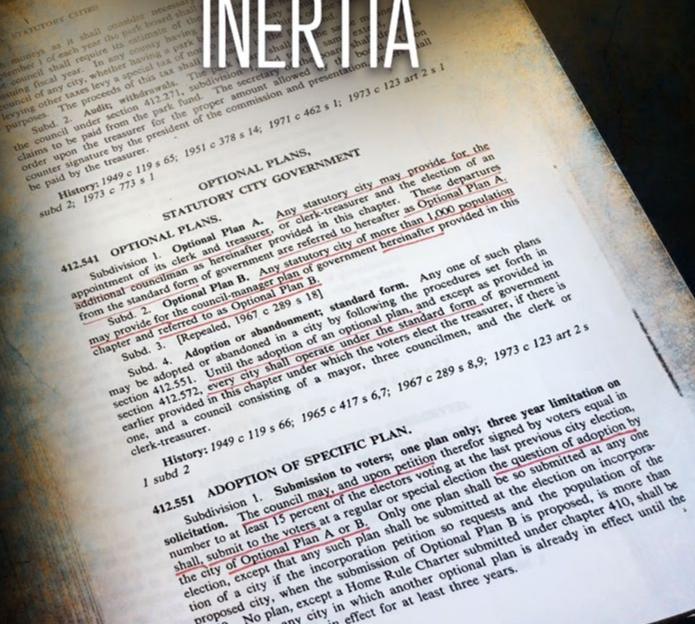
# HOW the STATE CAN DEAL WITH the SCHOOL BOARDS'





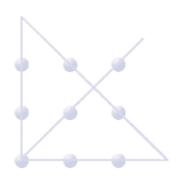
# Should you wish to copy this paper to others you'll find a pdf of it linked at: http://bit.ly/SchoolBoardsInertia

All of us working to think out the rationale and the design for a self-improving system understand the challenge: Traditional education policy has thought in terms of 'ordering' the system with decisions from above. We are convinced success lies in starting with schools and teachers.

We hope you will consider this alternative strategy that we suggest now be tried. We ask: "Why not?" . . . and invite your response.

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# IT HAS TO BECOME A SELF-IMPROVING SYSTEM

The states' move away from the public-utility model – creating a second, 'R&D', sector of public education – has produced schools that have learned both to do non-traditional school well and to do traditional school better. Now, to complete the strategy of innovation-based systemic reform, the challenge is to get the districts to pick up the innovations emerging.

Boards of education unfortunately are slow to adopt innovative approaches to learning and new models of organization. For 30 years the assumption has been that education could be better *without* school having to be different. So their tendency has been to respond to problems – as, of low student performance or of declining enrollment – in ways that do not move away from traditional school.

That was, is, a mistake: Districts should be addressing these problems by changing school, in ways that maximize student motivation. 'Doing different' is hard, though, for districts organized as centralized public corporations. It asks boards and superintendents to do what they have been not-doing: which is, to delegate decisions about change to the schools and to trust teachers to lead the learning.

'Different' is necessary now. Parents have choices; districts have to persuade families to enroll. That means making school appealing. And that requires an ability, a willingness, to pick up innovations.

If the state wants its district sector to survive and to improve, the state will need to help. Alone, districts cannot close the gap between what their mission-statements promise and the results they deliver; cannot overcome the inertia inside.

What follows begins by explaining why the 'how' of improving school and learning requires creating "a climate of encouragement for innovation" for the schools and teachers.

It then suggests an approach the Legislature can take to deal with the pressure for sameness that afflicts boards of education; how it can redesign the district to be a self-improving organization.

#### 1. The simple, strategic idea is to try what's now not-done.

Seemingly intractable problems sometimes get solved when someone asks: What are the things not being done? . . . and decides to try what everyone else has been not-doing.

Think about the attempts to fly heavier-than-air craft. For years these 'flying machines' crashed; the operator unable to balance in the ever-changing wind by shifting his weight. Wilbur Wright saw birds maintaining balance, changing direction, by adjusting their wings. He and Orville tried 'warping' their glider's wings. That worked. In 1903, powered, their craft flew. Their innovation spread, improved. Six years later Bleriot flew the English Channel; not long after that Lindbergh flew the Atlantic.

One after another the various efforts to make education 'fly' have crashed. *And it is conspicuous* what education policy is not-doing: It is not opening the way for teachers take charge of the learning, adapting their instruction to engage and motivate their students.

