a parent’s first insight into the desegregation role of magnet schools.

The focus group sessions clearly indicated that materials provided to parents do not appear to fully explain the role of magnet schools, especially to “first-timers”—parents who are making contact with the District for the first time. The role is further obscured by discussions of the twelve additional preferences affecting student assignment (see “Admission Guidelines to Magnet Schools” on page 32). Parents who fully understand the importance of racial preference and its relationship to other requirements, and who have the time and capability to research the racial-balance requirements at various magnet schools, are able to more effectively rank their choices. This enhances their chances of getting into a school of their choice. Parents without such time, knowledge, or capability may unwittingly list virtually preempted choices. This especially affects “first-timers” who are not necessarily new residents of the District. As one focus-group parent said: “You need to know how to fill out the form so that you don’t blow all your choices by putting down a first choice that’s too popular. You have to know how to prioritize.”

Maria and her husband, John, diligently studied their child’s kindergarten choices. Maria had worked in education and understood magnet-assignment issues pretty well. After the couple decided on their first choice school, Maria filled out the form, listing the child as Hispanic. John objected, saying he was only half Hispanic. Maria explained, “If you want him accepted by his first choice, he is Hispanic. That is what that school is looking for. If we had chosen the other school he would be white because that’s what they’re looking for. You’ve just got to know how to work the system.” John agreed his son was Hispanic.

Clearly parents with the most thorough and up-to-date information are at a distinct advantage. District materials and staff tend not to give individualized advice, but to answer questions in generalities that may or may not be useful to
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a caller. This is motivated however, by a desire to be fair, and to avoid any criticism of bias or giving unfair advantage.

Other identified sources of information for families:

- **Water bill**: A small leaflet enclosed with the city water bill invites people to learn more about the District’s schools, lists elementary magnet and city-wide alternative schools, and encourages people to contact the District office with any questions. There is a problem however, due to the fact that residents who rent are not as likely to receive a water bill, which the District acknowledges.

- **The Parent Information Fair**, held in early February of each year, is currently coordinated by the District’s Office of Parent, Community and Volunteer Relations. Individual schools and city-wide programs have exhibits. Information packets contain maps of schools, open house schedules, a glossary of acronyms, parenting helps and an agenda. Workshops are offered on a variety of topics such as parenting tips, ways to improve scholastic achievement, issues that might concern minority populations and how to choose a school for your child, both elementary and secondary. The District estimates that 2500 people viewed the exhibits last year and notes that there was an increased participation by minority parents and parents of secondary students from previous fairs.

- **Open houses** at individual magnet schools are offered for parents of prospective students in March, and these dates are specified on a calendar in the February magnet brochure. In spring 1992, open houses ran throughout the month, with the final two held five days before the magnet school application deadline. On many nights, numerous open houses were held simultaneously. School staff often give short presentations, with texts and materials on view.

- **The Office of Parents, Community and Volunteer Relations**. In a progressive move early in his administration, Superintendent Curman Gaines created this office in the summer of 1991. This office defines its mission: “To foster an alliance between schools, parents, community and volunteers that will create a more effective educational system where a caring and personal environment will give support to each student.” The office newsletter, “News and Views,” is sent home with students quarterly. It contains parenting tips, a calendar of parent-involvement workshops, and a summary of school-board actions. Although student assignment and choice issues are not addressed in the newsletter, this office may have the potential to be a forum for addressing these issues—especially if it tracks the types of questions asked about assignments and magnets by parents, teachers, and students.

- **The Office of Magnet and Specialty Planning**, in existence for seven years, processes magnet applications. Staff are available to answer questions not covered by the magnet brochure, which this office also produces. This office manages to offer training to principals and personnel who handle magnet applications with a small staff. They also conduct workshops on a limited
basis to small groups such as Early Childhood Families Education (ECFE), Head Start and other community groups. The Education Committee did not find any workshops for the general public however, to promote understanding of school choice procedures. They also maintain current enrollment tabulations at each school. (Note: The District is in the process of merging this office and Student Accounting into the Student Placement Center, in an attempt to improve communications and efficiency, and ultimately information to parents.)

