

Viewpoint

Rolnick's preschool plan to close achievement gap deserves more study

Minnesota, under Gov. Mark Dayton, initiated universal, all-day, public school kindergarten. The Adams-ECM Editorial Board endorsed that initiative as a wise investment. The former governor also proposed universal education for 4-year-olds.

Our view is adding another age level to public education for all students is a daunting fiscal and operational task. Alternatives exist.

Minnesota has a major achievement gap between students by race and socio-economic status. The inability to close that gap is an economic, cultural and civic loss. Art Rolnick, a retired senior vice chair and director of research for the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis and a fellow at the Humphrey Institute of the University of Minnesota, is a proponent of early childhood education as necessary to closing the achievement gap. Rolnick's plan deserves consideration.

Rolnick's proposal is based on research: Early childhood education pays off economically. The follow-up of a well-structured investment in a 3- and 4-year-old program would result in greater school and life success. Rolnick links program investment to government cost savings and greater economic advantage later in life.

Proposals center on non-traditional public school delivery models taking advantage of existing preschool childcare services but adding requirements for educational standards and performance. Minnesota invests \$70 million a

year in a comparable program started by Dayton and covers about 11 percent of eligible children. Rolnick estimates that \$400 million a year would extend the program to all who qualify and want to enroll.

This would be an optional program for parents. It is an open enrollment model allowing attendance at any educationally certified preschool. Any private, public, religion-based preschool/child care service could qualify to provide preschool education by meeting clearly stated standards for teaching/learning and oversight. The state would pay the tuition.

Some of what Rolnick advocates exists under state law. However, there are questions that lawmakers and the Department of Education should examine.

The target student population should be defined by socio-economic criteria and available statewide. The standards for certifying programs must be thoroughly

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defined. The oversight structure to insure compliance must be funded and implemented. Telling the difference between pre-K, publicly funded education and personally funded child care is a major issue. Parents paying for child care will look with suspicion on publicly paid preschool. The difference in the programs and the program access criteria have to be sound and clear. Teacher qualifications must be defined and required.

The impact of publicly funded preschool on private child care businesses must be assessed. Rules

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King of the Scrubs has fond football memories

Two weeks ago, I drove by a high school, saw 50 cars in the parking lot, wondered why, and then saw that football practice had begun. That, in turn, brought on a nostalgia trip from my own football playing days.

I still see only benefits from my time playing football, even though I was not much good at it. I played in junior high, but as a freshman, I was 6'1" or 6'2" but only about 140 pounds. I decided to be a student manager, shagging blocking dummies and balls.

Then, fate intervened. The only sport in which I displayed any talent was basketball. Late that fall, one of the basketball co-captains contracted spinal meningitis. A couple of other hoopsters had decided their autumn afternoons could be better spent hunting instead of playing football. As a result, early in the basketball season, the varsity got run off the court by a better conditioned opponent.

After the game, the coach read us the riot act, telling everyone if we wanted to play basketball, we had to play a sport year-round. Then noticing me, only a lowly B-team reserve, he said, "You, too, West. If you want to play basketball, you'll play football."

I was an end as a sophomore. We had only two pass plays, "Quickie left" and "Quickie right," which determined which end went out for a pass. Football was more of a ground game then, not the aerial show one sees today.

I have only two memories from that sophomore year. One was when we gave up a safety on a bad snap from center on a punt. The center came to the sideline and told the coach he hurt his arm. The coach said, "How could you have hurt it? You just hiked the ball 10 feet over the punter's head."

West Words



by **Tom West**
Former Editor/General Manager

The other memory was when the coach sent me in at left end and the play was a "Quickie left." I cut across the middle, was wide open and would have gone for 30 yards if not a touchdown. The quarterback threw the ball perfectly, it landed right in my hands – and I dropped it.

As a junior, I decided that I would rather play tackle. The problem was that I was now 6'4" and only weighed 155.

We went 1-6-1. I started only the tied game, and my one memory of it is running downfield on a kickoff and being blindsided on a block. The opponent hit me from the side just above the knee. If my foot would have been planted, not only would my football career have ended, but my basketball career as well. As it was, I cartwheeled over him, landing on my shoulder and head, no worse for wear.

The next year, I missed a week of pre-season practice because of a mild concussion. I was lying on the ground and a player fell hard on top of me, squeezing my helmet. I had a headache for a week.