The idea of trusting teachers will distress conventional education policy and politics. Excluded from decisions about professional issues, teachers have responded like most industrial workers... so are put down as opponents of change, interested only in economic issues. But surely that makes Walter McClure's point: that people behave the way they are structured and rewarded to behave... that if you want to change the way people and organizations behave you should probably change the way they are structured and rewarded.

Some things are too obvious.

Trying to hold teachers accountable for learning, for what results from decisions made in the central office, violates the wisdom about the need to combine accountability and authority. If district leadership will not accept accountability for learning, then teachers need to have control of professional issues.

#### 2. The school, then, has to be the unit of improvement.

A torrent of research, advice and exhortation pours out from academics, consultants and policy groups, intended to show districts how to do improvement. But centralized district action is not the route to change. Change requires inverting the approach; de-centralizing the decision about doing-different to permit those closest to the action to try things.

Delegating autonomy to the school has for years been the recommendation for success. Jack Frymier published Fostering Educational Change in 1969. If young people want to learn, he advised, they will; if they don't, you probably can't make them. So any successful effort to improve learning will begin by improving student motivation. Motivation is individual. The teacher's job is to know what motivates the individual student so s/he can then center on that student's attainment-level, interests and aptitudes.

■ It is possible this adaptation will develop best in schools where teachers formally direct the learning. There is much talk today of 'teacher leadership', but most of it falls short of organizing schools on the 'partnership' model in which the professionals truly are in charge; as in architecture, engineering, auditing, law, medicine and other white-collar vocations. That organizational innovation did begin appearing in Minnesota in 1993 and is now spreading nationally, among teachers. (The initiative, organized by Education Evolving and the Center for Teaching Quality, is linked at www.teacherpowered.org.) When able to 'call the shots' teachers commonly change what they and their students do. Their schools appear to retain teachers well and to have superior economics. A third national meeting of teachers – charter and district – is set for November 30-December 2, 2018, in Boston.

It is an approach to try, because . . .

#### 3. It works best to introduce the 'different' at small scale.

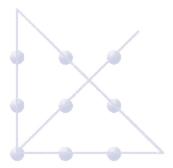
Proposals for 'different' usually come from a minority; the advocates often dissenters, low-status people, outsiders. Innovation is, as Professor Lienhard writes, essentially "an act of rebellion", unlikely to be welcomed. Efforts to impose their innovations across the organization as a whole will be resisted. Indeed, efforts to introduce any significant change district-wide are likely to be reduced to the minimum that is acceptable. Change needs to start with those who are ready.

- This means beginning by saying 'yes' to discontented professionals wanting to try something they think will work better; then helping their change spread as the different learning experience appeals to other parents and students. In **Diffusion of Innovations** Everett Rogers explains this process; the process by which systems actually change.
- It is better for the 'different' schools to be created new. It is possible to convert an existing school, but not common: In an existing school, as in the district as a whole, there is the problem of those not ready. Better to start with a coherent community committed to the new direction.
- It is easy enough to minimize the risk in innovation. Keep the scale of the change small; make participation voluntary; abort the trial quickly if it is clearly not working. But: In debating the change, balance the risk of the 'different' against the risk in continuing old ways that, though familiar, are themselves failing.

#### 4. Might reformers join with unions to support this idea?

■ The fascinating possibility is that giving schools and teachers authority and accountability could bring together these two interests that up to now have seen each other as 'the enemy'. The idea seems outrageous. But what if the scenario were to play out like this:

- Empowered to adapt schooling to students' needs, teachers change school in ways that maximize student motivation. Better motivated, students work harder; achievement rises. With students more engaged and successful, public support for the schools rises. Able to control what matters for student success, teachers accept responsibility for student and school success. Seeing their members moving into professional roles, the unions support the change. Noting this change in teacher and union behavior, more of those in conventional 'school reform' support the delegation of authority to the school and the idea of professionalizing teaching. As teachers acquire a professional role, teaching becomes a better job and career . . . improving the ability of public education to recruit and retain top people.
- The idea that unions and reformers might find common ground will elicit some disbelief. But it is an idea worth pursuing. In the efforts with 'teacher-powered' schools since 1993 you can see this process beginning. Its positives are powerful.
  - Student engagement now drops steeply through the years of school. Opinion surveys for The Kappan show that, sensing this, the American public now values student-engagement more than test-scores as the measure of school success. Eight of 10 Americans say schools should be accountable for getting students engaged. Maximizing motivation would make more sense than trying to deal with boredom and misbehavior by adding police, social workers and 'restorative practices'.
  - Support is high among teachers for having the authority to 'call the shots' about learning: Polling shows support above 70 per cent; higher still in the general public. (These are numbers that normally impress elected officials.) Over 20 years teachers have shown it is possible to run schools organized as professional partnerships.
  - Turning teaching into a truly professional job and career is the only way to attract and to retain top-quality people in teaching. Money alone cannot do it: Public education cannot outbid all the other vocations that want top people.