**Student Assignment Evaluation**

The magnet program approach and its corresponding student assignment procedures seem to have been adopted to promote voluntary desegregation without systematic, ongoing, and comprehensive evaluations of the approach, its effectiveness, and its impact upon a broad community.

In a report by the Council of Metropolitan Area Leagues of Women Voters (CMAL), *Metropolitan School Desegregation and Integration*,\(^1\) district-wide measures of accountability were identified as one of six ingredients for effective integration. The reports quotes from a study by Leonard B. Stevens for the Minnesota Department of Education:

> To prevent the consequences of rumors when a new desegregation plan, such as metropolitan wide desegregation, begins to take place, it is advisable to make regular progress reports to the community, the parents, and the students as well as to such government bodies as the state board of education or the courts, when pertinent.\(^2\)

At their inception, an evaluation of magnet programs was conducted and limited to portions of the desegregation program. The first grant application for federal magnet-school monies included limited funds to evaluate two of four goals: academic excellence and improvement of basic-skill instruction. Desegregation and equal access were not evaluated. The evaluation was conducted from September 1985 through June 1987. Published in December 1987, the report looked at eight elementary magnet schools and five junior-high specialty programs, though the data from two of the elementary schools was incomplete.

Basic-skill instruction was evaluated by comparing the SRA (Scientific Research Associates) Survey of Basic Skills fall and spring test scores in reading and mathematics for two years. Generally, results indicated that the six elementary schools achieved the District goal that “70% of the students who

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2. Ibid.
Public School Choice: Findings

attended school a minimum of 155 days and who participated in a District math and reading program would increase at least 1.0 grade equivalent unit per year per subject.”¹

A parent survey and standardized Self Observation Scales completed by students were other measures of academic excellence utilized by the study. The parent survey was given to parents with children enrolled in magnet schools and to those who transferred into or out of magnet schools. It attempted to determine how parents learned of magnet programs and their opinions of the programs. The 1987 report concluded that the largest percentage of elementary parents stated that they learned of magnet schools by “word-of-mouth,” but it did not state the actual percentages.² The report cited the District’s brochure and the St. Paul Pioneer Press as sources of information. Again, percentages were not included in the study’s results. The lack of a comprehensive base-line will make it difficult to evaluate and compare the success of the District’s attempts to inform parents about school assignment programs in the future.

Although the elementary magnet system has increased from 8 schools to 27 since 1985, the only further evaluation that has been done is a study of sibling preference. The District did attempt to evaluate the possible effects of a sibling preference policy during 1991-92, prior to implementing a policy change. This sibling preference study included a one-year pilot sibling preference program in non-attendance area magnet schools and data gathered from parents on the 1992 magnet application form. While the LWVSP had concerns regarding the community’s opportunity for participation, the District is to be commended for attempting to study this issue. (See “Statement to the St. Paul Board of Education, January 21, 1992” on page 35.) The SPPSD Board will make a determination regarding sibling preference in early 1993.

The effectiveness of methods for disseminating information to parents does not appear to have been examined. A response form was given to participants at the Parent Information Fair to rate the quality of the keynote address, workshop topics, and exhibits. The Education Committee noted that the form did not ask parents whether the fair provided them with information they wanted, and the number of forms returned was “too small to report,” according to the District.³

Inconsistencies between data sources contribute to difficulty of analysis.

The District occasionally reports data—such as applications summaries—inconsistently from year to year. This makes comparisons over time very diffi-

². ibid, 18.
³. see SPPSD response to LWVSP in expanded documentation file.
Public School Choice: Findings

cult. The District staff says information in 1992 was reported differently due to the sibling preference policy study. Changes in personnel who report data also account for some inconsistencies, according to the District.

For example, Monroe is listed as an "alternative community school" on the sight count but as a "neighborhood school" in the magnet brochure. Open school is listed as a "magnet/alternative" in both places. Mounds Park is listed as two programs for the sight count and as one program for free and reduced lunch reporting.

The District's compliance with the state desegregation law is evaluated annually by recording student race via a "sight" count as required by state law. The District also records this information by program when more than one program occupies a building.