However, when the season began, I started at tackle. I still only weighed 160 pounds. The first three games, I was outweighed between 20 and 40 pounds by the defenders across from me.

The closest I ever came to getting my name in the paper for a football exploit came on a busted

play. It was a pass to the flat on my side. I was supposed to block a linebacker, dove and missed. The defense strung out the play, so the receiver cut back. I was just getting to my feet when I saw him coming with several defenders in hot pursuit. He ran by me, and I dove at the first defender and hit him in the knees. We went down in a heap, another opponent fell on top of us and a third tripped over the pile, staggering. No one was within 20 yards of my teammate when he crossed the goal. The paper said he scored "behind solid blocking."

But that was my apex, low as it was. We won that game, but finished 2-6. After the third game, a sophomore replaced me as a starter. I then played only sporadically. I remember only the last practice. All the starters were sent to the locker room early, leaving just us scrubs. The coach divided us into teams, and he asked the other team who was the best player on the other side. They picked me. It was the biggest compliment I ever got on a football field – King of the Scrubs.

I look back on those days, the hot two-a-day practices in the August sun, the games on cold and sometimes rainy autumn nights, and I mostly remember the shared camaraderie, the pain of losing and pleasure of victory, and working together with my friends on a common goal, play after play.

Of late, football has been getting a bad rap. One wonders what the reaction would be today if one told the school board, we have a great new sport in which 20 percent will be injured during the season, and probably around 10 percent will miss class time as a result. Speaking from experience, however, I still think boys can do many worse things than suit up on the gridiron.

Tom West, now retired, is the former general manager of this paper. Reach him at westwords.mcr@gmail.com.

Big Brothers, Big Sisters program continues in Pierz; needs Bigs and Littles

By **JACKIE SCHOLL JOHNSON**
Guest Columnist

One of my favorite lines that I like to say is "All roads lead to Pierz." This has proven true many times over in my conversations with so many different people. This community does have that effect on people, the ones living there and the ones from there, who are living elsewhere. Myself included. It will always be home.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Minnesota began a school-based program in Pierz during the 2018-2019 school year. In the school-based program, mentors ("Bigs") meet with their mentees for about an hour, once a week. I have witnessed the tremendous benefit to the kids, to the volunteers and to the community and have thought "Why not Pierz?"

Sometimes the best place to help a child realize their potential is at school. Kids enjoy having their Bigs meet with them there, whether it's in the classroom or on the playground or having lunch together. And parents know what a positive impact it makes.

Some of the biggest supporters of our School-Based Mentoring program are teachers and staff.

They see students ("Littles") come back from their time with their Big filled with confidence, smiling big, ready to learn and eager to succeed. We have heard throughout our 18 years of doing this type of programming that the day their Big comes to spend time with them, is their best day of the week and the kids rarely are absent that day.

Although it takes place at schools, our School-Based Mentoring program isn't limited to the classroom. Of course, some Littles do talk with their Bigs about class, or do homework, or read together, but it's perfectly fine to shoot

hoops in the gym or play on the playground. We assure our Bigs that there are plenty of things to do and talk about when you are together! The time will fly.

At the end of the day, it's really all about starting a friendship, providing guidance and inspiring kids to reach their potential.

At Big Brothers Big Sisters, we have tremendous confidence in our ability to impact children and help them stay on the right path. Littles in our program have better attendance and grades, improved peer relationships and increased self-esteem.

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"Please consider this opportunity to make a difference in a child's life and to bring more smiles to your face ..."

"Of late, football has been getting a bad rap. ... Speaking from experience, however, I still think boys can do many worse things than suit up on the gridiron."

Online Poll

How do you feel about Highway 27 in east Little Falls being open to traffic?

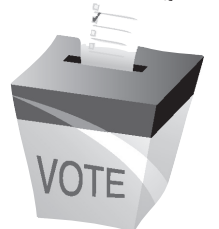
1. Thankful – it's been a long summer.
2. I was just getting used to the detours.
3. I avoided Little Falls because of it.
4. I am waiting for the west side to get done.

Last week's poll results

Does the falling of the stock market have you worried?

53.3% No. It is always going up and down.
26.7% Yes. We could go into another recession.
20.0% I don't make enough money to worry about such things.

Cast your vote online at www.mcrecord.com



Letter to the Editor

War, the worst kind of narcotic

To the Editor:

Chris Hedges (an American journalist, Presbyterian minister,

writer, activist, Princeton University lecturer) stated in 2008, that "war is addictive, indeed it is the most potent narcotic invented by human kind."