But...

# HOW TO DEAL WITH THE SCHOOL BOARDS' INERTIA?

#### 5. District organization today makes innovation difficult.

'Letting people try things' runs against the culture created by the centralized arrangement that gives boards and their management authority over the schools, their people and 'professional issues'. The inertia in the current model of district organization explains John Goodlad's observation that "The cards are stacked against innovation". The system has begun to be redesigned, re-formed. But not yet the district.

Differences among schools create difficulties for boards of education: controversy and sometimes animosity, questions and meetings, they would like to avoid. Inevitably they conclude the wiser course is to keep things the same – across the schools and down through time; representing uniformity as equity.

Boards are possessive about their control of professional issues – what's taught and how it's taught – believing this "The last real authority we have", as the head of the Minnesota School Boards Association once said to the membership. They delegate to the school no further than to the principal they appoint and can remove: "We must have someone we can hold accountable."

Net: 'Are we organized right?' is, superintendents say, a question boards never ask. Nor do the K-12 associations, obsessed with getting-revenue. So the centralized model continues.

- Some superintendents, understandably concerned about risking their career, avoid innovation and its attendant risks. Some try, and find they have to dilute their proposals to pacify those resisting or to accommodate to the board's desire for sameness. Some try and succeed but then find their changes reversed by a successor certain s/he has been brought in to take the district another direction.
- Teacher unions have adapted to the reality of the industrial model that limits teachers' voice to economic issues. Some in the leadership have worked to get teachers professional authority. But with limited success so long as the work of union staff is still grievances, bargaining and occasionally strikes.

- The parents and citizens most influential at the district level are often traditional, pressing board members to preserve the 'real school' they remember from their own school days: students seated and the teacher in front of the blackboard; the picture the media so often use to illustrate their stories about schools.
- Early in the history of chartering there was talk of a 'ripple effect'; the notion that an innovation appearing in a chartered school would spread across local public education . . . as a pebble dropped in a pond sends ripples across the water. That did not happen. Minnesotans understand why. If the pond is frozen, no ripple. When the districts are 'frozen', no ripple.

(Occasionally districts do respond when a charter is proposed in their area...either by authorizing the school themselves or by letting proponents set up as a district school. Two suburban districts near Minneapolis responded by creating Spanish-immersion schools – which then attracted significant non-resident enrollment.)

It seems not right, though, to have to hope that a district will offer this positive response. *Districts should be designed to change on their own*. At the moment they are not: The statutory public-corporation model breeds a 'systemic inertia'. To produce innovation, district organization needs a redesign.

#### 6. The state can help get district organization redesigned.

A state adopting the strategy of innovation-based systemic reform will need to ensure that innovations appearing in the chartered schools and elsewhere do spread into the districts.

- Only the state has the capacity to act. The local district itself is unlikely to move away from the centralized model that now empowers board and superintendent. The national government cannot act directly, the organization of public education not existing in national law. (What it can do is to encourage and perhaps leverage-on the states to make the changes needed.)
- The state will need a 'structural' remedy, 'conduct' remedies not having moved the districts. Neither exhortation nor regulation has produced fundamental change in their behavior. Nor has the enabling legislation in Minnesota and perhaps other states: It permits much but requires nothing, so can safely be ignored. Pilot projects are popular but cannot be relied on to generate change that is lasting.
- People want to do what is best. But 'best' is not a kind of school or model of organization: 'Best' is having the greatest capacity to adapt in the environment of rapid change now surrounding education.
- The challenge is to find a process for this organizational redesign that is compatible with the political imperative about 'local control' which in most states means: 'Nobody tells the districts what to do'.

#### 7. A state can go beyond 'enabling' legislation.

A state can encourage, perhaps require, districts to consider an alternate plan of organization. Minnesota's legislature did this years ago to upgrade the capacity of its municipal government: designing several alternate plans of organization and establishing a process by which a different plan would be considered and could be adopted.

• At the end of World War II Minneapolis and Saint Paul were full: The new families were bound to build in the suburbs. Out there was old-fashioned 'village' government, no way prepared or competent to handle the development coming.