The number of children by race per building and per program are recorded annually showing successful desegregation efforts. How students are assigned is only partially evaluated. The committee did not find data that would indicate whether the assignment was "successful" or "appropriate." Lack of this data may frustrate serious attempts to measure "outcomes" of the magnet approach for both minority and majority populations yet such data may prove to be crucial in determining future student needs.

Data for on-time, late, and attendance area, non-attendance area applications by majority and minority applicants were kept in 1991–92. Waiting lists by school were also recorded. Why parents apply late was not evaluated. Note: Minority children who applied late were less likely to be enrolled in the magnet they requested than majority children. (See "1991–92 Magnet School Applications" on page 34.)

Children in "non-magnet" schools are enrolled by request, reassignment, or when a school choice is not made.

Reassignment, as defined by the District, occurs when a student lives in a magnet attendance area and needs a non-magnet placement. The District records the total number of reassignments processed. It does not track reassignment by the following categories:

- the number of children reassigned to a non-magnet school due to nonacceptance into magnet schools
- lack of space in non-magnet schools
- the number of children reassigned voluntarily/involuntarily
- school
- race
- administrative reassignment or transfer
Public School Choice: Findings

If reassignment does contribute significantly to desegregation efforts in St. Paul and the requisite reassignment data are unavailable, a complete evaluation of the current plan to maintain racial balance in St. Paul schools would not appear possible.

Conclusions

Focus group participants generally perceived current student assignment to be unclear, unpredictable and/or unfair. Various desegregation methods may have created policies and practices that “piggybacked” on each other, instead of resulting in a coordinated and comprehensive system. Have the vision and ideals that created the current desegregation plan been lost to short-term and perhaps, more politically expedient efforts to satisfy statutes? If so, the inadvertent result may be greater polarization of the community, fragmenting of neighborhoods, and inequities within the system.

Since policy, procedures and practices are misunderstood by parents and District personnel alike, the process of developing student-assignment policy may benefit from increasingly meaningful community input. Although the District provides several sources of information, these sources can be incomplete, inaccurate, or inaccessible.

Because the purpose of magnet schools is “to reduce the disproportionate minority count in elementary schools,” schools in neighborhoods with high minority populations have become magnets. As a result, focus group session indicated that:

- minority parents sometimes feel their children are being “spread out” (assigned or reassigned) outside their communities more often than majority children.
- minority families in focus groups felt they have no “neighborhood school” option as do other neighborhoods in the city.

The assignment system was primarily designed for the purpose of achieving racial desegregation and is largely described to parents as being a system designed to maximize choice. These two purposes are sometimes contradictory and do not always appear to complement each other in working towards current desegregation goals.

The District’s attempts to meet the state’s desegregation rule do very much appear to be “good faith” efforts. The District has not had the funding or resources to thoroughly evaluate its student assignment policies and their impact on the various populations in the District. This study’s research indicated however, that such data may be the ultimate accountability measure for any school district.

1. See Focus Group minutes in expanded documentation file.
2. See interviews and District publications in expanded documentation file.
Conclusions

One other factor may influence the District’s desegregation and magnet school efforts in the near future. The Minnesota Board of Education is in the process of rewriting its desegregation rule. At this time, the proposed statute would no longer include a numerical standard that districts must meet; instead, districts must submit plans for “inclusive education.” “Inclusive” education is not precisely defined in the proposed statute and school districts are responsible for interpreting and implementing statutes. The 15% rule would only be used to determine which districts must submit desegregation plans. The potential adoption of a new rule makes it currently difficult to predict the future of desegregation in St. Paul.

The effects of the multiple tools of school desegregation in St. Paul—magnet schools, non-magnets schools, and reassignment policy—have not, to date, been adequately evaluated. Desegregation continues to be a challenge for the District, which has a growing minority population and increasing transportation costs. It is, therefore, a formidable task to fully understand the impact of these tools on the school system as a whole and on the community at large.