He is right. — **Robin Hensel, Little Falls**

Thank you letter

To the Editor:

Harding Place would like to thank Harding Bar and Grill for their generous donation from their anniversary Rib Fest cook-off. Their generosity assisted Harding Place with purchasing a much

needed new lawn mower. Rob and Cindy Litke's thoughtfulness toward Harding Place and always willing to assist as needed is greatly appreciated. — **Laurie Doroff, Harding Place manager, Harding**

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Viewpoint

Preschool plan deserves study

(Continued from Page 6AA) and regulations for the transition of existing private programs to enable students to access state funding must be well defined.

Church-based programs would be eligible but we advise caution. Separation of church and state through careful monitoring is possible but the foundation provided by the state must be learning related, not religion related.

Public school alternatives must be a part of the state-funded model. Parents who choose a public school pre-K program should be able to access that program with state dollars at a local

public school.

Early childhood education is a linked process for lifelong learning, not a childhood event. Coordinated follow-through is critical. Evaluation and assessment (a data-based assessment) of a new pre-K effort is critical. Evaluation of impact through the K-12 grades is critical.

There must be no confusion between child care services and certified learning programs. Minnesotans will find it difficult to accept selective, social-economic, state-funded child care when they're still paying for their children. The program requires uniform curriculum, components for the learning day, teacher qualifications and measured outcomes

quantifying success.

If religion-based providers participate, separation of religion-based goals and instruction from public goals and instruction must be clear and identifiable.

Rolnick's plan refers to state dollars as "tuition." Others would call it vouchers.

The value of voucher-based programs for K-12 public education remains unresolved. Rolnick's approach to preschool education offers a chance to test vouchers on a limited basis.

— An opinion of the Adams Publishing – ECM Editorial Board. Reactions welcome. Send to: editorial.board@ecm-inc.com.

Big Brothers Big Sisters in Pierz

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It's one of the most rewarding volunteer experiences for mentors of all ages, 15 to 75. Consistently, volunteers tell us time and time again that they get more out of being together than the kids. The altruistic

feeling of knowing that for just an hour a week, you can make a big difference in the life of a child is life-changing for our volunteers.

Right now, our biggest needs are: youth in grades 1-4 to participate as Littles, adult mentors, and high school Big Brothers.

Please consider this opportunity to make a differ-

ence in a child's life and to bring more smiles to your face and call (320) 253-1616 or visit www.BigDefenders.org.

Jackie Scholl Johnson is the executive director of the Big Brothers Big Sisters Program based in St. Cloud.

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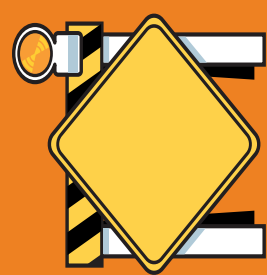
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Highway 27 from bridge, east to Ninth St. completed

Since the end of April, drivers have been averted from driving on Highway 27 in Little Falls in one fashion or another. Starting with the work on the east side of the bridge — drivers were required to take a detour around the city to get from one side of town to the other.

Once that work was completed, the detour took drivers on an in-town detour of one sort or another.

But now, the east side is complete — and what was once a chewed up mess while underground infrastructure and utilities were replaced, is now a nice smooth, paved and beautifully striped mile-stretch of Highway 27 from Ninth Street to the bridge. In addition, the sidewalk and curbs are Americans with Disabilities (ADA) compliant, as are the traffic lights.

Crews put the final touches on the striping Thursday, which required the top layer of bituminous be shaved a bit where the striping would go. Kirk Allen, project manager for MnDOT said this is done to create a depression for the paint to be

laid so when snow plows go through, they don't scrape up the paint. Crews also laid textured white pads in the pedestrian crosswalk, using a glue and heat process.

The last piece started either late Thursday night or early Friday morning — the removal of hundreds of traffic control signs, expected to be completed sometime Friday so Highway 27 on the east side was open to traffic — before the announced date of Monday, Aug. 26 and well before the target date of the Arts and Crafts Fair (Sept. 7-8), when more than 100,000 people come to Little Falls.

A ribbon cutting to celebrate the completion of the east side of the project has been planned for Sept. 5, at Bank Square.

Allen said work on the west side is in full swing, with infrastructure and utility work still underway. That work is expected to continue until mid-September. When that is complete, the construction of the road will begin, with the goal for a completion date in mid-October.

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