In 1949 the Legislature put in statute three optional plans of organization and a process by which one of these could be adopted. The local council could put a plan on the ballot for voter approval. Or – important for the political dynamics – a plan could be put up for approval by citizen petition.

This worked; got competent front-line local government into the Twin Cities suburbs . . . just in time. (The legislation on optional plans of municipal government -- Minnesota Statutes 412.541 – appears on the cover of this paper.)

- The Legislature could now do the same for school districts.
  - Put perhaps three optional plans into statute.
  - Provide for a plan to be put on the ballot either by the district board or by a petition from citizens.
  - Provide (as did the 1949 program for villages) that if a new plan is adopted a reasonable period is available for transition.
  - Carry forward existing contracts, debt obligations, etc.

<u>Such legislation respects local control</u>. It simply provides a way to get elected officials and local voters to discuss and, if they wish, to adopt an alternate form of organization.

<u>It would not have to apply to all districts</u>. The Legislature might make it applicable only to those identified in some way as in need of improvement (in statutory operating debt, for example, or with persistently low levels of student proficiency). For other districts the process could be available but voluntary.

The state could if necessary be more assertive. The Legislature could put into statute a preferred plan – the Education Board plan described below, for example – and require that it be put to vote. The state could give an 'identified district' a year to adopt an approved variant of its own design, the state plan taking effect were the district not to act.

#### 8. Several optional plans are clearly worth considering.

The first, below, keeps the board in charge, with changes to strengthen the leadership for innovation. The second clearly delegates to schools the authority to do-different. The third moves education into general local government to accomplish certain non-instructional objectives.

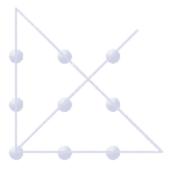
 Individuals who know districts well suggest a variety of ways to increase the prospects for districts to pick up the 'different'. Here are three.

**Plan A: School Board** – The elected board continues to own and run schools, but is restructured. *To deal with the leadership weakness in existing structure the board chair would be directly elected, at large.* Board members would be term-limited. Some, perhaps non-voting, might be appointed. The board would meet less often. The superintendent's role would be enlarged, perhaps the salary raised. Such a district could run a split-screen strategy internally; improving conventional schools and starting different schools new.

**Plan B: Education Board** – The elected board would authorize and oversee – and when necessary close – schools, but would not run schools. The schools would be autonomous; free to innovate, and directly financed – as many in the charter sector are. Teachers in a school would have the 'partnership' option to lead the learning, and also to manage the school if they chose.

Plan C: County Board – County commissioners would appoint the board of education, which would then have responsibility only for learning. Students would be integrated into county public health and social services. The county would assume responsibility for non-instructional services: accounting, purchasing, transportation, facilities, etc. previously handled by the district.

Good policy thinking should begin immediately about the specifics of these – or other – plans of organization.



# THE STATES REALLY DO NEED TO DO THIS

#### 9. It is past time to be getting the system right.

Our country could be getting far more than it is from its students and its teachers. And we could be going about the job differently. We do not have to remain trapped in a model of organization designed a century ago.

We are actually part way toward the solution. Since 1991 state policy has been gradually turning public education into a two-sector system that uses chartering as an R&D sector. The job now is to generate some new form of district organization that will allow and encourage schools and teachers to pick up the different; to speed and scale the process of change.

- After three decades of disappointment we have probably learned that, the first rule of winning being not to lose, it is critical to avoid 'strategies' that run to dead ends.
  - The eternal plea from the district system "Give us the money and leave us alone!" is a dead end. So is 'changing the people' on the board or in the superintendency. Endlessly deploring problems and reaffirming goals... proclaiming aspirations and offering visions... raises money and wins votes, but does not solve problems or change systems. Creating and publicizing a great new school, and assuming everyone will want one, attracts attention; but its effect obviously depends on replication. Mandates have little effect on organizations that have so large a capacity to resist. The push for more chartered schools is unclear about its end-game; leaves open what is to be the future of districts. Pointing to success in other countries does not show us how to do here what they do there.
- Young teachers, inspired and dedicated, find themselves unable to make the changes they see needed in order for them to be effective with their students. Superintendents find themselves unable to make the changes they see needed from their level. Discouraged, both are leaving the system. It is time to provide teachers, and school and district leadership, the right incentives; the reasons + opportunities to change.
- The 'standards' strategy, insufficiently sensitive to differences among students, produced a standardization that has now put it out of favor. The public is dissatisfied with the emphasis on testing. State and national objectives are not being met. Too many young people are being

hurt. Certainly the 'equality' goal is not yet realized. It is past time to develop a successful strategy.