Toward the "Future Perfect" for St. Paul Schools

In an effort to assist future LWVSP studies, collaborative efforts among community activists, educational professionals, students and their families, the Education Committee attempted to identify some possible areas of further study. These included:

- researching new or alternative efforts that may work to keep St. Paul public schools racially balanced
- researching alternative desegregation strategies by independent groups with a high level of community input to analyze the long-term impact (including the budget) to the District of:
  - standardizing enrollment procedures
  - eliminating/redesigning/or tracking patterns in preferences and attendance areas
  - replicating popular programs
  - increasing effectiveness of parent and community outreach
  - integrating magnet evaluation and outcome measures
  - tracking the effects of assignment and reassignment policy on minority populations and neighborhoods
- systematic determinations of whether and how minority students are impacted in relation to majority students. Such accounting may work to equalize the impact of desegregation community-wide
- expansions of usable information to minority and majority parents including:
  - presenting information about non-magnet schools all in one consistent place and/or in mailings that are consistent District-wide
  - revision of the magnet brochure
  - incorporation of foreign language materials and expansion of outreach efforts
- in-service training in assignment policy for District staff, teachers and especially principals
- the cost of the current student assignment procedures and its corresponding magnet program

In light of the possible state desegregation rule change, the recent voter rejection of a property-tax hike to aid public schools, and the predictions of overcrowded classes, taxpayers and legislators may likely demand a detailed accounting of the costs of the current assignment system. Readily available accounting of the current system for evaluation and analysis will be crucial to any serious efforts in the immediate future to transform education.

- examination of the long-term impact of the growing number of free programs serving four and five-year-old children that are not available district-wide.
Focus Group Summary

Composition

In general, participants had two or three children, at least one child was in school or about to enter school. The youngest child in school was likely to be in first or second grade. Each participant was asked how old their children were and what schools their children were attending. Almost all participants had some previous experience with choosing an elementary school for a kindergarten student or a school for a first grader within the last year or two. The focus groups were intentionally geographically and ethnically diverse.\(^1\)

Questions

Each member of the focus group was asked to respond to the following questions:

1. **Focus on your youngest school-age child. How did you choose the school for this child?**
   
   Responses to this question often included the sources of information parents used, or the strategies used to increase chances of having their child accepted in the school of choice. The findings included:
   
   • Parents who selected magnet schools for their children gave two basic reasons for choosing their school. They either preferred the characteristics of the magnet program or that the available alternative was considered undesirable.
   
   • Parents said that a school's reputation and recommendations from friends or professionals were as or more important than specific program features of a preferred school.
   
   • Not all parents reported strong preference for a particular school. Parents with a strong preference school felt they had spent more time and effort to choose a school and to get a child accepted into that preferred school.
   
   • If the parent chose a non-magnet ("neighborhood") school, the decision was often based on location and transportation variables. "Neighborhood" schools were selected because they were close to home, within walking distance, a part of the community, required no busing, had priority for busing, or allowed parents access to the school.
   
   • Parents sometimes reported that children attended non-magnet schools by default—they could not get into the school of their choice, had transportation problems, or were reassigned. Parents who chose non-magnet

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1. See expanded documentation file.
schools said they picked the school program on the basis of whether older siblings or neighbors’ children had positive experiences at the same school.

2. Where did you get information about enrolling this child in his/her school?

Parents learned about schools and the application process by different means including:
- word of mouth
- recommendations from other parents
- magnet brochure
- school visits
- experience of older siblings
- Early Childhood Family Education
- preschool screening
- Kindergarten roundup
- Health professionals
- Parent Information Fair
- Magnet office

3. Some people are successful in getting the school of their choice, some are not. Tell us what you think you can do to increase your chances of getting your child into the school you want.

Many participants had no advice to offer. Some believed that there was no way to increase their chances and some did not know of any strategies. Responses included the following:
- “Parents have to learn how the system works, and then work the system.”
- “You have to know how to fill out the form.”
- “Make contacts, stay in touch with the school, be aggressive, know someone.”
- “Talk to many people.”
- “Don’t waste your choices, prioritize them according to which schools you are most likely to qualify for.”
- “Get your application in on time.”
- “Your best chance to qualify is when your child is in kindergarten.”
- “Move into the neighborhood of your preferred school.”
- “Where a preference policy exists, use it; where it does not, hope or work for one.”
- “Declare your racial/ethnic identity based on what suits the school you want your child to attend.”
4. **How is the enrollment process different between magnet schools and neighborhood schools?**

Rarely were participants able to adequately answer this question. Some of the responses recorded follow:

- "I don’t know."
- "Aren’t all the schools magnet schools?"
- "Fill out the ‘intent to return’ form."
- "Neighborhood schools accept only close to area—magnet schools don’t care where you live. You can stay there if you move."
- "Magnets have more funds."
- "No neighborhood schools in minority neighborhoods."
- "You apply and wait for magnets."
- "Magnets—apply and wait. Neighborhood schools—register and automatically admitted if in the area."
- "Magnets go to open houses. Neighborhoods no open houses."
- "It is ironic that magnet schools are recruiting yet always seem to have waiting lists."
- "For a neighborhood school, go to Kindergarten round up and fill out an enrollment card. Magnet schools have applications based on racial and residential tiers."

5. **What information would you have liked to know before you enrolled your child in school?**

Parents indicated a desire to have clearer and better basic information about enrollment procedures, including registration procedures. In general:

- what the waiting list means
- what kinds of preferences apply to a school
- written procedures for special cases like early admission or Capitol Hill acceptance
- time-lines indicating when parents need to do what
- obtaining documentation for birth certificates and preschool screening
- how to maximize information .
- the number of minority and majority children (enrolled in a school)
- the number of minority staff
- how students are assigned to teachers and if it is possible to request a teacher
- what is expected of parents
- disciplinary issues
- the number of children from the neighborhood who attend the school.
Finding Your Way: Public School Choice in St. Paul

- Start investigating options early
  Begin in the fall if possible, no later than January. Don’t wait until the magnet brochure arrives 4-6 weeks before the magnet application deadline. It may take 1-2 weeks to arrange school visits. Use previous year’s magnet brochure. Call the Student Placement Center at 293-5127.

- Every school has different procedures for visiting
  Call individual school secretaries to make arrangements to visit. Also ask about the school’s starting time. (See “Elementary School List” on page 31.)

- Find out school’s racial balance
  Some schools need majority students to achieve racial balance, others need minority students. Find out the majority/minority count (previous year’s sight count) of interested schools to estimate your child’s chance of admittance. Call individual schools and talk to principal or secretary.

- Find out your non-magnet school assignment
  Every address in the city has a non-magnet school placement. Is it a school close to home or across town? You may not know definitely until July or August but you can get an idea of possibilities. Call the Student Placement Center.

- Find out if you live within a magnet school attendance area
  Don’t confuse attendance area preference for magnet schools with “neighborhood schools.” A preference for a magnet school does not mean guaranteed admittance. Call the Student Placement Center or individual schools.

- You must apply to magnet schools but are assigned to non-magnet schools

To increase your child’s chances of acceptance into magnet schools

- Get your application in on-time
  Any elementary school or the central District offices can accept magnet school applications. They must be received on the deadline date to be considered “on-time.” The deadline is usually one of the first days in April. Call the Student Placement Center for the deadline or see the magnet brochure for 1993 deadline.

- Know admission preferences and waiting list numbers for your desired magnet school(s)
  Match school preferences with your situation (see “Admission Guidelines to Magnet Schools” on page 32). Get current waiting list numbers from individual schools to estimate your chances of acceptance for next year.

- Check to see if preferences are the same at the time of application
Call the Student Placement Center to see if any preferences have changed since you first looked at schools.

• **Use 1st, 2nd, and 3rd choices wisely**

  If the magnet school of interest had a waiting list last year for the race of your child, odds are your only chance of acceptance is using your 1st choice. (2nd and 3rd choices are admitted after 1st choices.) To increase chances for acceptance into a 2nd or 3rd choice magnet school, find a school that needs your child’s race for balance.
## Elementary School List