- It is reasonable and feasible is necessary, really to run the innovation-based effort and conventional improvement side by side: the 'split screen' idea. Some parents will prefer, and some students will do better in, non-traditional school; some will prefer and do better in conventional school. Public education can be serving both. Gradually, the system will change. The choices created by innovation are essential: They generate the dynamics for change to spread. No choices, no change.
- There is no option to stand pat.
  - The district sector is no longer a public utility, able as the president of the American Federation of Teachers, Albert Shanker, put it in Minnesota in 1988 to "take its customers for granted". Public education is now a choice-based system. Which is good: For its own success the district sector needs a charter sector challenging it with innovations and competing with it for students.
  - Nor is it safe for public education charter sector as well as the district to assume school will have a monopoly on learning. An obsolete and inert system probably could be disrupted quickly by the software firms, seeing a \$600-billion-a year industry still 'delivering education' largely with adults talking to children, still age-graded and still using time as a constant. They might start selling new models of learning directly to families, bypassing school.
- It is time for skillful state leadership to bring together teachers and 'reformers', students and parents and policymakers, around the idea of teachers as professionals leading the learning. If the states do not act, it will not happen.

#### 10. Who might step forward to get the states to act?

Cutting a basically new deal with teachers – real professional authority in return for real change and accountability for results – should attract someone to take the lead. It is appealing politically as well as promising for policy. It needs to be tried.

■ The groundwork has been laid; the vision – even the desire – is clearly there.

In private, many superintendents are astonishingly candid about the need for radical change. State commissioners – again, in private – will occasionally suggest, "We just need to blow this system up and start over". Perhaps they will begin to say that in public. They should.

Spurred by, of all things, a suggestion from union critic Myron Lieberman, Albert Shanker took the lead in the 1980s to form the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards.

Marc Tucker in 1986 wrote the 'teacher partnership' idea into A Nation Prepared, the Carnegie Forum's response to A Nation At Risk. In A Union of Professionals in 1993, Charles Taylor Kerchner and Julia Koppich urged the teacher unions to move from the industrial to the professional model.

John Goodlad, and more recently Harvard's Jal Mehta, have envisioned more responsibility in the schools, with professional teachers. Paul Hill developed for the Education Commission of the States the idea of a district having a 'portfolio' of schools it did not run. This past year, in his work with the Progressive Policy Institute and on his 24-city tour discussing his book **Reinventing America's Schools**, David Osborne has been pointing to the progress of this idea in districts like Washington DC, New Orleans, Denver.

Currently, at OECD in Paris, Andreas Schleicher is interested in helping teachers increase their professional role in learning. (See TALIS, his Teaching and Learning International Survey.) NNSTOY – the National Network of State Teachers of the Year – works hard to advance the idea of 'teacher leadership'. So has Barnett Berry with his Center for Teaching Quality.

Some local union leaders see the potential. Louise Sundin in Minneapolis, influenced by Shanker's vision of teacher professionalism, believes that "If there are ever going to be schools that offer teachers real professional roles, teachers are going to have to create them". Provisions for 'micro-bargaining' are now in contracts (though still needing to be put fully into use) in Saint Paul, in Los Angeles, in Rochester NY.

- So the idea of enlarging school and teacher roles is alive. The challenge, as always, is to get to the successful 'how'. Three things are needed, for success.
  - It is important to be thinking realistically.

School, and schooling, can change—and change radically. But the transformation has to begin with small innovations that then gradually spread. The conventional policy discussion has seemed unable to think in those terms... of the education system transforming itself the way systems actually change. In academic circles and policy shops there has been too strong a tendency to believe the strategy must come as a 'completely-worked-out plan' to be engineered politically; too strong a tendency in the education media as well to test every new idea by asking: Is this The Right Way? Will it reach everyone's goals everywhere? No wonder so little happens.

The process of innovation gradually spreading will not necessarily move slowly. It might 'scale-up' change rapidly. The smaller the scale of innovation the more radical it can be; the more voluntary it is, the faster it can spread.

Someone has to see the potential 'win' in taking the lead.

It would be logical for the associations of state governments or state-government officials to say that, yes, this is the way to go. Joint action through an Education Commission of the

States was Conant's concept of how the nation's education system ought to change. If not ECS, then perhaps the National Governors Association or the National Conference of State Legislatures.