### Elementary Non-Magnet Schools

All non-magnet schools are K–6, except Monroe (K–8) and Rondo (K only, all day)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Phone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ames</td>
<td>1760 Ames Place</td>
<td>293-8970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chelsea Heights</td>
<td>1557 Huron St.</td>
<td>293-8970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Como Park</td>
<td>780 W. Wheelock Parkway</td>
<td>293-8820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dayton’s Bluff</td>
<td>262 Bates Avenue</td>
<td>293-8915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Consolidated</td>
<td>409 E. Case Avenue</td>
<td>293-8685</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Heights</td>
<td>2001 Margaret Street</td>
<td>293-8870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groveland Park</td>
<td>2045 St. Clair Avenue</td>
<td>293-8760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hayden Heights</td>
<td>1863 Clear Avenue</td>
<td>293-8815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highland Park</td>
<td>1700 Saunders Avenue</td>
<td>293-8770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highwood Hills</td>
<td>2188 London Lane</td>
<td>293-8875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homecroft</td>
<td>1845 Sheridan Avenue</td>
<td>293-8955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mann</td>
<td>2001 Eleanor Avenue</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monroe Community</td>
<td>810 Palace Avenue</td>
<td>293-8690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North End</td>
<td>27 E. Geranium</td>
<td>293-8795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkway</td>
<td>1363 Bush Avenue</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philen Lake</td>
<td>1089 Cypress Street</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prosperity Heights</td>
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<td>Randolph Heights</td>
<td>248 South Hamline Avenue</td>
<td>293-8780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rondo All Day Kindergarten</td>
<td>560 Concordia</td>
<td>293-5926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheridan</td>
<td>525 North White Bear Avenue</td>
<td>293-8745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Anthony Park</td>
<td>2180 Knapp Street</td>
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### Elementary Magnet Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Phone</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adams Spanish Immersion</td>
<td>K-6</td>
<td>615 S. Chatsworth</td>
<td>293-1595</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian Magnet</td>
<td>K-8</td>
<td>1075 E. Third Street</td>
<td>293-5938</td>
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<tr>
<td>Battle Creek Environmental</td>
<td>K-6</td>
<td>60 S. Ruth Street</td>
<td>293-8850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin E. Mays Fundamental</td>
<td>K-8</td>
<td>560 Concordia</td>
<td>293-8730</td>
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<td>Capitol Hill Magnet</td>
<td>1-8</td>
<td>560 Concordia</td>
<td>293-5918</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cherokee Heights</td>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>694 Charlton Street</td>
<td>293-8610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downtown Kindergarten Magnet</td>
<td>4-5yrs</td>
<td>4th and Robert Street</td>
<td>293-8620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastside Workplace Magnet</td>
<td>4-5yrs</td>
<td>475 Ema Street</td>
<td>293-8845</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expo Magnet*</td>
<td>K-5</td>
<td>540 Warwick</td>
<td>290-8384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farnsworth Magnet</td>
<td>K-6</td>
<td>1290 Arcade Street</td>
<td>293-8675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin Music Magnet</td>
<td>K-6</td>
<td>630 Jackson Street</td>
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<td>Frost Lake Technology</td>
<td>K-6</td>
<td>1505 E. Hoyt Avenue</td>
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<td>Gallier Science/Math</td>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>1317 Charles Avenue</td>
<td>293-8710</td>
</tr>
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<td>Hancock-Hamline Collaborative</td>
<td>K-6</td>
<td>1599 Englewood Avenue</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>J.J. Hill Montessori</td>
<td>4yr-6gr</td>
<td>998 Selby Avenue</td>
<td>293-8720</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jackson Preparatory</td>
<td>K-6</td>
<td>437 Edmund Avenue</td>
<td>293-8650</td>
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<td>Longfellow Humanities</td>
<td>K-6</td>
<td>318 Moore Street</td>
<td>293-8725</td>
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<td>Maxfield Science/Math</td>
<td>K-3</td>
<td>380 N. Victoria</td>
<td>293-8680</td>
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<td>K-6</td>
<td>1575 L’Orient</td>
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<td>Museum Magnet</td>
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<td>Open School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Riverview</td>
<td>K</td>
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<td>Roosevelt</td>
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<td>160 E. Isabel Street</td>
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<td>Saturn Magnet</td>
<td>4-8</td>
<td>65 E. Kellogg</td>
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<td>Webster Magnet</td>
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<td>World Cultures/Languages</td>
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*These schools plan to add 1 grade per year to grade 6
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<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Grades</th>
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<td>Orono</td>
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<td>Northmoor</td>
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<td>Mississipi</td>
<td>K-6</td>
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<td>Gilead</td>
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<td>Maxwell</td>
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<td>Longfellow</td>
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<td>EXPO</td>
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<td>Downtown</td>
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<tr>
<td>Am Indian</td>
<td>K-8</td>
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<td>Adams Sp. Lm</td>
<td>K-6</td>
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</table>