The governor of a single state – perhaps with national leadership in mind – could call for the new deal with teachers; could propose the needed legislation. So might a courageous state superintendent or commissioner. So might an individual legislator, as Senator Ember Reichgott and others in other states did with chartering.

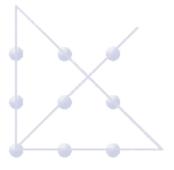
Some recognized individual or individuals might be best to advance the idea. Richard Riley and Lamar Alexander, for example; each earlier a governor and U.S. secretary of education. They would make a powerful combination.

The new way of thinking will require support from outside. Those in politics and in the operating system are predictably cautious, and likely to think 'inside the box' of traditional arrangements. They will be encouraged if they hear from the civic sector. Those at the state level should take advantage of the new message from Washington; Congress and the department both urging them to use the flexibility they are now being given.

• To summarize: We are halfway to a strategy that can be effective in transforming public education.

Useful innovations are coming from the charter sector, from other districts and from research. Now these need to be picked up by the district sector. They will need to be adopted school by school. The delegation of authority this implies will require a redesign of today's centralized district corporation. The states will need to help districts with that redesign. And there is a way a state can effectively assist.

The states will have to make public education a self-improving system.



#### CREATING A SYSTEM THAT PRODUCES GOOD SCHOOLS

## **2017** Minnesota Statutes 122A.42 GENERAL CONTROL OF SCHOOLS.

(a) The teacher of record shall have the general control and government of the school and classroom. When more than one teacher is employed in any district, one of the teachers may be designated by the board as principal...

#### Key elements of the strategy, in Minnesota

1. The chartering law:

https://www.revisor.mn.gov/ statutes?id=124E.01&year=2017& keywordtype=all&keyword= charter+schools

2. Inter-district enrollment:

https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=124D.03

**3.** The post-secondary enrollment option:

https://www.revisor.mn.gov/ statutes?id=124D.09&year=2017& keyword-type=all&keyword=postsecond ary+enrollment+options **4.** Graduation incentives; alternative programs:

https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes?id=124D.68

5. 'Innovation zones':

https://www.educationevolving.org/content/innovation-zone-law-faq

**6.** 'Site-governed schools':

https://www.revisor.mn.gov/ statutes?id=123B.045&year=2017& keyword\_type=all&keyword= charter+schools

#### There are initiatives not showing in legislation.

1. "The States Will Have To Withdraw the Exclusive":

https://www.educationevolving.org/files/ StatesWillHavetoWithdrawthe Exclusive.pdf

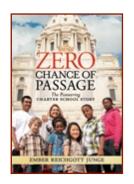
**2.** The national initiative on 'teacher-powered' school:

http://www.teacherpowered.org

Reports from education|evolving: https://www.educationevolving.or

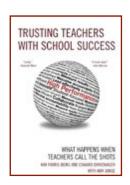
https://www.educationevolving.org/publications?page=I

#### **BOOKS ABOUT INNOVATION AND TEACHERS**



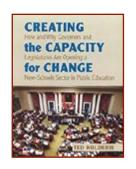
## Ember Reichgott Junge on the origins of chartering

https://www.amazon.com/ Zero-Chance-Passage-Pioneering-Charter/ dp/1592984762



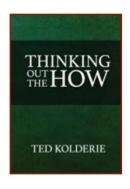
#### **Teacher-powered schools**

Available on Amazon: https://www.amazon.com/ Trusting-Teachers-School-Success-Happens-ebook/ dp/BooAMXTHEU



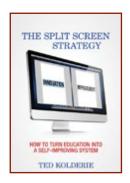
#### The general strategy; 2004

Available from Education Week Press



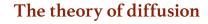
## A round-up of the education strategy, 20017

Available on Amazon: https://www.amazon.com/ Thinking-Out-How-Ted-Kolderie/dp/1592986501/ ref=sr\_1\_1?ie=UTF8& qid=1516052847&sr=8-1&keywords=thinking+ out+the+how



## The split-screen strategy; 2014

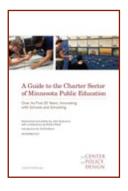
https://www.education evolving.org/pdf/Book-Split-Screen-Strategy.pdf





## Everett Rogers, on how innovations, spreading, change systems

https://www.amazon.com/ Diffusion-Innovations-5th-Everett- Rogers/ dp/0743222091



#### A Guide to the Charter Sector of Minnesota Public Education

https://www. educationevolving.org/ content/guide-to-chartersector-of-minnesota-publiceducation