Admission Guidelines to Magnet Schools
Goals of the District-wide system of elementary magnet schools as defined in 1985 proposals to the federally-funded Magnet School Assistance Program:

- **Desegregation:**
  - End the harmful effects of minority isolation by reducing the minority percentage in each of the five high minority (elementary) schools to more closely reflect the District's minority population in all elementary schools of 35%.

- **Equal Access:**
  - All students in St. Paul will have the opportunity to enroll in the magnet school of their choice.

- **Improvement of Basic Skills Instruction:**
  - The first responsibility of the principal and staff in each magnet school will be to assure the mastery learning of St. Paul’s core curriculum of basic skills by each student.

- **Academic Excellence:**
  - Develop a curriculum, select staff, and acquire materials and technology to create an instructional program in each magnet that will be both unique and outstanding.
### 1991–92 Magnet School Applications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Majority</th>
<th>Minority</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On time</td>
<td>1594</td>
<td>1296</td>
<td>2890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late</td>
<td>761</td>
<td>1130</td>
<td>1891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-time + Late</td>
<td>2355</td>
<td>2426</td>
<td>4781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Late</td>
<td>32.3%</td>
<td>46.6%</td>
<td>39.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Accept - On time</td>
<td>1162</td>
<td>999</td>
<td>2161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Accept - On time</td>
<td>72.8%</td>
<td>76.9%</td>
<td>74.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Accept Late</td>
<td>555</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>1095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Accept Late</td>
<td>72.9%</td>
<td>47.7%</td>
<td>57.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Statement to the St. Paul Board of Education, January 21, 1992

My name is Deb Louwagie. I am the Executive Director of the League of Women Voters, St. Paul. This letter was sent to all members of the Board of Education on January 16. I am here to make the League’s concern public.

The League of Women Voters encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government and believes that governmental bodies protect the citizens right to know by giving adequate notice of proposed actions. Because of these principles, the St. Paul League has concerns about the process used by the Board of Education to change the district policy on sibling preference. The League does not have a position on the sibling preference issue itself, but believes that the process used did not provide adequate opportunity for participation by citizens in St. Paul.

A citizens Ad Hoc Committee on Sibling Preference was established by the Board of Educations to study the current policies and make recommendations to the Curriculum and Instruction Committee of the Board. However, the committee first met on November 11, 1991, gathered and analyzed data, and made its recommendations to the Curriculum and Instruction Committee on December 17, 1991. Although the committee worked very hard to gather input from the community by conducting a survey and holding two public meetings, thorough examination of the issues and informed participation by citizen simply was not possible in the short time frame given to the committee by the Board of Education.

In addition, the survey results may not provide an accurate portrayal of the community’s position due to the lack of representative sampling. In its report to the Teaching and Learning Committee of the Board, the Ad Hoc Committee states that “the surveys while imperfect, were used as a tool to understand the community’s position....” Policy changes, especially as significant as this one, should be based on information where the accuracy of that information is maximized. Also, they should not be rushed even though the Board is under the pressure of deadlines.

At a special Committee of the Whole meeting held on December 30, 1991, the outgoing Board subsequently voted against the Ad Hoc Committee’s recommendations to change the policy. At the first meeting of the newly formed Board on January 7, 1992, the sibling preference issue was not on the publicized agenda but added to the agenda by a Board member under new business. The issue was then discussed and the policy changed passed by the Board. Because the issue was not on the publicized agenda, adequate notice of proposed action was not given to the community and again informed citizen participation was not possible.
In the future, the League urges the Board of Education to take the time necessary to study the issues thoroughly, inform affected parties equally, encourage comprehensive parent and community involvement, and give timely notice of proposed actions to its constituents.